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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 30 January 2018

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Carillion

1. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of the liquidation of Carillion on the viability of small businesses. [903611]

10. **Sir Robert Syms** (Poole) (Con): What steps he is taking to support businesses affected by the liquidation of Carillion. [903621]

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): I have set up a taskforce bringing together small and medium-sized businesses, the Government, local government and trade unions to assist with the impact on small and medium-sized enterprises and the supply chain. The taskforce has delivered a range of supportive measures, including assistance from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs for those experiencing difficulties and more than £900 million of support from UK lenders.

Diana Johnson: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer, but, with 30,000 small firms thought to be owed money by Carillion due to late payments and fees, will he look at the idea of project bank accounts that hold money in trust in ring-fenced bank accounts to make sure this situation does not arise again? The Specialist Engineering Contractors Group wants Britain to follow what is already happening in Australia, where such project bank accounts are used in all large public and private building contracts.

Greg Clark: I will indeed look at that, and it has been one of the recommendations of the taskforce. It is important that we learn all the lessons and apply them quickly, and this is one such suggestion.

Mr Speaker: Sir Robert Syms—where is the fellow? I call Antoinette Sandbach.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): The local authority pension fund forum has called for a review of accounting standards, having received opinion that there are substantial legal flaws in international reporting standards. The opinion states that the standards do not enable anyone to make a meaningful assessment of a

going concern, which is a highly relevant issue for Carillion. Will the Secretary of State support such a review?

Greg Clark: The day that Carillion went into insolvency I wrote to the Financial Reporting Council, and I spoke to its chairman, to ask it to investigate the auditors and those who are regulated as accountants. The FRC has agreed to do that, and it announced yesterday that the investigation is under way. I would expect it to learn the lessons for any changes to the regulations that it applies.

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm whether the advice to firms that have lost money as subcontractors of Carillion is that they take out a loan? Does he think it is acceptable that those firms should be charged interest on taking out a loan, rather than getting the money they are owed for jobs they completed as supply chain businesses of Carillion?

Greg Clark: On the first day of the insolvency, I had in the representatives of all the supply chain organisations. The first request they made was that we get the banks in to make sure that they treat leniently their customers who were caught up in the insolvency. The banks agreed to do that, and they put funds aside to support and assist those customers. Each bank has made commitments that it will apply leniency to any terms and conditions faced by those businesses.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend has almost answered my question, because I was going to say that cash flow is as important as profitability. The problem with lack of cash flow is when the banks become too heavy and foreclose on smaller firms.

Greg Clark: That is exactly the point that the businesses made. That is why I asked the banks to attend in person to meet those businesses, and it is why the banks gave those commitments and guarantees. It is important for Members with constituents who may be affected that the banks have made that commitment and have made a promise that they will deal individually with anyone who is so affected. The measures are on each bank's website, but any colleague should come back to me if they experience a problem.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): This morning, at a joint Select Committee hearing on Carillion, we were told by the chief executive of the Financial Reporting Council that, before and after the collapse of BHS, he had asked for greater powers to regulate companies and take action before things go badly wrong. He told us that there was a lack of Government interest in making the necessary changes. In the light of the collapse of Carillion and the threat to thousands of jobs and suppliers in the supply chain, are the Government interested in taking action now?

Greg Clark: I do not agree with the hon. Lady. I engaged the FRC immediately, and it is very important that we and the FRC learn the lessons. We will apply whatever is appropriate that comes from those inquiries.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Poole (Sir Robert Syms) says that he was not told of the grouping. If that is so, it is a discourtesy—I hope it is not so. Maybe it got lost in the post. Let us hear from the fellow.

Sir Robert Syms: The collapse is really bad news for many smaller businesses, many of which will have their capital wiped out. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with banks about forbearance in keeping those businesses going so that there is proper competition in this market for the future?

Greg Clark: I apologise to my hon. Friend if he did not receive notice of the grouping—I am sure that is my error.

On engagement with the banks, each of them has responsibilities to its customers to help them through difficult times. The banks have explicitly committed to help them with any cash flow difficulties that they experience, and I expect the banks to deliver on it.

18. [903630] **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Scottish training firm TIGERS—Training Initiatives Generating Effective Results Scotland—is working hard with the Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland and the Construction Industry Training Board to place 126 apprentices who used to be placed in partnership with Carillion. What is the Secretary of State doing to encourage small businesses to step forward to fill that gap and ensure that all apprentices can complete their training?

Greg Clark: The hon. Lady raises an excellent question, and I want to pay tribute to the CITB, which has been working closely with its Scottish colleagues, for a magnificent response. It has been able to not only contact but offer continuity to all the apprentices—I think I am right in saying that—to give them the ability to continue their training. That was a formidable, agile response to an urgent situation, and it deserves the praise of the House.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): In July last year, the Government were warned by the Federation of Small Businesses and the Specialist Engineering Contractors Group that Carillion was transferring risk to its subcontractors. They highlighted that Carillion's payment period was doubled from 65 to 120 days, that Carillion made money on the back of early payment by charging fees, and that regulation 113 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, which relates to 30-day payment, was not being enforced. Will the Secretary of State outline what actions, if any, he took on receipt of that information?

Greg Clark: The lessons and the scrutiny of what went wrong in Carillion, both on the part of its directors and its scrutineers, and in the oversight that took place across the whole of the public sector in terms of contracting, need to be looked at and will be looked at, including by Select Committees of this House. Whatever actions are required from that, we will take.

Rebecca Long Bailey: So it is clear that no action was taken and that subcontractors were being mistreated again and again. But that is not all: the FSB and SEC Group also highlighted how retention moneys and project funds due to suppliers were not being protected from Carillion's potential insolvency. As a result of the Government's inaction, microbusinesses are now owed on average £98,000, small firms £141,000 and medium-sized firms £236,000, and large businesses are owed on average £15.6 million. Will the Secretary of State therefore

explain to the House and all the businesses affected why the Government took no action last July and why many are on the verge of bankruptcy today?

Greg Clark: Retentions and project bank accounts have been the subject, in response to those and other concerns, of a consultation on specific measures, which closed very recently. That came out of the recommendations that were made. Part of the taskforce that we have established includes these representative bodies, and they know that they have my commitment to take all the necessary actions to learn the lessons and protect any future concerns against things that could be learned from this case.

Low-paid Workers

2. **James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that low-paid workers are remunerated appropriately. [903612]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths): The national minimum wage and national living wage rates are recommended to the Government by the independent Low Pay Commission. To ensure that workers are paid fairly and that non-compliant employers are caught, the Government provide £25.3 million to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs for minimum wage enforcement—that is an increase from £13 million in 2015-16. Last year, HMRC secured arrears of wages for 98,000 workers, totalling £10.9 million.

James Cartlidge: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and welcome him to his deserved new position. I very much welcome the national living wage as a way of boosting the wages of our lowest-paid workers. Does he share my surprise that there are those who criticise its generosity, given that the only international comparator is *The Economist's* Big Mac index, under which we have the most generous minimum wage in Europe aside from that of its richest country, Luxembourg?

Andrew Griffiths: I completely agree with my hon. Friend on that. The next increase to the national living wage is to be a whopping 4.7%. The introduction of the national living wage was the biggest pay rise for low-paid workers in nearly 20 years. The latest increase will benefit more than 2 million people and is set to cover 3 million by 2020. The average earnings of a 25-plus, full-time worker have increased by £2,000 since 2016.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): When will the Government accept the need to actually prosecute more firms that fail to pay the national minimum wage? Only when people are prosecuted for breaking the law, rather than being issued with warning notices, are they going to take it seriously.

Andrew Griffiths: I gently point out to the hon. Lady that the Government take robust enforcement action against employers who do not pay their staff correctly. We have increased enforcement funding to £25.3 million this year. The total value of penalties has more than quadrupled since 2014-15, and in 2016-17 a record £3.9 million was recovered in penalties, with one penalty of more than £1 million being issued.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Along with the steps the Minister has outlined, does he agree that increasing the tax-free threshold and taking the lowest paid out of tax altogether has made an enormous difference to many workers in this country?

Andrew Griffiths: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend: 4 million people have been taken out of paying tax as a result of decisions taken by this Government. The employment rate is 75.3%, which is the joint highest rate since comparable records began in 1971. We have record numbers of people in work, and unemployment is at its lowest for 40 years. This Government are on the side of the worker and the lowest paid.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Low pay stifles investment and holds back productivity. We in the Scottish National party believe that the economy is stronger when a real living wage is paid. The Minister's own Department has rightly named and shamed 350 companies for failing to pay even the minimum wage. Does he therefore agree that the practice of companies paying no wages at all through unpaid work trials is morally repugnant? Will his Department support the ending of that shameful practice?

Andrew Griffiths: I should point out to the hon. Gentleman that more than 160,000 people in Scotland benefit directly from the national living wage. The Government are looking closely at employment practices. We engaged Matthew Taylor to look into employment practices and to come up with new ways to support people, particularly those in the gig economy. We very much value that work and will be coming forward with recommendations in the very near future.

Executive Pay

3. **Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): If he will take steps to regulate executive pay. [903613]

19. **Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): If he will take steps to regulate executive pay. [903631]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths): The Government will legislate to require quoted companies to publish and explain the ratio of their chief executive officer's pay to the average pay of their UK employees. Companies will also have to provide a better explanation of how share price increases affect the value of complex, long-term incentive plans.

Laura Smith: Does the Minister acknowledge that there is sufficient compelling evidence to conclude safely and beyond any reasonable doubt that collective bargaining significantly reduces income inequality?

Andrew Griffiths: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise the issue of collective bargaining and how that affects employee pay and the wider pay of executives. I should point out to her one interesting fact: the average FTSE 100 CEO's pay leapt from £1 million to £4.3 million between 1998 and 2010, but CEOs' pay fell by 17% in 2016. Interesting.

Stephanie Peacock: It would take the average person in Barnsley East more than 176 years to earn what the average FTSE CEO earns in 12 months. Does the Minister agree that that is a sign of grotesque inequality in the UK? What is he going to do about it?

Andrew Griffiths: What private companies pay their directors is ultimately a matter for their shareholders, but the new pay ratio disclosure requirements mean that we will give shareholders and other stakeholders important new information on how pay at the top of companies fits with wider workforce pay. Companies will be forced to explain and defend their pay ratios and account for changes to the ratio over time.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Does the Minister agree that Britain's biggest broadcaster, the BBC, is setting an appalling example to the nation over executive pay in failing to ensure gender parity?

Andrew Griffiths: I assure my hon. Friend that we absolutely and completely agree with fair pay. It is unacceptable that women who are doing the same job as men receive less pay. That must change. The BBC must act.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): Hardworking people on ordinary incomes are understandably angry at the way executive pay has skyrocketed at a time when ordinary wages have remained flat. When can we expect to see these regulations that the Minister is talking about on publication of pay ratios, and can he confirm that this requirement will be in place for companies by June, as promised?

Andrew Griffiths: I have to point out to the hon. Lady that she may have her figures wrong. CEO pay has fallen, not risen. This Government are keen to ensure that there is more accountability and transparency in relation to the pay of top executives. We want to give the shareholders of companies greater power and ensure that there is greater accountability to shareholders and to the workforce.

Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab): Since 2010, Carillion has paid out more than £500 million in dividends to shareholders while, over the same period, running up a pensions deficit of £587 million, a deficit that is now threatening the security of thousands of hardworking people. While those people suffer, former Carillion CEO Richard Howson was rewarded with a bonus package worth £1.5 million in 2016. Will the Government join me in condemning this scandal and work with the Labour party to end the failed model of outsourcing using shell companies and in condoning excessive pay, or will it be just business as usual?

Andrew Griffiths: Please allow me to assure the hon. Lady that any payments due to directors and executives of Carillion have been stopped; nobody is getting paid and nobody is getting executive bonuses. The moment that the insolvency happened, the Secretary of State wrote both to the Insolvency Service and the FRC to ensure that there was a thorough investigation of all payments to directors. If necessary, PricewaterhouseCoopers and the Insolvency Service have the power to claw back all of those payments. I can assure her that we will be

learning the lessons from the Carillion insolvency and ensuring that we do all we can to support businesses going forward.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We have a lot of questions to get through, so we do need to speed up a little bit.

Seafarers: National Minimum Wage

4. **Chris Williamson** (Derby North) (Lab): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the work of the legal working group on seafarers and the national minimum wage. [903614]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths): The Government believe that seafarers should be paid fairly for the work that they do. My Department and the Department for Transport worked with trade unions and employers to publish new guidance that explains the responsibilities of employers to pay the national minimum wage. We are crystal clear that if someone works in UK waters, they are entitled to at least the minimum wage and that all employers—no matter where they are from—must pay it.

Chris Williamson: I am pleased to hear that, but is the Minister aware that UK seafarers are being undercut by rates of pay as low as £1.75 an hour? That is happening even though the legal working group on seafarers and the national minimum wage, which includes his Department, agrees that legislative change is needed to provide more protection. Will the Minister give a commitment to work with the RMT and Nautilus to end this brazen exploitation, starting with the application and enforcement of the national minimum wage for seafarers working between UK ports and offshore installations?

Andrew Griffiths: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that the guidance is clear that the national minimum wage applies on foreign registered ships when they are in UK territory. The new guidance is the first of its kind on the application of the national minimum wage specifically to seafarers, which shows that this is a priority for the Government. UK national minimum wage law must naturally have a limit, but if a person is employed as a seafarer in British waters, they will be entitled to the national minimum wage.

Apprenticeship Levy: SMEs

Q5. **Ben Bradley** (Mansfield) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education on encouraging small and medium-sized enterprises to take advantage of the apprenticeship levy. [903615]

The Minister for Higher Education (Mr Sam Gyimah): The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Education are working together to establish a world-class technical education system, which is vital to our industrial strategy. This includes encouraging businesses, including SMEs, to offer apprenticeships. We are working with all employers

to ensure that the apprenticeship levy works effectively and flexibly for industry and supports productivity across the country.

Ben Bradley: I welcome my hon. Friend to his role on the Front Bench. I have previously had conversations with my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) in her former role as Education Secretary about finding new ways to support SMEs in my constituency to get involved in education, particularly through apprenticeships, which are important for my constituency as so few people there go to university. I will continue that approach with the Department for Education, but would my hon. Friend commit to meeting me to discuss how we might further support small businesses to train young people in Mansfield?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are committed to supporting businesses in Mansfield through the D2N2 Growth Hub. Since its launch, it has engaged more than 5,100 businesses. He mentions young people in his constituency. The message from this Government is that we will support those who think university is the best route towards building the future they want and that we will also support those for whom apprenticeships or a non-university route is the best route. We do not want to put a limit on aspiration, whatever that aspiration may be.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I know that the Minister is new in his post, but he needs to wake up, for goodness' sake. There is chaos and meltdown in the apprenticeship scheme, with a 62% drop in apprenticeship starts and further education colleges in bankruptcy. Small individual employers in the textile industry cannot get their apprenticeships through. Get a move on—do something about it, man!

Mr Gyimah: I welcome the characteristic passion with which the hon. Gentleman delivers his question, and I share his objective in that we both want the best future for young people. As he knows, the apprenticeship system is going through a change. It will now be employer-led with a focus on quality. We are in the first year of the levy operating and we did expect a bit of a dip, but this situation will recover to deliver the future for our young people.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Further education colleges such as Newcastle-under-Lyme College and Stafford College are vital to the provision of apprenticeships, both under the levy and non-levy. But just having the levy on its own is not necessarily sustainable. Will the Minister ensure that all further education colleges have access to funding for non-levy apprenticeships?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend makes a good point, but the levy is very much in its infancy. It is going to raise £2.6 billion to fund apprenticeships for young people. We have to give it time to work, but I take his point on board.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): Businesses still tell me that there is a skills shortage in my area. FE colleges have continually faced cuts by this Government. Given the introduction of the levy and the other policies that the Government have been talking about, at what point

in time does the Minister believe the skills gap will be filled, to meet the needs of business and the wider community?

Mr Gyimah: The hon. Gentleman mentions a skills gap in his local area. This Government are committed to delivering 3 million apprenticeships to plug that gap. Some 1.2 million are now being created, and I am determined that we will deliver on our target.

Aerospace Sector

Q6. Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): What steps he is taking to support the aerospace sector. [903616]

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): The Government enjoy a strong partnership with the aerospace sector through the Aerospace Growth Partnership. Since 2010, the sector's turnover has grown from £24 billion to £34 billion, and exports have almost doubled. Following the excellent and wholly justified ruling of the United States International Trade Commission on Friday night, I am delighted that Bombardier in the hon. Gentleman's constituency will be able to look forward to a bright future.

Gavin Robinson: Hear, hear! I was overjoyed on Friday night when Bombardier unanimously won its case with the United States International Trade Commission. In paying tribute to the Secretary of State and to the Minister responsible for the aerospace industry, I ask that they stand resolute against any appeal that may be lodged and ensure that the C Series, now that it is finally ready for take-off, is the true success we know it can be.

Greg Clark: I will indeed. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the stalwart way in which he and his colleagues stood up for their constituents and, indeed, the supply chain that covers the whole United Kingdom. Right from the beginning, this has been a joint endeavour between us, the Canadian Government, the company and everyone with an interest in the success of Bombardier.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the future of our space and aerospace industries is key to our economic future and that practical measures like the new Space Industry Bill will open up new opportunities?

Greg Clark: I do indeed. Space is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the economy, and we are world leaders in it. Through the Bill, we will ensure that we have the right regulatory regime to underpin that.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Since the aerospace sector requires long-term planning and investment, does the Secretary of State not share my alarm at the threatened takeover of the leading tier 1 supplier GKN by a turnaround company specialising in maximising shareholder returns over five years maximum? Is this not a national security issue?

Greg Clark: The right hon. Gentleman is a previous occupant of my post, so he knows that the powers that the Secretary of State has over these things have to be exercised in a quasi-judicial way. Therefore, I should not, and cannot, comment on that case. However, he

will know, because he has written to me, that I have spoken to both chief executives, and I am keeping it under close review.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): It is good to hear my right hon. Friend talk about the importance of aerospace. Will he consider the aerospace initiative that is being proposed in Kinross-shire in my constituency as part of the Tay cities deal, and will he or other colleagues meet me to discuss it?

Greg Clark: My colleagues and I will be very happy to meet my hon. Friend to develop the full potential of aerospace in his constituency.

Keep Me Posted Campaign

7. Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): Whether he has met representatives of the Keep Me Posted campaign. [903618]

The Minister for Higher Education (Mr Sam Gyimah): Representatives of the Keep Me Posted campaign are dedicated advocates for consumer choice on billing. Neither I nor current BEIS Ministers have met them, but my officials have done so in the past and are familiar with their campaign and the valuable work they do.

Martin Whitfield: Considering the levels of digital exclusion, including in broadband coverage in my constituency, will the Minister agree to meet me and Keep Me Posted to discuss the implications for our constituents?

Mr Gyimah: In response to the hon. Gentleman's point about exclusion, I think the House can celebrate the fact that, under this Government, 95% of the country will be covered by our superfast broadband roll-out. However, I take his point on board and will be delighted to meet him.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Will the Minister work with banks and utilities to ensure that charges for paper billing are restricted to the actual cost of providing that service and are not allowed to become a cumulative fee for those who need or choose paper bills?

Mr Gyimah: Yes, I am happy to work with them.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I welcome the Minister's commitment to meet the Keep Me Posted campaign. That is a very welcome development, particularly because older people in my constituency have made representations to say that they find it intolerable that they are not able to get paper bills. Will he assure me that he will take this on board for the whole United Kingdom?

Mr Gyimah: Absolutely. I do agree that consumer choice is important. Many suppliers offer paper bills, but they are not cost-free. It is important to recognise that at a time when we are seeking to boost productivity, it is not unreasonable for businesses to incentivise more efficient billing processes. The regulatory framework

varies by sector. Where charging differentials exist, we would look at that. I am happy to look at it across the whole United Kingdom.

Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): While recognising the gradual shift away from paper statements and bills as they go online, it must be acknowledged that 16 million people over 15 years old still do not have basic online skills and 5.2 million households still do not have access to the internet at home, and they may face penalisation for requesting a paper bill or statement. What action, exactly, will the Minister take to ensure that people are not penalised for making what should be a legitimate consumer choice? What strategy will he put in place to make sure that people who do not have these skills at the moment can develop them in future?

Mr Gyimah: The hon. Lady makes the very important point that we should make sure that those who need paper bills do receive them and are not unfairly penalised. Any discount made for paperless bills, or charge for paper bills, in sectors where this is allowed must be justified in relation to the relevant administration costs. We do not believe that the Government should intervene to make other customers for whom online billing and payment is perfectly acceptable bear the costs of providing a paper billing service.

Small Business Sector

8. **Trudy Harrison** (Copeland) (Con): What steps he is taking to support growth in the small business sector. [903619]

13. **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): What steps he is taking to support growth in the small business sector. [903625]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths): We are actively supporting small businesses by enhancing the business support helpline and funding growth hubs in every local enterprise partnership area in England. The new Small Business Commissioner will help with payment issues, and British Business Bank programmes support nearly £4 billion of finance to more than 60,000 small and medium-sized enterprises.

Trudy Harrison: I thank the Minister and welcome him to his new position. Sellafield in my Copeland constituency is one of Britain's biggest single-site employers. It is about to award its multimillion PPP contract. What is he doing to promote the role of SMEs, rather than just large companies, when awarding those contracts?

Andrew Griffiths: I clarify to the House that PPP stands for "programme and project partners" and not, as many might have assumed, "public-private partnership". The programme that my hon. Friend talks about will support Sellafield in decommissioning and contains provisions designed to support small businesses. In November 2015, the Cabinet Office agreed to a target of 31% of spend with SMEs for the Government's Nuclear Decommissioning Authority. Moreover, as the Small

Business Minister, I will look at what I can do to ensure that more is done to help small businesses to win Government contracts.

Maggie Throup: Will the Minister join me in commending the work of the Erewash Partnership, which helps entrepreneurs in my constituency to start up and grow their own small businesses? Will he consider what more Government can do to help such organisations expand their support services?

Andrew Griffiths: I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in applauding the work of the Erewash Partnership, which she will know was a previous winner of a national enterprise award—well done them. Through our industrial strategy, all businesses in every region will have access to a growth hub. We have announced a further £24 million of core funding over the next two years for growth hubs, including the D2N2, which I understand works with the Erewash Partnership. I am delighted to work with her to do what I can to support businesses in her constituency.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): Stability among larger tier 1 suppliers is really important to SMEs in the automotive and aerospace supply chains. Given that, does the Minister agree that if the Melrose bid for GKN splits up and sells off that company, as is anticipated, that cannot be in the interests of either sector or SMEs in this country?

Andrew Griffiths: We are always sensitive and aware of the impacts on the supply chain. We need a strong supply chain, but I point the hon. Gentleman to the Secretary of State's previous answer on that issue.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Support for the small business sector will be even more urgent given the findings of the UK Government's leaked Brexit analysis, which shows that in all current scenarios, businesses across all sectors and all parts of the UK will be hammered with between 2% and 8% reductions in GDP growth. Will the Minister confirm what planning his Department has undertaken in the light of those figures? Is he declining to publish because it is too embarrassing?

Andrew Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman will know that that issue is the subject of an urgent question later on in the House. I would hate to spoil his fun, so I will leave it to others.

Carbon Reduction Targets

9. **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the UK's ability to meet its carbon reduction targets. [903620]

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): If you will indulge me, Mr Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to the hon. Lady's predecessor, who made an amazing and powerful speech in the other place. It was quite astonishing.

We should all be proud of the excellent progress the UK has made in meeting its carbon reduction targets. The current numbers show that we have met our first budget, are on track to exceed our second and third budgets and are 97% and 95% of the way to meeting our fourth and fifth budgets. The clean growth strategy

that I brought forward last year sets out an ambitious set of 50 policies and proposals that will help us to meet those targets.

Helen Hayes: I thank the Minister for her tribute to my predecessor, Baroness Jowell, who is much loved in Dulwich and West Norwood.

Southwark Council confirmed last week that it has invested its £150 million pension fund in a low-carbon investment, concluding that continuing to hold significant investments in fossil fuels in the context of climate change would present a long-term financial risk to the fund. Will the Minister tell me what conversations she is having with private firms with large pension funds to encourage and facilitate divestment from fossil fuels, which is now clearly the most responsible decision for pension fund members and the future of our planet?

Claire Perry: The hon. Lady points out the very powerful fact that the Government can set policy and bring forward achievable targets, such as our renewables ambition, but we also need the private sector and private capital to be involved in financing this transition. I have numerous conversations with companies about what they are doing with their own investments and, equally, about what they will be doing to help other companies to invest in a more sustainable future. I refer her to the Powering Past Coal Alliance, which I launched with my Canadian counterpart last year and which is helping the world to get off the dirtiest form of fossil fuel heating.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Given that more than a year has now passed since the Hendry review reported on the potential contribution of tidal lagoon technology, when does my right hon. Friend think that Ministers will be able to respond positively to that report and give a green light to this important environmental technology?

Claire Perry: I am left in no doubt by my right hon. Friend and others about how anxious people are to see this review go forward. We want to get our future investment in renewable energies right. We continue to look very closely at this, and I hope that we will be able to inform the House shortly.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): The Minister will have seen the recent report by the Committee on Climate Change about the Government's clean growth strategy in relation to the fifth carbon budget. Indeed, I know that she has seen it, because she wrote the committee a nice letter thanking it for its report. What plans does she have in place to rectify the shortcomings and omissions in that strategy, as identified by the Committee on Climate Change in its report?

Claire Perry: As the hon. Gentleman and I both know, the report basically said there had been a sea change in our ambition for future climate reduction actions. I was extremely grateful to the committee, as I always am, for its scrutiny and information. We were the first country in the world both to pass a climate change Act and to set up an independent scrutineer. As we all know, we have to do more, particularly on business energy efficiency and new homes standards. I am looking forward to working in a consensual way, cross-party, to bring forward those measures.

Pilot Town Deal

11. **Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): What progress his Department is making on developing a pilot town deal as outlined in the industrial strategy. [903622]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): I am delighted that the industrial strategy White Paper commits to considering a town deal for Grimsby, which I know has been warmly received by my hon. Friend. I welcome the strong public-private approach to driving forward ambitious plans for the regeneration of Grimsby. The Department and the project board are in close contact on the detail of this deal, and I hope that we will have a proposal for consideration in the very near future.

Martin Vickers: I thank the Minister for his reply, and I would point out that this deal also includes Cleethorpes—it is for Greater Grimsby. I know that discussions are continuing at official level, but I would welcome an opportunity for the Minister to meet representatives of the project board in the new future, so that we can give some political clout to this deal, which could provide a pilot for many provincial towns up and down the country.

Richard Harrington: I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and members of the Greater Grimsby—including Cleethorpes—project board either as soon as I am able to leave Westminster or in Westminster. I encourage my hon. Friend to organise a meeting here so as not to lose any time in holding this important engagement—and if he wants to bring some local fish and chips, that would be fine.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Let us hear the voice of Grimsby.

Melanie Onn: The hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) will know that Great Grimsby is obviously the centre of the universe, certainly in northern Lincolnshire. This project is really important, and it is essential to improving jobs, skills, housing and culture in my constituency of Great Grimsby. It does seem to have been ping-ponged between the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Who is taking the lead, how much will the Government commit to ensuring its success and when will my very patient constituents start to see the change that they deserve?

Richard Harrington: I assure the hon. Lady that I am not a ping-ponger, and this shows the Government working together. We will continue to work together, and I will take responsibility for making sure this happens as soon as is possible.

Carillion

12. **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the potential effect of the liquidation of Carillion on workers' pensions. [903624]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths): The taskforce established to tackle the impact of Carillion's liquidation includes the Department for Work and Pensions, and my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary is in regular contact with my right hon. Friend the Pensions Secretary. Those already receiving their pensions will continue to receive payment at 100% of the usual rate. Anyone worried about their pension situation can contact the Pensions Advisory Service; its dedicated helpline has now responded to over 800 calls since Carillion's insolvency.

Paul Blomfield: I thank the Minister for that answer, but I think it will be of very little comfort to many Carillion staff, past and present, when they hear that the deficit in their pension fund is approaching £1 billion. Public sector contracts have made some at the top of Carillion very rich indeed, so what action is the Minister taking to ensure that current and future pensioners do not lose out?

Andrew Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman will understand that issues in relation to pension schemes are a matter for the independent Pensions Regulator. However, the Pensions Regulator has been in contact with Carillion and the pension scheme trustees for a number of years about the funding of the pension scheme. I can absolutely assure the hon. Gentleman that the work of the taskforce is to look at what happened in relation to the Carillion insolvency, and to ensure that if lessons are to be learned, we will learn them.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): The global headquarters of GKN is in my Redditch constituency. It employs 200 people, and concerns have been raised about the pension scheme there as well. The Pensions Regulator is warning that in the event of a takeover, there may be something to look at. What lessons is the Minister learning from Carillion in this case, and what further action does he need to take?

Andrew Griffiths: The Secretary of State, I think, has already outlined the approach with which the Government are handling the takeover of GKN, but I can assure my hon. Friend that the implications of business actions, and particularly takeovers, in relation to pension schemes are a priority for the Government. We will continue to proceed with care and caution to protect the interests of all members of pension schemes.

Agency Workers

14. **Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op):** Whether he plans to review the rules governing the use of agency workers. [903626]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths): The Government work to ensure that our labour markets work for everyone. That was why the Prime Minister asked Matthew Taylor to carry out an independent review on modern working practices. The Government are considering the issues that the review has raised, including rules governing the use of agency workers.

The review is comprehensive and detailed, and we have been giving the report the careful consideration it deserves. We will respond shortly.

Gareth Thomas: Two thousand workers in BT call centres, some of whom handle 999 calls, are paid up to £500 less per month than permanent staff because BT uses the loophole known as the Swedish derogation under agency workers regulations. Taylor recommended its abolition; when will the Minister get on with it?

Andrew Griffiths: As I have outlined, the Matthew Taylor report does, in some depth, look at the Swedish issue. I am meeting Matthew Taylor this afternoon, and that issue will be one of those that we shall discuss. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that in 2017, the employment agency standards inspectorate dealt with more than 800 complaints from agency workers. EAS investigations have protected an estimated 303,000 agency workers, and we will continue to defend their interests.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): How many of those complaints under the agency workers directive led to successful prosecutions?

Andrew Griffiths: I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the answer.

Renewable Energy

15. **Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP):** What recent steps he has taken to support the development of renewable energy sources. [903627]

21. **Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the adequacy of the level of investment in the renewable energy sector. [903633]

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): The development of renewable energy is a tremendous UK success story. Thanks to our significant investment and the support of all of us, renewable capacity has quadrupled since 2010. Last year, 30% of our electricity generation came from renewable sources.

Stuart C. McDonald: Yesterday, 10 UK trade associations wrote to the Secretary of State to express serious concern about delays to the long-awaited feed-in tariff consultation. Will he or Ministers agree to meet them to address both those concerns and the uncertainty facing small-scale low-carbon energy projects?

Claire Perry: I am always happy to engage with anyone who would like to further the cause of renewable energy in the UK, so I would be happy to do so.

Mr Speaker: I call Mary Creagh. Not here—where is she?

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): More than half of Scottish energy consumption is met by renewable sources, including the Whitelee wind farm, based near Eaglesham in East Renfrewshire, which is the largest onshore wind farm in the UK, but can the Minister confirm that less-established renewable energy

projects in Scotland will be able to compete for the £557 million of funding that is available as part of the clean growth strategies?

Claire Perry: As my hon. Friend knows, because we have discussed it several times, we are looking hard at how we use that committed £557 million of support for renewable energy in a way that brings forward projects when there is significant local support. I look forward to continuing the discussion with him.

22. [903634] **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): For the first three quarters of 2017, renewable electricity generation in Scotland was 19% greater than in the same period in the previous year. Scotland is on track for a record year of renewable generation in 2017. Will the Secretary of State commend the efforts of the Scottish Government in this area, and, in particular, the new target to have 50% of Scottish energy needs covered by renewables from 2030?

Claire Perry: Scotland benefits from some fantastic geographical advantages that mean that it is a world leader in many of these things, but it is, of course, UK bill payers across the nation who are investing in the introduction of renewable energy, whether that is in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Electric Vehicle Charge Points

16. **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): What steps the Government have taken to improve electric vehicle charge point infrastructure. [903628]

17. **Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): What steps the Government have taken to improve electric vehicle charge point infrastructure. [903629]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): We have a range of grant schemes to support the installation of charging infrastructure—on-street, off-street and at workplaces. At the autumn Budget, the Chancellor announced a £400 million joint public and private charging infrastructure investment fund.

Mark Pawsey: My constituency is already home to the new electric London taxi, and we have recently heard the announcement of £80 million of investment in a new electric battery development facility in Coventry. Does the Minister agree that this presents opportunities for my constituency and the wider area to establish leadership in the electric vehicles sector?

Richard Harrington: It certainly does, and I have had the honour of visiting my hon. Friend's constituency. On the day we announced the battery facility he mentions, the CEO of Jaguar Land Rover declared:

"We also intend to produce battery electric vehicles in the region, bringing the West Midlands to the forefront of modern mobility in the UK."

That is the industrial strategy in action.

Gillian Keegan: Chichester District Council has invested in 20 new electric vehicle charging points in carparks throughout the district. However, a constituent recently told me that it took him six and a half hours to get from

Chichester to Oxford in his electric car because there were insufficient charging points during the journey. What is the Minister doing to join up individual council initiatives to ensure that there is a comprehensive network of charging points nationwide?

Richard Harrington: We are pressing hard on this. The Government are taking powers under the Automated and Electric Vehicle Bill to ensure that the infrastructure is rolled out. Government leadership, along with local authority engagement and a growing private sector, means that the UK now has more than 11,500 publicly accessible charge points. The Government have committed £15 million to ensuring that there will be one every 20 miles on the strategic road network. That is coming, and it will be coming soon.

Topical Questions

T1. [903636] **John Penrose** (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): Since our last Question Time, it has been my pleasure to introduce my new colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) and for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), to the Department and to see our agenda progressing. We announced the automotive sector deal, supporting British innovators and manufacturers with a joint commitment of millions of pounds of investment from industry and Government. The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said that the deal would place the UK at the forefront of electric, connected and autonomous vehicles. I am delighted to announce that Lotus Cars has announced its intention to invest significantly to expand its production, creating 300 new jobs at its plant in Norfolk. Production will increase fivefold in the years ahead.

John Penrose: Energy distribution network operators charge obscenely high prices on our energy bills and make absurdly large profits for running safe, low-risk monopoly businesses that get energy to our homes. Does the Secretary of State agree that Ofgem has been far too soft on these firms for ages, allowing them to get fat and lazy at customers' expense? Will he join me in urging Ofgem to get a great deal tougher in future?

Greg Clark: I agree with my hon. Friend and welcome the decision by SGN, SSE and National Grid to refund excess returns to consumers—the others should follow suit. He is absolutely right, and in the next price control period, Ofgem should have a much tougher regime.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I gently remind colleagues that at topical questions progress is expected to be much quicker? We need short, sharp inquiries; people should not simply seek to bring into topicals what they would have asked had they been called—which they were not—in substantive questions. Pithy questions; pithy answers.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I shall try to be pithy, Mr Speaker.

GKN is a great British engineering company, forged in the first industrial revolution with strengths in defence, aerospace, automotive, batteries and the internet of things, which should place it at the heart of our future economy—high skills, high productivity and high wage—but the debt-driven hostile takeover threatens 6,000 UK workers, pension funds and the supply chain. The Secretary of State has said that he will not comment on individual cases, so may I ask him a general question? Does he believe that it is in the national interest for City investment houses to use debt to dismantle our industrial base?

Greg Clark: The hon. Lady understands the constraints that I have in any particular takeover. As a feature of our economy, it is very important that we have investment into our companies from those with the capital to do so. That is why we have a regime that limits the grounds for intervention, but there are certain grounds that I will have to consider during the time ahead.

T2. [903637] **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): Will the Minister join me in welcoming the news announced by the aerospace trade association—ADS—of record new aircraft delivery figures worth £29 billion to the UK in 2017, as well as the further announcement of an order by Emirates for an additional 36 Airbus A380s? How will the Government help to ensure that the UK aerospace supply chain is in a position to take advantage of those excellent opportunities?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): The sector has huge growth potential. The Government support the industry through the aerospace growth partnership and have committed £3.95 billion for it, which already supports 200 companies, including Safran and GE Aviation in my hon. Friend's constituency.

T3. [903638] **Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): By last Friday, just 526 of the 9,000 companies that need to report their gender pay gap had done so. What powers do the Government have to compel companies to publish these numbers ahead of the April deadline, as there are no civil or criminal sanctions in the regulations?

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): Having just taken over the diversity portfolio in the Department, I share the hon. Lady's extreme disappointment at companies failing to report. I will take this matter forward and perhaps work with her as a matter of urgency.

T4. [903640] **Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Bearing in mind the world-leading reputation of Rothamsted Research in Harpenden, will the Secretary of State explain what plans the Department has to work with Rothamsted, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and other bodies to further improve Britain's world-class position in agricultural science?

The Minister for Higher Education (Mr Sam Gyimah): I will make three quick points: the Government are investing £70 million in the agri-tech catalyst and £80 million in four centres for agricultural innovation through the 2013 agri-tech strategy; and I pay tribute to Rothamsted

Research as a key partner in agrimetrics. We are working together to deliver integrated solutions for the agricultural community.

T5. [903641] **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): On 10 January, the First Minister of Wales sent a letter to the Prime Minister offering substantive funds for the tidal lagoon. When will he get a response and when will we have the tidal lagoon decision for investment across Wales?

Greg Clark: Officials are meeting their counterparts in the Welsh Government so that they can understand and explore the proposal that has been made.

T7. [903643] **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): As banks are closing on our high streets, two of my towns, Newhaven and Polegate, are not having any banking facilities left. Will the Minister consider expanding the facilities that post offices offer? Postmasters such as the one in East Dean in my constituency are keen to do more, but Post Office Ltd refuses to allow them to do so.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths): I take on board the very important question that my hon. Friend asks. The Government have invested over £2 billion to ensure that the Post Office is able to meet the needs of our constituents and the small businesses that rely on it. That means that 99% of UK personal bank accounts and 95% of small business accounts can be accessed to withdraw cash, and that customers can deposit cash over the counter or cheques in any one of the 11,600 post offices across the UK.

T6. [903642] **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): Investment in solar energy has fallen by 85% over the last year. Will the Minister explain why her Department believes that solar energy no longer requires public subsidy?

Claire Perry: I am sure that the hon. Lady will be delighted to know that I opened Britain's first subsidy-free solar farm last year. The great success of the policy framework and the investments that we have all made through our bills means that we are able to bring forward renewable energy without substantial subsidies. I would have thought that she would welcome the idea of getting more renewable energy for less investment.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): Given that the Keep Me Posted campaign has pointed out that those who cannot or do not use the internet pay £440 a year more in household bills, will the Minister consider extending the provisions that already exist in banking to energy and telecommunications bills?

Mr Gyimah: The right hon. Gentleman makes a very important point, which is why I agreed in a previous response to meet the campaign's officials to see how we can work on this.

T9. [903645] **Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): The loss of over 200 jobs at Cleveland Potash is a heavy blow for people living in Loftus and east Cleveland, so I am grateful to the Small Business Minister for negotiating an agreement across Government to extend the same flexibilities around training granted to workers at SSI to those at

Boulby. The chief executive of the taskforce has described that as critical. Will he commit that this will all be finalised before redundancies are announced in the spring, so that people leaving Cleveland Potash can have certainty?

Mr Speaker: I remind colleagues of the merits of the blue pencil. If you have a prepared question and it is a bit on the long side, just scratch a bit out—very useful, and the question never suffers.

Andrew Griffiths: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his tenacity in campaigning on behalf of his residents. Following his representations on the impact of the proposed redundancies, I am happy to confirm that there will be additional flexibility in how the rapid response service can be used. That means that, while there is no additional funding, all workers made redundant from Cleveland Potash will benefit from the same flexibilities for job-focused training as have been made available to ex-SSI and supply chain workers.

T8. [903644] **Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): In the light of the possible barriers to resolving cross-border insolvencies in the UK post Brexit, what assessment has the Minister made of the need to reform the UK's corporate insolvency framework to ensure that it is fit for purpose?

Greg Clark: We keep the insolvency regulations under constant review, in response both to Brexit and to lessons learned from our experiences domestically. I will work with the hon. Gentleman to make sure that his views are fed in.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Consumers in the south-west are paying extra on their bills because energy network companies are charging too much. We need greater competition and more teeth in the watchdog to do something about it.

Claire Perry: I think that my hon. Friend is inviting me, as a fellow south-west MP, to agree with him. Network costs vary regionally because of different costs in serving customers. Ofgem took more than £15 billion out of network costs in its last price control framework, and I look forward to introducing various measures such as the price cap Bill, which I shall be introducing shortly, that I hope will be supported by all Members of the House. We want to ensure that we have energy bills that consumers can afford and that we protect the most vulnerable in the process.

Mr Speaker: Short, single-sentence questions are now the order of the day, as will be brilliantly exemplified by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron).

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I will see what I can do.

The universal service obligation for superfast broadband will be good news for businesses across the country, but the fact that the announcement has been made with no date makes it counterproductive, as that is slowing down broadband. Will the Government announce a date and say that registration can start immediately?

Andrew Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman will find that the date set out in the Digital Economy Act 2017 was 2020, but I am sure he will join me in congratulating the Government on their success in ensuring that 95% of the country now has access to broadband.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Will the Minister support Transport for the North's strategic transport plan, which calls for a 50% increase in regional infrastructure spending across the north of England?

Richard Harrington: Infrastructure is a major pillar of the Government's industrial strategy White Paper, and local input is essential. I welcome Transport for the North's input, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will welcome this, too.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): The hostile takeover of GKN by Melrose threatens break-up, sale and closures. The Secretary of State has powers under section 58 of the Enterprise Act 2002 to intervene. Will he intervene to block this hostile takeover, which is not in the national interest?

Greg Clark: I have explained to other Members the importance of exercising these powers in the required way and of not giving a running commentary in this House.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does the Minister agree that competitive rates of interest should be offered to businesses and subcontractors that are affected by the LARC collapse, and that the 8.64% offered to LARC Construction in my constituency is simply too high?

Andrew Griffiths: I agree with my hon. Friend that access to competitive finance is essential, not just for businesses affected by LARC, but more widely, and particularly for small businesses. I am happy to meet him to discuss the issues if he would like me to.

Mr Speaker: It is a great pleasure to welcome back to the House the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley). I know that the House will join me in doing so.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is great to be back.

We have ambitious plans on Teesside to create 20,000 jobs on the former SSI steel site. The biggest issue holding us back is, obviously, the ownership of the site. Can the Secretary of State update us on what conversations he is having with the official receiver and the Thai banks to enable us to fulfil our potential, create jobs, and bring investment back to the site?

Greg Clark: I welcome the hon. Lady back to the House and commend her for her commitment to ensuring that we secure the best possible future for that site. I shall visit Teesside shortly to continue our discussions. There is great commitment on the part of both the Government and the local development corporation to finding the right solution. The ownership is not in the Government's hands, but everything that can be done is being done.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): A constituent of mine is a director of Tower Supplies, one of the leading small and medium-sized enterprises in the personal protective equipment sector, whose bid was recently rejected by Transport for London in the first round of the process with no explanation. The practice is for feedback to be given, but that does not always happen. Will the Minister work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and other Departments to ensure that the system does not hinder SME growth?

Andrew Griffiths: The Government are committed to ensuring that more small businesses are able to bid for such contracts. We want to support SMEs through the procurement process, and to ensure that they can be competitive and win such contracts. I shall be happy to meet my hon. Friend and representatives of the company that she mentioned in order to find a solution.

Eleanor Smith (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): When I met the Minister last week, I was told that the Carillion headquarters would continue to operate in the interim. What steps are the Government taking to safeguard jobs for the employees who work in my constituency?

Andrew Griffiths: I think that the hon. Lady and I spoke on the telephone on the day of the insolvency, and I think I have met her twice since then, along with other Wolverhampton colleagues, to ensure that she is kept fully updated. We are working closely with PricewaterhouseCoopers and the Insolvency Service in the best interests of not just the creditors but all those employed in the Carillion network. To date, things have been positive, but I will seek to update the hon. Lady further as more information becomes available.

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I think that this point of order flows from the exchanges that we have just had. Although ordinarily points of order are made later, I will—as I sometimes do—take this one immediately after questions.

Gillian Keegan: Thank you, Mr Speaker. When I asked a question earlier, I neglected to say that I am a serving member of Chichester District Council.

Mr Speaker: That is a very belt-and-braces approach, for which the hon. Lady certainly cannot be criticised in any way. I thank her, as the House will, for what she has said.

Leaving the EU: Economic Analysis

12.37 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union to make a statement on the Government's analysis of the long-term economic impact of Brexit on the economy.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Steve Baker): I will begin by setting out our approach to publishing economic analysis, I hope once and for all.

I can confirm that—I think the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) will want to listen to this. I can confirm that when we bring forward the vote on the final deal that we agree with the European Union, we will ensure that the House is presented with the appropriate analysis that the Government have carried out, so that the House can make an informed decision. All Members must surely agree, however, that the Government cannot be expected to put such an analysis into the public domain before it has been completed. That would misrepresent our views. Furthermore, the Government cannot be expected to publish the analysis while the negotiations continue, which would surely harm the national interest. Parliament has rightfully agreed that Ministers have a duty not to publish anything that could risk exposing our negotiating position.

Let me now turn to the article that prompted the urgent question. It is a selective interpretation of a preliminary analysis. It is an attempt to undermine our exit from the European Union. As I have told the House before, the Government are undertaking a wide range of analysis on our exit from the EU. The next stage of that analysis, summarised in a draft paper presented to Ministers this month, has been a cross-Whitehall effort to support our negotiating priorities. It has not been led by my Department, and it is not yet anywhere near being approved by Ministers. Even the ministerial team in my Department has only just been consulted on the paper, in recent days, and we have made it clear that it requires significant further work. In fact, I saw this report myself only this morning. The analysis to which I believe this article refers is a preliminary attempt to improve on the flawed analysis around the EU referendum. It is there to test ideas and to design a viable framework for the analysis of our exit from the EU. At this early stage, it only considers off-the-shelf trade arrangements that currently exist; we have been clear that these are not what we are seeking in the negotiations. It does not yet consider our desired outcome: the most ambitious relationship possible with the EU, as set out by the Prime Minister in her Florence speech.

Such an agreement is in the interests of both the UK and the EU. Therefore, the scenarios in this analysis continue to suffer from the flaws we have seen in previous analyses of this type. Such analyses have been proved to be wrong in the wake of the referendum, not least because there is huge uncertainty around any forecast, especially in the long run and especially in the context of a major strategic choice.

It is the Government's job to improve on this analysis, but to do so we first have to understand where it went wrong previously. That is what the analysis to which

this article refers is: it is not a forecast for our preferred outcome of the negotiations; it does not yet properly take account of the opportunities of leaving the EU.

Finally, on 23 June 2016 the people of this country took a decision to leave the EU in the context of a wide range of economic information. The purpose of this analysis is not to question that decision, which this House voted overwhelmingly to uphold. I hope all Members of this House will agree that we should continue to respect the result of the referendum.

Keir Starmer: Not good enough.

Here we go again: Brexit impact assessments, take two. For the past year, we have called on the Government to publish Brexit impact assessments. It is a simple argument: on decisions of this significance, Parliament is entitled to know the likely impact of the Government's approach to Brexit and thus to hold the Government to account. The Government have repeatedly refused our requests.

Last year the Secretary of State initially insisted that these reports existed in "excruciating detail", but were so sensitive that nobody else could see them. After this House passed a binding Humble Address, the Secretary of State changed tack, telling the Brexit Select Committee just last month that no "economic forecast of outcome" had ever existed. Yet last night we learn that an analysis has been produced after all.

This is now piling absurdity upon absurdity, and there are some pretty obvious questions. When was this new analysis commissioned? In particular, was it before or after the Secretary of State gave evidence to the Brexit Select Committee last month on this issue? Is this the only report that has been prepared on the Brexit scenarios? If not, what other analysis has been done? Does this new analysis model the Government's Brexit approach? If not, why not? If so, will it lead to changes in Government policy? Finally, and most importantly, will the Secretary of State publish this now—not in nine months, but now, so that we can hold the Government properly to account?

We have been here before. It took a great deal of time last year and the use of a Humble Address to force the Government to release documents relating to Brexit. The Secretary of State has the chance today to avoid a repeat of that exercise if he commits to publishing this new analysis in full; will he do so?

Mr Baker: The right hon. and learned Gentleman raises the question of impact assessments, and what I can say to the House is that we have always been absolutely clear that we have a wide-ranging programme of analysis, which is evolving continually, but this economic analysis is not what is formally known as an impact assessment. [*Interruption.*] What I would say to the House—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There is excessive gesticulation from a number of hon. Members, which is unseemly and certainly unstatesmanlike.

Mr Baker: The right hon. and learned Gentleman and the Labour party are completely neglecting our duty to safeguard the national interest in the course of these negotiations. I can understand why he and those behind him would want the reports in the press to be

[Mr Steve Baker]

accurate. Fundamentally, they do not wish to leave the European Union. For them, good news is a disaster and bad news is a welcome confirmation of their world view. They await each set of employment figures with eager anticipation, only to have their hopes dashed when every set shows an ever-increasing number of people in work. They gleefully celebrate warnings from banks about the possibility of jobs moving to the continent, then they have to retreat when, a few months later, the banks assert the supremacy of the City of London. I do not blame them. They care passionately about remaining in the European Union and they want to overturn the result, but their strategy is becoming clear: demoralisation, delay and revocation. However, that is not what our parties stood for at the last election. Our parties were clear that we would respect the result of the referendum, and that requires the Government to deliver the best possible Brexit. That is what we are trying to do.

As I said in the opening words of my reply, when the time comes for a meaningful vote, the Government will ensure that the House is appropriately informed. However, we can see what some of this economic analysis could be worth. Let us take as an example the respected Bank of England. What institution could be more respected for its analysis? In August 2016, it made a quantitative forecast of the impact of Brexit, saying that exports would go down by 0.5%, but they went up 8.3%. It said that business investment would go down by 2%, but it went up by 1.7%. It said that housing investment would go down by 4.75%, but it went up by 5%. It said that employment growth would be zero—flat—but it went up to a new all-time high. The public deserve to see the national interest protected in these negotiations and to have a House of Commons of representatives who exhibit a healthy scepticism about economic forecasting.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): It is perfectly obvious to everyone on both sides of the channel that if the United Kingdom leaves the largest and richest multinational free-trade area in the world and constructs new barriers by way of tariffs, customs or regulatory barriers between ourselves and that market, future generations will to some degree be poorer than they would otherwise have been. Does the Minister not accept that the Government should feel themselves under a duty to have the best-informed debate in this House and in the country on the possible consequences of likely scenarios now, when the Government are deciding what their ultimate policy is going to be, and continuously throughout the vital next 12 months when the final picture will start to emerge? Will the Minister stop pretending that this is something to do with defending our negotiating position or that it is some kind of perverse attempt to reverse the referendum decision, and accept that he has failed, actually, to protect the Government from political embarrassment?

Mr Baker: The public have made a profoundly important strategic choice, which is to leave the European Union. That means that the Government need to deliver free trade on a new basis: on the basis not of political integration but of a new deep and special partnership with the European Union. It is the Government's intention to deliver the best possible and most frictionless trading with our friends in the European Union, which it is in

all our mutual interests to do. My right hon. and learned Friend talks about our duty, and he knows well that our duty is to look after the national interest of our constituents and of our country. That is exactly what we are seeking to do as we take these negotiations and this analysis forward.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): Just yesterday, I was commenting in this Chamber that the only constants in the Government's Brexit position are chaos and confusion. Far be it from me to get in the way of the Government undermining themselves, or of Tory feuding, but this situation counts, and their bluff and bluster just will not cut it any more. It is striking that the figures that have been released are very similar to the figures that the Scottish Government produced on Scotland's place in Europe. If the Scottish Government can produce their figures, why can this Government not do so?

Mr Baker: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that we are not copying the Scottish Government's analysis and that we are doing our own homework. The Scottish National party's position is clear: it wants to break up the United Kingdom and have a Scotland within the European Union. The actions that he describes must be understood in that context.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): We have here some London-centric remoaners—that could be a way of describing the shadow Brexit Secretary—in the civil service who did not want us to leave the European Union in the first place and put together some dodgy figures to back up their case. They still do not want us to leave the European Union and are regurgitating some dodgy figures to try to reverse the result of the referendum. Does my hon. Friend agree with that analysis? If so, does he agree that this really is not a news story?

Mr Baker: My hon. Friend makes a point that is very much in line with his long-held views. I should reaffirm that I am proud of the officials with whom I work. Irrespective of how they voted, they are demonstrating commitment to delivering on the decision of the British people. The intention of our current analysis is to improve on what has gone before and, as I set out in my initial response, we recognise that there were flaws in the previous approach.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): A lack of transparency is not in the national interest. On 6 December, I asked the Brexit Secretary,

“have the Government undertaken any impact assessments on the implications of leaving the EU for different sectors of the economy?”

He replied, “Not in sectors.” Now we learn that that work has been done, and it is reported that chemicals, clothing, manufacturing, food and drink, cars and retail will be the hardest hit sectors. Will the Minister offer the House an explanation for the discrepancy between what the Exiting the European Union Committee was told and what we now know?

Mr Baker: As I have explained, we have always said that our economic analysis was continually evolving across a wide range of activities—[*Interruption.*] Opposition Members laugh, but what else would they expect but for the Government to work continually on a developing analysis? As I may not have said in my

opening remarks, I know that the Secretary of State only saw this particular document last night—I saw it this morning—and I think that that will explain the answers he has given.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that businesses up and down the country, including in Redditch, will wonder whose side the Labour party is on when its Members take great pleasure in forecasts that predict doom and gloom? People may conclude that Labour is not on the side of this country's hard-working businesses and entrepreneurs.

Mr Baker: My hon. Friend is exactly right. Now that the decision has been taken, the vast majority of right-thinking people in the United Kingdom will expect it to be carried through with a good heart as a matter of choice. Time and again, we see a foot-dragging reluctance from the Labour party, which increasingly seems not to be respecting the choices of its own voters.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): It is reported that the analysis shows that the north, the midlands and Northern Ireland will be hardest hit in all the scenarios. Will the Minister confirm that that is because all the scenarios assume that Britain is outside the customs union? Will he confirm, too, that the Government appear to have undertaken no analysis of the different customs union options and of the impact on our economy? Given how significant the situation is for northern manufacturing and for Northern Ireland and given that the CBI has said this is irresponsible and is letting down northern manufacturing, will he commit to conducting and publishing analysis before the customs Bill completes its passage through Parliament?

Mr Baker: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady because she has given me the opportunity to reassure her that there is economic growth under all the scenarios in the economic assessment. The only question is to what extent and how fast, but there is projected to be economic growth across a 15-year period in all the scenarios.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Does my hon. Friend understand that many businesses in my constituency are already nervous about the apparently cavalier attitude of some Brexiteer opinion towards their continued success? Will he therefore confirm that the Government will seek to negotiate an arrangement and get a result that does not damage the long-term economic success of our country and the national interest of our people?

Mr Baker: I can give my right hon. Friend that assurance. The Government are not cavalier. It is precisely because we take our duties seriously that we are continuing to develop our economic analysis, and I can of course reassure him that we are seeking to establish a free trade agreement and other partnership arrangements that are of unprecedented scope and ambition.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): For the Minister basically to excuse his not publishing the information because he has not yet had the chance to edit, twist or distort it or to redact the information within it is a total and utter disgrace. The public have a

right to know about their livelihoods and their futures, and it is deeply irresponsible and dishonest for the Government not to publish the information. It is a cover-up, pure and simple, and it stinks.

Mr Baker: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on going for the hardest possible hit that he can manage, but it is not good enough. The truth is that the hon. Gentleman has made it perfectly clear through his words and his actions that he does not accept the referendum result. It is perfectly clear that he is among those who wish to seek a revocation of the democratic decision of the British people, and he is acting in that spirit.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): As an antidote, will the Minister read Professor Minford's work? Alternatively, he might just go to the cinema to see "Darkest Hour".

Mr Baker: I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend. I can confirm that I will read Professor Minford's work, and the transparency register will also show that I have met Professor Minford. I will continue to meet Professor Minford and to look at the work of Economists for Free Trade.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): As the Cabinet squabbles in the middle of these tough negotiations, the Minister has no right to talk about the national interest. He must stop treating parliamentarians like chumps. He knows, we know and this analysis confirms that Brexit will cause huge damage to British jobs and British families. Will the Government and, indeed, the Leader of the Opposition now allow a vote on the deal so that the people can decide whether they want to pursue this damaging approach or to stay in the European Union?

Mr Baker: The right hon. Gentleman reminds me that I did not answer the other point of my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne). I have been to see "Darkest Hour" and the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) does a good job of reminding me that some people do approach our current circumstances in an unnecessarily bleak spirit. I say to him once again that the economic analysis is clear that there is to be economic growth in all scenarios. I encourage him to go back to the report published by the Treasury Committee, on which I served, during the referendum campaign and look at the documented abuse of figures by the remain campaign. I urge him not to repeat that abuse of figures.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): According to this analysis, the car manufacturing, chemical and food sectors, all of which are vital for my constituency, will clearly be adversely affected. Quite frankly, Minister, I take exception to being told that it is not in the national interest for me to see a report that would allow me to best represent my constituents. Parliament needs access to the best possible information on which to base our decisions.

Mr Baker: I have great faith in my hon. Friend, and we of course appreciate the importance of cars, chemicals and food. As I said at the beginning of my response,

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when the time approaches for us to have a meaningful vote in Parliament, we will put appropriate economic analysis before both Houses to assist the choices that they make. However, we do not expect the European Union to publish all its analysis in a transparent manner, and we do not propose to go into the negotiations having revealed all our thinking.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): I wonder whether the Minister thinks that perhaps the person in the Whitehall establishment who leaked this document would be better off moving, and working in Brussels. Was the methodology used in this report, or whatever it is, the same methodology that said the country's financial future would tank if we did not join the euro?

Mr Baker: We are carrying out the usual inquiries into who leaked the report. The hon. Lady is absolutely right that past economic predictions have been very poor, and poor for good reasons on which I would love to elaborate on another occasion. I have set out that particular critique of even the Bank of England's forecasts, and she is absolutely right that, as I said earlier, we should have a healthy scepticism.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): We would be in a strange position if Governments had to publish every bit of advice to Ministers and every bit of analysis that they profoundly believed to be wrong. The last Labour Government did not do that, and the Minister should resist publishing this analysis if he believes it is not in the national interest to do so. I also advise him that people are trying to divert the Government's direction on Brexit—there is absolutely no doubt about it. Will he look into why this particular document was leaked on this particular day, the day that the withdrawal Bill has its first debate in the upper House?

Mr Baker: My hon. Friend, the Chairman of the Select Committee on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs, makes an important and authoritative point about the conduct of government. Opposition Members would do well to reflect on how they would wish to govern the country if, God forbid, the electorate should ever give them an opportunity to do so.

All of us in this House need to have an eye on the long-term functioning of our democracy and our constitution. With that in mind, I hear what my hon. Friend says. There is clearly a campaign to overturn the referendum result, and it can be seen at work in the media and in this House. We will certainly bear in mind what he says.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister says that this cross-departmental analysis has not been co-ordinated by his Department, but on that there appears to be some confusion. When the Brexit Secretary gave evidence to the Brexit Committee last week, I asked him whether his Department is co-ordinating the cross-departmental work on the sectoral impacts of no deal, and he said, "Yes."

If there is indeed no deal, we would likely fall out on World Trade Organisation rules. Will the Minister confirm that in one of the scenarios outlined in the report—the

WTO option that is advocated by many Conservative Members—the impact of non-tariff barriers is the equivalent of a 10% tariff slapped across the economy?

Mr Baker: That was quite a long question. There are two particular scenarios that are not modelled in this analysis. One is the policy choices that the Prime Minister rightly set out in her Florence speech, and the other is exiting in the unfortunate, and we think unlikely, circumstance of not reaching an agreement and how one might take the right policy choices in the event of trading on WTO rules. We will continue to take this analysis forward, and I look forward to the day when we are able to present appropriate analysis to the House before the meaningful vote.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does the Minister recall, prior to the referendum, what became known as "Project Fear"? Everything was going to go wrong after the referendum if we voted to come out—something short of bubonic plague—but that did not happen. With those warnings, the British people still voted to come out, so of what relevance is another forecast now that predicts exactly the same as "Project Fear"?

Mr Baker: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I well remember "Project Fear" in all its manifestations. Most of us on the leave side thought at the time that those horror predictions would not come to pass after the vote and, happily, we have been proved correct. I look forward to continuing to prove economists wrong after they make horror story predictions.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Why have the Government assessed the impact of all the scenarios but not the one they say they want, the fantasy cake-and-eat-it one?

Mr Baker: I am grateful for that question, because I can reassure the right hon. Gentleman and the House that we will continue to develop and expand our economic analysis. We cannot control the timing of leaks, and were we to have chosen to publish an analysis, as we will when we approach the meaningful vote, it will of course contain the relevant information.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): My hon. Friend is of course right that this analysis does not question the result of the referendum, nor does it model his desired scenario, but what it does show is that modelling a fully comprehensive free trade deal with the EU post-Brexit, combined with the benefits of new trade deals, shows a net effect on economic growth of 1.5%. Where does he hope a special and deep relationship will differ from a fully comprehensive free trade deal post Brexit?

Mr Baker: My hon. Friend may know that Michel Barnier tried to include financial services in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership deal, and we believe that we can go beyond what has been agreed in the past. The analysis does not include a comprehensive deal of the scope we would like to agree; it includes only an average based on past precedents. We believe that we can reasonably go further than we have before, and of course we are well apprised of the importance of financial services and of ensuring that the City flourishes.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): If the economic forecasts and impact assessments published to date have been so wrong, why do the Government not tell the British people what it is they want from the EU by way of a deal, cost it and publish the results? Why is that so difficult?

Mr Baker: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out what we want in the Lancaster House and Florence speeches. We are heading down the path of successfully delivering on what the Government have said we wish to have.

Joanna Cherry: Cost it.

Mr Baker: We will continue to carry out a wide-ranging and developing programme of economic analysis, which will help to inform our negotiating position and our decisions.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): Can my hon. Friend, the excellent Minister, name a single civil service forecast, leaked or otherwise, that has been accurate?

Mr Baker: No, I am not able to name an accurate forecast. They are always wrong, and wrong for good reasons. [*Interruption.*] Members are chatting at me from a sedentary position. My long-standing views on the flaws in the epistemology of the social sciences and the consequences for econometrics are well set out in various forums, and I encourage Members to go and have a look at them. I am happy to recommend a reading list.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): The Government are not protecting the interests of the British people but withholding information from them. The Minister keeps invoking the referendum, but of course that did not give us any indication of the form of Brexit that the public wish us to follow. Will he confirm that what the analysis shows is that the least worst option—staying in the single market and customs union—has been voluntarily taken off the table by the Prime Minister with no mandate whatsoever?

Mr Baker: I encourage Members to google the hon. Gentleman's name on *The Sun* website. They will find a wonderful picture of him, during the referendum, standing next to a poster proclaiming that the leave campaign wanted to leave the single market. He made the point at the time—[*Interruption.*] He certainly did, and anyone can go and find it on *The Sun* website. The point was made at the time, and the public chose.

It would not be possible to honour the decision of the British people if we allow the European Union to set the UK's tariffs and if we become people in a political purgatory of perpetual rule taking from the European Union without any democratic say. It is the desire of this Government that our country should continue to be a democracy. For that reason, we will leave the European economic area and the customs union.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that our post-referendum experience illustrates the danger of publishing incomplete and inchoate economic analyses? We were told prior to the referendum by the

Treasury that we would enter immediate recession if we voted to leave. The International Monetary Fund told us that the economy would contract by as much as 9.5%. Both were made to look extremely foolish.

Mr Baker: My right hon. Friend is exactly right, and he might have added to that catalogue of failures of the economics profession the failure to see the financial crisis. It is time for economists to re-examine their methods, for the reasons I indicated earlier. I am grateful to him for putting those past failures on the record.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): Given that the leaked Government analysis confirms that, realistically, there are three ways that the UK might leave the EU, each with a very different impact on jobs, trade and livelihoods, why have MPs not been given a direct vote at the start of the process to determine what sort of Brexit the UK is pursuing? Is it not about time that we in this House are allowed to take back common sense and seek the sensible option of staying in the single market by staying in the European economic area and remaining part of a European customs union?

Mr Baker: The hon. Lady is entirely wrong; the sensible and pragmatic way forward, which honours the result of the referendum and ensures that this is a democracy with an independent Parliament able to ensure that control is exercised over the laws of this country, is to carry forward my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's policy, as she has set out in Florence and in the Lancaster House speech.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Is it not about time we set up a charity called "Soothsayers Anonymous" for people who simply cannot kick the habit of predicting when conflicts are going to break out, when we are going to have opinion polls that are going to be accurate and when we are going to have economic forecasts regarding the EU that are going to be accurate, even though history has shown time and again that they are not worth the paper they are written on?

Mr Baker: That is a very good point, but I am not sure we will make it Government policy to do it.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): The Minister will be well aware that Sinn Féin has already used the Brexit decision to agitate for a border poll. I say to the British Government that they need to be very careful to ensure that Sinn Féin does not use any more negative impact assessments to feed its narrative. In those circumstances, what guarantees can he offer the people of Northern Ireland that the economy will not suffer as a result of Brexit? We must make sure not to feed Sinn Féin's narrative.

Mr Baker: The hon. Lady makes a sobering and important point, which the Government have heard. I say to her that in all scenarios in this economic analysis, there is economic growth—the question is only: how fast? It is this Government's task to ensure we achieve the fastest GDP growth and indeed the fastest GDP growth per head, which is why we have brought forward a comprehensive programme on productivity. Of course we are most concerned to ensure the prosperity of the

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people, not only of Northern Ireland, but of the whole of the island of Ireland and right across Europe. That is why it is in our mutual interest to agree a comprehensive and deep free trade agreement.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Even though these forecasts do not look at the Government's preferred outcome, does my hon. Friend not agree that the data they contain, however imperfectly, do underline the importance of building a bespoke deal around maintaining customs union-style arrangements and ensuring as great a level of access as possible to the single market?

Mr Baker: I agree with my right hon. Friend on most of his points, but, as I said in an earlier answer, we do not think remaining in the customs union, so that the European Union set our tariffs on imports, would be the right thing to do. We think that would be the wrong choice for the UK. It would prevent us from operating an independent trade policy and plugging ourselves into the rest of the world's growth, where multiple authorities, including the European Commission, have admitted that 90% of the world's growth will come from. So on that particular point I disagree with him, but on the rest of his arguments and, in particular, on the need, in our mutual interests, for a good-quality trade agreement, he is right and I agree.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Ministers keep using the excuse that it is in the national interest to withhold information about the economic impact of Brexit—that is on the days when they admit such information exists. I will tell them what is really not patriotic: pursuing a policy that will make our country poorer than it would otherwise be, in order to satisfy right-wing, nationalist ideology. So will the Minister desist from saying that it is in the national interest to withhold this information, given that the only interest it serves is that of Tory Ministers embarrassed by its contents?

Mr Baker: I simply do not accept the premises of the right hon. Gentleman's question; he makes ludicrous suggestions. I consider myself to be an old English liberal and I think most of the Eurosceptics with whom I associate also consider themselves liberal in outlook, particularly on matters of trade and the economy. With that in mind, I cannot possibly accept his premise. The fact is that we are in a negotiation and no one seriously would expect us to go into—

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Wash your mouth out.

Mr Baker: The right hon. Gentleman says I should wash my mouth out, but I am happy to debate liberalism with him any time.

We are heading for an open, liberal, free trading future for the UK. Any suggestion of nationalism is quite wrong and quite ludicrous, and the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) should retract.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) looks as though he has just consumed a very bitter lemon, but I hope he recovers.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Does my hon. Friend share my dismay that pro-remain Members of this House who represent constituencies that voted to leave leap on incomplete economic analysis and profess deep understanding of complex economic methodology, yet fail to wrap their minds around the simple arithmetic of the referendum, which was that 52% voted to leave?

Mr Baker: I must exercise some caution, Mr Speaker, because as you will know, Wycombe District, which is substantially larger than the constituency of Wycombe, did express the other view. However, what I think we need to do is come together to unite around the result as a country, and to choose for ourselves not to leave the EU because we must or because we ought, but to leave the EU successfully because we choose to abide by the democratic decision of the United Kingdom as a whole.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): How can we unite together when the Government are withholding information from the rest of the House?

Mr Baker: It is very difficult to answer the question of how we can unite together when certain Members of this House, including, I am sorry to say, the hon. Lady, keep provoking as much division as possible. She represents a party claiming to be liberal and democratic, and which once offered a real referendum on Europe, but we have had a real referendum on Europe and it is time for her to get behind the result.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): The gloomy pre-referendum Treasury forecasts led many of us to vote remain with a heavy heart. The public made their decision, and we stood on an election manifesto saying that we would follow through on that decision. Will the Minister tell me why we should believe part forecasts—these forecasts, which have apparently been published, are not complete—given that the initial information put out before the referendum was flawed?

Mr Baker: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, and "Project Fear" was mentioned earlier. It is most unfortunate that one fundamental tactic always used throughout the long and sorry history of misrepresenting the true purpose of the EU has been to demoralise the public. It is time for each of us in this House to take a lead in going forward in a spirit of buoyancy and hope.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister would not accept the premise of the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), but this morning we heard from the former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who cast significant doubt on the Government's own ability to forecast the impact of Brexit on jobs and growth. What assurances will the Minister give workers in my constituency, for example, those in the Jaguar Land Rover or Vauxhall supply chains, that Brexit will not fatally wound the manufacturing sector on Merseyside?

Mr Baker: As I believe the record will show, I have said multiple times that in all scenarios in this economic analysis growth is forecast. So it is good news for the hon. Lady and for the country that in all of the forecasts—in all of the circumstances of the economic analysis—growth is forecast. She brings up the issue of the supply chain, so I also say to her that we are of course apprised of the imperatives of complex international supply chains, not just between the UK and Europe, but around the whole world. In particular, I draw attention to provisions in the Union customs code for inward and outward processing rules, which should assist manufacturers in her constituency.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): Were the economists involved in these forecasts the same ones who said we would lose half a million jobs if people voted for Brexit? Since the referendum we have, in fact, gained 350,000 jobs.

Mr Baker: I am not able to give my hon. Friend exactly that information, but perhaps some of the economists are the same ones. In my experience, civil servants, at all levels, dutifully carry out the instructions of the Government, and I am sure they are doing that in this case.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It might surprise the Minister to learn that I have read a number of his articles, and there is much in them that I disagree with. He talks a lot about liberty, accountability, transparency and democracy, but he does not seem to like any of those principles when they are applied to him and his Government, and when they shed light on the reckless course that this Government are pursuing. If they have not done a full, comprehensive analysis, they are incompetent. If they have done it, we should see it.

Mr Baker: As I announced at the beginning of my initial response, the Government will make available to both Houses of Parliament the appropriate economic analysis before we make a decision on the meaningful vote.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): No one in this House should dismiss the referendum result—that would be overstepping the mark—but it is our role, as the Government have accepted, to scrutinise the deal and ensure that it is the very best it can be for all our citizens, regardless of how, or indeed whether, they voted in the referendum. The impact assessments were made available to parliamentarians in absolute confidentiality, and I went to see them. I fail to see why that same process cannot be extended for this most recent and any further analysis. This is a one-time deal only, and I for one owe it to my constituents to prove to them that I have exercised full scrutiny.

Mr Baker: I cannot accept the premise of my hon. Friend's question. We have gone to and fro in the House about the meaning of the term "impact assessments". What was made available to colleagues were sectoral analyses. I refer my hon. Friend both to the written ministerial statement setting out how meaningful votes will happen at the end of the process and to my previous remarks about the need to protect the integrity of our negotiating position. We will ensure that, when we reach

the end of the negotiating period, parliamentarians are able to access appropriate economic analysis when we all take that important decision.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Last week, I asked the Treasury's permanent secretary whether he could confirm that just a single one of the Government's scenarios for a deal post Brexit would lead to a better economic deal and outcome than what we have as members of the single market and customs union. He did not seem able to answer. Is not the truth that no such model exists? Has it not been confirmed today that, as a result of the Government's dogmatic determination to pull us out of the single market and the customs union, it will not be my city, London, that is most affected, or indeed the industries in the City of London that are worst affected, but the key sectors of the economy right across the UK, with the impact felt worst in the west midlands, the north-east and Northern Ireland? How on earth could that possibly be in the national interest?

Mr Baker: The hon. Gentleman said that there is no such model; the truth is that my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) referred to a model earlier. Economists for Free Trade are very clear about their modelling. Other models are available—at the time of the referendum, Open Europe did some modelling and found that the effect could be plus or minus 2%. The truth is that there are profound uncertainties facing not just the United Kingdom in this negotiation but all economies in the world. All face three big issues: the growth of technology; a new phase in globalisation; and, of course, the continuing aftermath of the financial crisis which, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, has left interest rates at levels the Governor of the Bank of England has described as extraordinary if not emergency. Those three issues mean that all economies are on highly uncertain paths. The Government will navigate their way through the future with confidence and boldness.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind): Is the Minister aware that in the past 40 years the European Union's share of global GDP has fallen from 30% to just 15% and that 90% of future world economic growth is going to come from outside Europe? Does he agree that the future is not regional relative decline; the future is global?

Mr Baker: I do agree, and my hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. We need to make sure that this country is well positioned. He refers to the previous era of globalisation and particularly the emergence of China. The United Kingdom's task is to take the right strategic decisions so that we can be plugged in not only to Asia but, I very much hope, to an emerging Africa, Latin America and the whole world, and so that we can participate on the basis of technologies that were unimaginable at the beginning of the EU's life, not least the internet, inexpensive air travel and containerised shipping. Those three things have transformed our world for the better, and I hope and expect, as I am sure my hon. Friend does, that in future, over the course of our lifetimes, the world will improve in ways that we cannot yet imagine.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): We have learned today that the Government's own analysis suggests that the economy will grow by less than 5% in the case of a UK-EU trade deal. That is people's jobs and livelihoods. Will the Minister confirm that the Government's negotiating position has been decided not on the basis of the economic evidence but on ideology alone?

Mr Baker: Let us not pretend that there is no ideology among those who wish to remain in the European Union, even at the cost of overturning a democratic decision, remaining in the EEA and surrendering democratic control and power. The figure to which the hon. Lady referred is wrong—it is not as she stated—but I do not propose now to walk through what is in the analysis which, as I have said, is currently a provisional draft and is not yet Government policy.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): On Friday, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union was on Teesside to set up an optimistic free-trading vision for the UK after we leave the EU. Given that all estimates have consistently underestimated our economy, surely it is time to just get on with the job.

Mr Baker: It is time to get on with the job. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and his colleagues for their brilliant work agitating for free trade zones, which I believe should be an important part of the Government's consideration.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Minister is clearly making himself out to be a bit of a philosopher today, so I say to him that surely it is the mark of a democracy that those of us who take different sides do not question each other's patriotism. If he does not trust the forecasts, will he take the sensible decision—like the one taken by the previous Chancellor, George Osborne—to get them out of the Treasury and say to the Office for Budget Responsibility, "You get the forecast done by the time of the spring statement"? Then we can all see what the truth is.

Mr Baker: I have been careful not to use the word "patriotism" and not to question anyone's, but the voters of the United Kingdom are entitled to look at the words and actions of their parliamentarians and ask what they are trying to achieve. Are they committed to adhering to the referendum result? Are they doing so with a spirit of confidence and boldness, and with buoyancy and hope, or are they trying to demoralise the public and overturn the result through delay and revocation? The hon. Lady should think very carefully about what her voters—and, indeed, all our voters—will think about our actions. I hope she will commit to carrying through their democratic decision.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): It is in the national interest to get the best deal we possibly can. Does my hon. Friend agree that to do that we have to keep our cards close to our chest? These are tough negotiations, and to expose the goods and the bads in such negotiations plays right into the hands of an organisation that, let us face it, does not want us to leave anyway.

Mr Baker: I think the EU's willingness to see us leave is increasing by the day as we go through this process. It is important that the House knows that key figures throughout the EU pay close attention to our newspaper headlines, so it is important and incumbent on us all to remain committed, in that spirit of buoyancy and hope, to carrying through the referendum result.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): We have been here before, because the same gloom-laden forecasts were made before the referendum and none of them was anywhere near the mark. Does the Minister agree that these long-term forecasts are as useful for predicting future economic performance as newspaper horoscopes? More importantly, will he assure us that despite the hysteria from the Opposition Benches, the Government will not be distracted from honouring their commitment to deliver the United Kingdom out of the single market and the customs union?

Mr Baker: The hon. Gentleman's question reminds me of the great economist Galbraith who said, if I recall correctly, that the only purpose of economic forecasting was to make astrology look respectable. There is a great deal of truth in that.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Another great economist, J. M. Keynes, said, "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?" Will my hon. Friend confirm that a deep and special partnership must include services as well as goods, because services account for 80% of our economy, and that any deal that did not include all services would not be in the interests of the United Kingdom?

Mr Baker: Of course I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of services, but I go further. It is extremely important that our ambassador to the World Trade Organisation, Julian Braithwaite, is chairing the relevant committee on services. It is in the UK's and, indeed, the world's interests that we take part in a global liberalisation of services in trade. That is key to unlocking the UK's prosperity and, indeed, to unlocking Governments' capacity to meet the commitments that they have entered into for their populations.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): My constituents, many of whom are former Conservative voters, cannot understand why any Government would adopt policies that they knew would make them or the country worse off. The Minister's tactic today is to rubbish his own commissioned analyses because they show that leaving the EU will be an economic disaster, to a greater or lesser extent. If he believes in Brexit at any cost, will he at least have the honesty to say so?

Mr Baker: That is simply not the case. As I have not hesitated to say several times, the economic analysis does not show the country being worse off; it shows the country being better off under all circumstances. It shows GDP growing—

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Nonsense!

Mr Baker: The shadow Minister says it is nonsense, but I can assure him that it is not. The economic analysis shows GDP increasing in all circumstances.

The point of the Government's policy must be to carry through faithfully the decision of the British people and to do so in a way that proves these doom-mongers and naysayers wrong.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): In these negotiations, the UK is on one side, and 27 other Governments and the EU are on the other. Will my hon. Friend say how many of those Governments, as well as the EU itself, have confirmed that they will publish the entirety of their internal analysis on each option that they might be prepared to offer?

Mr Baker: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. I am not aware that any of them is prepared to reveal that information, and he was absolutely right to mention it. I can assure him that I have given instructions to our teams to analyse the interests of other member states simply for the purpose of demonstrating that it is in our mutual interests to conclude a deep and special partnership.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: As there is so much noise, I will call someone who has been behaving in a statesperson-like manner. I call Fiona Onasanya.

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): I refute the accusation that we do not accept what our constituents have voted for. In June, they were asked a simple question, which was something like this: would you like a divorce, yes or no? They answered that question, but they did not know who would have the children, who would get the house, and how the assets would be split. Will Ministers give us the detail of the impact analysis that has been done, so that we can advise our constituents on how leaving will affect them?

Mr Baker: The hon. Lady makes a very interesting point, but I slightly regret her metaphor. We need to face up to the fact that the British public have rejected the idea of delivering free trade through political integration. Our task is to rise to the challenge of this new decision in strategic political economy and deliver free trade, which provides for democratic control of political power. I did listen carefully to what she said.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It is with growing admiration that I listen to the pronouncements of the Mystic Megs, and indeed the Mystic Moggs, who, with near papal infallibility, pronounce this, that or the other as being an absolute certainty. I agree with the Minister when he says that this is an uncertain process. All my constituents and businesses in North Dorset want to hear from the Minister is that he and the Government are committed to a pragmatic, common-sense solution to this issue that we are facing, to ensure economic growth, stability in jobs and prosperity in Dorset.

Mr Baker: As I said in an earlier answer, I believe that that pragmatic way forward is as set out by our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in the Lancaster House and the Florence speeches, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for underlining the fact that it is the right way forward.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): How dare the Minister suggest to my constituents that ignorance is bliss! My constituents were misled by the lies on the side of the Brexit bus. My constituents are now being deprived of the information that suggests that, up and down the north of England and in Yorkshire in particular, jobs and employment will plunge if we go out on the worst terms. Will he apologise to my constituents for misleading them?

Mr Baker: No, I will not. I encourage the hon. Gentleman to listen to the arguments that I have made and to the answers that I have given. In all scenarios in this analysis, economic growth increases. He talks about people being misled in the referendum campaign; there were two campaigns and both are susceptible to criticism. I encourage him to look at the Treasury Committee's report, which criticised the remain campaign quite heavily; otherwise, I should not have been able to sign up to it.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): In my constituency, more than 2,000 people work in insurance. Britain is home to the world's largest insurance market, and many European companies need access to our market. Does the Minister agree that it is in the interests of both Britain and Europe to seek a much deeper and more modern trade relationship than the EU has with any other third country?

Mr Baker: I do agree with my hon. Friend. The United Kingdom has a comparative advantage in insurance, as it does in so many financial services. As I indicated earlier, it is in the interests of Europe and the world that we should be able to take that comparative advantage and put it to the service of the whole world.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): Like that of the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), who is no longer in his place, my constituency is the gateway to Britain from the Republic of Ireland and on the frontline of Brexit. Businesses that I have spoken to in the past few weeks and months want, because of the uncertainty, an analysis of what Brexit will mean for them specifically. Will the Minister tell the House when he was intending to share this information with local authorities, the devolved Administration and, indeed, their MP who needs to keep them informed?

Mr Baker: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), has been in contact with the Port of Holyhead, and we will continue our programme of engagement, well apprised of the need to keep talking to businesses, particularly those that provide our important infrastructure, such as the port in his constituency. He asked me when: I have said that, before the meaningful vote, we will make appropriate economic analysis available to the House.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): During referendum week, I was fortunate to speak to 25 schools, taking a neutral position. I visited two schools in the past fortnight, and the vast majority of the students, who would probably have voted to remain, wanted us to get on with the job rather than unpick it. Does the Minister agree that it is essential that we respect the ballot box system that elected us, engage more with our constituents and get on with the job in hand?

Mr Baker: I do agree with my hon. Friend. I particularly lament the way that so much of the demoralisation that has taken place has been aimed at young people. It is precisely because we are concerned for their future that we want to deliver a successful partnership with the European Union as we turn out to take advantage of that growth, 90% of which will come from the rest of the world. It is their future that we are concerned about, and it is their future that led people like me to campaign for leave on the basis of upholding their democratic choice to choose a Government and influence its policies.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): These leaked figures indicate and expose the damage that will be caused by a Brexit outside the single market and the customs union. Is it not the case that the greatest failure of this Parliament, on the biggest issue of our time, and despite the damage that it will do to people's livelihoods and standards of living, is that the British Government and the Labour Opposition share the exact same position?

Mr Baker: As I have already said, all scenarios in this analysis show growth. The analysis is heavily caveated with the profound uncertainties that exist, not only for the UK and Europe but for the world. In that context, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept the answers that I have given today.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Following directly on from that, is it not right that we should approach such economic modelling with caution? History has proven to be wrong and flawed in the past. The information is incomplete. Does my hon. Friend, and philosopher longstanding, look forward to proving this analysis wrong as well?

Mr Baker: I would agitate for a healthy scepticism about the use of mathematical economics, and we should go forward in that spirit.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): What duty does the Minister owe to the British people, including my constituents, if not to tell the truth about the choices in the negotiations before us and what they will mean for jobs and businesses in Nottingham?

Mr Baker: Over the long course of the history of the European Union, and indeed of the referendum campaign, people have not shown a particular willingness on a very wide scale to engage in the details of trade policy. This is an area where they do expect the Government—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady says something about our duty. Our duty is to get on with the job that the people have given us to do not only in answering the referendum question telling us that they wish to leave the EU, but in voting at the general election for a range of parties, all of which, including her own, said that we should leave the European Union. And to leave the European Union, we need to leave the customs union and the European economic area and restore democratic control and political power, and that is what we will do; that is our duty.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): The naysayers who are talking this up are some of the same people who said that on 24 June we would drop off a cliff, exports would

be down, foreign direct investment would be down, and jobs would be lost—the list goes on—but the opposite is true. Does my hon. Friend agree that it will not always be plain sailing—there will be difficulties along the way—but the end destination is worth getting to, and people up and down this country in increasing numbers are just saying, “Get on with it”?

Mr Baker: I agree with my hon. Friend that we do need to get on with it, and, yes, the end destination is worth getting to, although, hopefully, there will be no end to this journey. We will journey out into a new life of prosperity and self-government, which will give us the dignity of self-control.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): First, let me draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests concerning Weightron Bilanciai.

I have here a letter sent by the European Commission, which was received by British manufacturing firms, telling them that after Brexit all products certified for use by UK certifiers will no longer be eligible for sale in the EU. Those companies are now rushing to get their entire product range recertified, often at three times the cost, from European certifying authorities. What advice do the Government give to UK manufacturing firms that have products certified in the UK about what they should do in the run-up to Brexit and the need for recertification?

Mr Baker: I expect us to conclude a free trade agreement with the European Union that includes agreements in relation to product conformity. I hope that we will make rapid progress through these negotiations now that we have made sufficient progress and are moving on to the next stage. I very much hope that everyone in this country, including manufacturers, to which the hon. Gentleman refers, will be given an accelerated degree of certainty as we progress through the negotiations.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Is my hon. Friend familiar with the PwC analysis that suggests that the UK could be the fastest growing economy in the G7 between Brexit and 2050?

Mr Baker: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing that out.

Jo Platt (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister will be aware that I have submitted 23 questions to his Department asking what assessments the Government have undertaken—all to ensure that businesses and workers in my area are safeguarded. The Government have repeatedly refused to release even the titles of these assessments, so will the Minister confirm how many impact studies the Government have conducted and for how long he expects Members to have access to these documents before we vote on the final Brexit deal?

Mr Baker: I think that the documents that we put out and discussed at great length continue to be available to colleagues. As I have said, we will lay before both Houses the appropriate economic analysis before the decision is taken.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Mr Speaker, you will recall from this morning that the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) ducked my question on the impact of these assessments on small businesses, so I will try again. Leaked or not, if the Minister is willing to be disparaging about his own civil servants who are producing his own reports, does he also reject the reports from the University of St Andrews that point out that small business will be hit by lower levels of investment and access to finance, lower growth and reduced product development opportunities?

Mr Baker: I will make two points. First, as far as I recall, I have never been disparaging about civil servants with whom I have worked; it is quite the reverse. What I have been disparaging about is method in the economic sciences. That is quite different. Secondly, all the circumstances in this analysis predict growth. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave earlier, pointing out all the flaws in the predictions of the Bank of England. I ask him to start working out how he can play his part in leading this country forward with a spring in its step.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I refer the House to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. In the past week, Mark Carney and Jaguar Land Rover have blamed Brexit on the fall in growth and business respectively. For Jaguar Land Rover, this is resulting in prolonged shutdowns and declining production. This is happening now. Will the Minister accept the reality of what is happening and publish the Government's analysis?

Mr Baker: I accept that Jaguar Land Rover does not sell as many cars as I should like it to. I consider it this Government's duty to enter into trading arrangements with the whole world that facilitate the company's complete success. I look forward to working to do just that with all the strength we can muster.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): If work has been done on the regional impact of different Brexit scenarios, is not it in the national interest for regional devolved bodies and local councils to have this information, so that they can make appropriate plans for the future?

Mr Baker: We will continue our programme of engagements with the devolved Administrations and the English regions. What we will not do is publish or reveal information we consider to be prejudicial to their interests and the national interest or that would harm our negotiations.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): The information in today's Government report directly reflects what industries and businesses on Teesside have been saying for months—that they will suffer if the Government totally abandon the single market and the customs union. Ministers may choose to ignore the reports, but will they please listen to what the industrialists and the businesspeople are saying? The Government need to be

open and honest about the impacts and provide clarity on how these businesses can trade successfully after Brexit.

Mr Baker: The Secretary of State went to the region only last week to make an important speech about the implementation period, precisely because we understand the importance of industries and businesses there. There is no question of our ignoring analysis. We are conducting the analysis to inform our position, as I have tirelessly set out.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): This is about the UK Government doing their job, and they have spectacularly failed to do that. This leaked paper talks about the impact of Brexit on different areas of the UK, despite the Government telling devolved Governments and Administrations that they have no such information. The Minister failed to answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), so when will this information be shared with the devolved Administrations, so that they can make decisions on behalf of the people they represent and govern?

Mr Baker: We will make information available once we are through the negotiation, so that we do not end up putting ourselves in the position of publishing information that is prejudicial to the national interest. I would expect that information to be published—and, in particular, to be made available to both Houses of Parliament—once the negotiations have concluded and before the meaningful vote.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Why do this Conservative Government not trust the voters of Bridgend, many of whom rely on the Ford engine plant for their jobs? It is acknowledged that car manufacturing will be one of the hardest-hit areas. The Minister says that there is going to be growth. In that case, let the people of Bridgend know where the growth is going to be and what better growth could be achieved by staying in the single market. Is he more interested in healing the wounds within the Conservative party than looking after the people of Bridgend?

Mr Baker: I am interested in healing the wounds across the whole country, getting people to unite behind a democratic decision and thus taking it forward. It is precisely because we do trust the voters that we want not only to carry through the referendum result, but to ensure our parliamentary independence, so that the voters can materially affect a Government's policy choices.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): I am concerned about some of the recent answers. Will the Minister confirm what damage will happen to the UK's negotiating position if this analysis is shared with the devolved Governments?

Mr Baker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman can easily find a wide range of literature that will explain how to do a negotiation. But what one does not do when going into a negotiation is to place one's cards face up on the table, and we are not going to do that.

Jo Platt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I will take this point of order now, as I believe it relates to the subject matter that we have been discussing.

Jo Platt: Further to the question that I have just asked, I have tabled 23 written questions to the Department for Exiting the European Union and the Treasury over the past six weeks, asking for the titles of any assessments that the Government had conducted on the impact of our withdrawal from the European Union. However, none of these questions has been adequately answered. What I have received has been vague; my questions have often been ignored; and Ministers have not provided me with the information I requested. Mr Speaker, without any obvious avenue to take, I seek your guidance on how I can secure an answer from Ministers to the questions I have asked in order for me to ascertain the number of assessments the Government have undertaken and their titles.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her intended point of order, although I am not at all sure that I can offer her much satisfaction or comfort. The content of ministerial answers to parliamentary questions is the responsibility of the Minister concerned. It is not, and cannot be, a matter for the Chair. I understand her dissatisfaction with the answers that she has received. I am afraid that it is not uncommon for answers from successive Governments of different complexions to fail to engage—either fully or, in some cases, at all—with the question in the view of the recipient of the answer, or, indeed, to do so only vaguely. However, I advise the hon. Lady to persist and to discuss with the Table Office what other avenues she might pursue.

I must emphasise, on the basis of some little experience in the House, the merits of quantity, persistence and, above all, repetition. Members must—if I may very politely say so—keep at it. I remember one year tabling, I think, a little under 4,000 questions, which somewhat irritated Ministers at the time, although that caused me no concern whatever. I was simply concerned to table the questions that mattered to me. If that caused some inconvenience to other people, it was really beside the point. Democracy costs.

On whether Members will be granted access to analytical studies on the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the EU ahead of any vote on the final deal, I do not know the answer to that question beyond what we have heard from the Minister today, and the Minister has said some things today on which Members can reflect. If the hon. Lady wants to put further questions on this matter to Ministers, it is open to her to do so.

On whether it is in order for Ministers or Departments to show information to journalists before providing it to the House, I would say that although this is not a matter of order, it would certainly represent a discourtesy to

Members, and I would deprecate that. I hope that Ministers will reflect on the matter and consider what information should be provided to the House on this important matter at all stages. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Lady.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Does it relate to the matters we have just been discussing?

Neil Coyle *indicated assent.*

Mr Speaker: Very well, I will take it. The hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) will just have to be patient for a short period.

Neil Coyle: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The ministerial code of practice outlines seven principles of public life, one of which is on openness. It states specifically:

“Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.”

It sounds as though there is certainly a discrepancy between what was said to the Select Committee in December and what we have heard over the past couple of days and some things that the Minister has said today. What course of action is open to a Member who wishes to pursue the matter at stake if the Secretary of State or a Minister has not provided information that should be available to my constituents and businesses who are deeply affected by it?

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I will make a number of points briefly in response. First, the ministerial code to which he refers is certainly a very important document, but compliance or non-compliance with it is not adjudicated on by the Chair; that is a matter for others.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman inquires on what recourse he has if he believes that there is a discrepancy. The short answer is that he can table a question or, indeed, a series of questions on the matter, applying his little grey cells to the formation of such inquiries as he thinks appropriate.

Thirdly, the hon. Gentleman referenced evidence to the Select Committee. He will have heard his right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), the Chair of the Brexit Committee, who asked a question on this matter early in the exchanges. The right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues can pursue the matter if they so wish. They have a track record of doing so on previous occasions and might choose to do so on this occasion. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman.

PIP Back Payments

1.52 pm

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to make a statement on the process and timetable for the personal independence payment back payments.

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton): As a result of our decision not to appeal the recent PIP judicial review judgment, we informed the House via a written statement and in a response to a parliamentary question that we will be carrying out an administrative exercise to identify claimants who may now be eligible for more support from PIP. The Secretary of State took the decision less than three weeks ago. As previously said, we will be working with Mind—experts in the field—and doing things as sympathetically and effectively as possible. While efficiency is important, I cannot stress enough that I want the appropriate scrutiny and complete accuracy to be applied to this exercise, so it will not be rushed.

This exercise will include screening the existing PIP caseload of some 1.6 million people to identify the group who may benefit, but the vast majority of claimants will not be affected. As the Secretary of State said last week, we currently estimate that up to 220,000 people will be affected by the judgment. For the group of people who may be affected, we will undertake a detailed review of their applications and awards. We will write to the individuals affected, and all payments will be back-dated to the effective date in each individual claim. There will be no—I repeat, no—face-to-face reassessments of awards. DWP case managers will be conducting a review of the existing information we hold, with a view to establishing whether claimants are entitled to more. If case managers need more information to make a decision, they will contact the claimant and/or their doctor.

I am sure you will understand, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this is a complex exercise, and we need to undertake testing to ensure that we implement it safely. We therefore do not yet have an estimate of how long it will take. Obviously, we will keep the House updated on our progress in this exercise. Based on preliminary calculations, we estimate that the overall costs of implementing the judgment could be up to £3.7 billion by 2022-23. However, this number is highly likely to change as we work through all the impacted cases.

Marsha De Cordova: I thank Mr Speaker for granting this urgent question.

Following the written statement of 19 January and last week's urgent question, yesterday we discovered in an answer to a written question that the Government will be reconsidering approximately 1.6 million PIP claims—effectively, everyone currently in receipt of PIP. However, no timetable was issued or detail provided for this process. We know that 55% of people with mental health conditions transferring from disability living allowance to PIP receive a lower award or no award at all. As the High Court found, the Government's regulations are highly discriminatory.

I am pleased that the Secretary of State and the Minister's Department have finally seen sense. However, there are a number of questions that the Minister must

answer. By what date will the Department have changed the PIP assessment guide, so that she can implement the judgment? How quickly thereafter will the Department be able to identify affected claimants? Is her Department prioritising the PIP claims it is re-examining? If so, will she publish the prioritisation criteria? By what date will all 1.6 million PIP claims have been reviewed? Will it be weeks; will it be months; or will it be years? Do the 1.6 million claims to be reviewed include those that scored zero points and were not awarded PIP? Will there be an appeals process for the PIP claimants not contacted by the Department who believe that they should receive back payments? Will the Department compensate claimants who have fallen into debt and accrued interest charges? After the equality assessment was published in February 2017, the estimated number to receive the higher rate of PIP went up to 164,000, and it is now 220,000. Will the Minister publish an updated assessment? What assessment has she made of the administrative costs to her Department of undertaking this complex exercise of a considerable scale?

This mess is one of the Government's own making. It is a clear example to this Government of the dangers of seeking to undermine both the independent judiciary and the House of Commons.

Sarah Newton: It is absolutely not true to say that we are trying to undermine the independent judiciary, because we have accepted the findings of the appeal and are now going to painstakingly, carefully and safely implement the findings. It is incredibly important for our democracy that we have an independent judiciary, and we stand by that.

The hon. Lady asked a number of questions. First, for clarification, the information that was provided in response to the written parliamentary question was absolutely the same as that given at this Dispatch Box by the Secretary of State last week and that contained in the written statement.

Moving on to some of the hon. Lady's more detailed questions, she mentioned the updating of the PIP assessment guide. She is absolutely right: that is the starting point to making sure that we properly and thoroughly implement the recommendations of the appeal. I am delighted to say that Paul Farmer of Mind has agreed to work very closely with us to get that right. I have spoken to Paul Gray, who has undertaken the independent reviews of PIP, and he has also offered his help. I recently met a broad range of our PIP stakeholders and invited them to share their expertise.

As I said in my previous response, it is incredibly important to me that we get this right. The exercise will be complex and, to carry it out accurately and safely, we want to ensure that stakeholders and experts are involved. As a result, I cannot set out a timetable at this stage, but I can reassure all hon. Members that we are approaching this with a great deal of vigour and will ensure we do it as soon as possible. We have already started to recruit more people at DWP to help with the PIP review.

We want to discuss the prioritisation of the review of PIP claimants very carefully with our stakeholders to ensure that the process is fair, transparent and open. We will be reviewing people who had zero points in their original claim. We are currently considering the best way to handle an appeals process.

[Sarah Newton]

Of course, I will update the House regularly. The Secretary of State said that she would do that from this very Dispatch Box last week. We have oral questions every six weeks, so there are plenty of opportunities for Members to ask us about the progress we are making in this very important work.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What impact, if any, will this effort have on the processing of new claims?

Sarah Newton: I thank my right hon. Friend for that important question. I want to reassure him that it is very important to me that the progress we have seen in making timely and good decisions on PIP continues. Our customers—our claimants—are very important to us in the DWP, and we want them to have a really good experience. I am determined to ensure that the progress we have made continues and that there are no delays for people applying for PIP.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I find it shameful and depressing that it took a court case to drag this Government back to the edge of decency, and I find the money wasted on legal proceedings abhorrent. However, since they are now at the edge of decency, may I urge the Government to take a few more steps? Will the Secretary of State apologise to the victims of the Government's actions? I appreciate that she is new in her post, but this is important. Will she also apologise to the families of those who have taken their own lives as a result of the Government's benefits policy? Will she confirm that she is now undertaking to restore some semblance of dignity to this policy area by reviewing all PIP cases where benefits have been stopped or reduced, rather than just those involving mental health? Will she undertake to come back to the Chamber in the very near future with a plan to start repairing some of the damage that has been done? One month should be sufficient time to get that rolling.

Sarah Newton: It is with deep regret that I hear the hon. Lady making such appalling and unsubstantiated claims about people committing suicide as a result of this. All of us in this House have a duty to be very mindful of the language and evidence we use to make such assertions. We are talking about some of the most vulnerable people in society, and it is shameful when Members deliberately misuse data.

I am pleased to have this opportunity—[*Interruption.*] Listen, the data to which the hon. Lady is referring is often misquoted, and it comes from the adult psychiatric morbidity survey. The deputy chief medical officer, Professor Gina Radford, has said that the adult psychiatric morbidity survey does not show any causal link between being on benefits and suicidal thoughts or behaviour. The survey findings indicate certain associations, but they do not indicate causality. The hon. Lady might not want to take my word for it, but is she seriously doubting the word of the deputy chief medical officer?

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I am very pleased that the Secretary of State has decided to accept this ruling from the Court and that the Minister has today confirmed that there will be no face-to-face

reassessments—that is absolutely right. I am also greatly encouraged that the Minister will be working with Mind, Paul Gray and other knowledgeable people to rectify the situation. Might she continue to work with them on an ongoing basis to see what other improvements can be made to PIP? The Work and Pensions Committee, of which I am a member, is about to publish its recommendations. I believe that a fundamental overhaul of the PIP process is required, but a number of very small things could be done, such as introducing videoed assessments, that would make a huge difference to how claimants feel about the process.

Sarah Newton: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and for the invaluable work that she and other members of the Work and Pensions Committee do. I look forward to receiving the Committee's recommendations and will give them careful consideration.

I want to reassure my hon. Friend and other hon. Members that I believe in continuous improvement. I am very grateful for the constructive working relationship that I have with many disability rights organisations and charities that support disabled people, and for the time they give to my PIP stakeholder group. We are about to set up panels of claimants of both employment and support allowance and PIP so that we further engage with claimants themselves. Of course, we undertake proper independent customer satisfaction surveys to ensure that we take every opportunity to improve the claimant experience.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): The Minister has told the House that all 1.6 million existing claimants will have their cases reviewed. I am grateful to her for adding that those who had zero points, and therefore did not get PIP, will also be included in the review. Will she confirm that the 180,000 people who used to be on disability living allowance and are no longer receiving benefit will be included? In total, on top of the 1.6 million, how many cases does she expect to review?

Sarah Newton: As all Members will know, people have been going through a managed process of transferring from disability living allowance to PIP. We will be looking at people who have gone through the PIP assessment process. Just over half of people on disability living allowance have gone through the managed process to PIP. There are still people on DLA who are yet to go through the process, but we are taking on board all the findings of the appeal and improving the process to ensure that we make the right decision the first time. That is really important to us and to claimants.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): This is a significant and important announcement. Will the Minister give a clear commitment on continuing to work with stakeholders and charities not only to learn the lessons, but to help them to communicate with all their members so that they can be kept up to date with that work?

Sarah Newton: When my hon. Friend held my position, he did a really good job of engaging with stakeholders, and I am building on that legacy. It is very important that we take on board their concerns and communicate with them frequently so that they can provide reassurance and information to their beneficiaries.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The system is in fundamental need of review. My constituent Martin Wright suffered a terrible life-changing accident at work several years ago. Despite that, he has been reassessed three times in three years and has now had his payments reduced. We will take Martin's case to appeal, and I have to tell the Minister that every single case from my constituency office that we have taken to appeal in the past year has been overturned. Does that not show that this system is broken, inhumane at times, and in urgent need of fundamental change?

Sarah Newton: Of course I do not like to hear of individual cases when things have not worked out as we would like them to. If the right hon. Gentleman would like to meet me to discuss his constituent's case, I would be very happy to do so. I hold meetings twice a month so that Members or their caseworkers can come along and meet my officials to review such cases.

It is worth setting all we are doing in context. We have made 2.9 million—I repeat, 2.9 million—PIP assessments, and 8% of those go to appeal, of which 4% are upheld, so the vast majority of people are getting the benefits to which they are richly entitled. If we look at the claimant work we do—the customer satisfaction surveys—we find that most people are satisfied with the process. Of course, until we have no appeals and 100% satisfaction rates, we will constantly be seeking to improve the situation, but the facts do speak for themselves.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): May I congratulate my hon. Friend on her response to the urgent question and ask her whether she will be kind enough to check my understanding of the figures? I think she said that there are 1.6 million PIP claimants and that she expected just over 200,000 to have their assessments changed—improved. It therefore seems to me that the 1.4 million people who will not see a change in their benefit will have had their expectations raised by this announcement. How will the Minister manage those expectations?

Sarah Newton: The Secretary of State has made it clear at the Dispatch Box that the figure is about 220,000 people. Some of the things that some Members of this place have said in the media are very disappointing, having both scared people and raised false hope.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): May I make one suggestion to the Minister about how she could do the decent and humane thing? She should passport all those affected by the contaminated blood scandal—having contracted HIV and hepatitis C—who were previously in receipt of DLA through to PIP at the higher rate. It should be a blanket passport.

Sarah Newton: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. It is really important that we remember what PIP is. It is a very modern, dynamic benefit, and it treats with parity of esteem physical and mental health and disabilities. No two people are the same and no two people's needs are the same, so it is a person-centred benefit. It is really important that we remember that.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I welcome the Government's decision to accept the Court's judgment and the Minister's careful work to improve

PIP assessments, including by looking at the recording of assessments, which she and I have talked about. Irrespective of whether someone's health condition is mental or physical, does my hon. Friend agree that what matters is that they get the help that they need to meet the extra costs of living and to live the fullest possible lives?

Sarah Newton: I thank my hon. Friend for her contribution. She is absolutely right to focus on parity of esteem—the Government have legislated for that—between people with mental and physical health conditions. That is really important.

Let us just look at the facts about how many people with mental health conditions are being positively supported by PIP. The latest figures from 27 October show that 66% of PIP recipients with mental health conditions get the enhanced daily living component compared with only 22% who receive DLA, the predecessor benefit. Some 31% of PIP recipients with mental health conditions get the enhanced mobility rate compared with just 10% of DLA recipients. It is absolutely the case that hundreds of thousands more people are being helped with PIP than with DLA. It is of course important, however, to do all we can continually to improve the process.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The mental health charity Mind found in its survey last year that 22% of the people it surveyed did not actually appeal against a PIP refusal because of their condition—they did not feel able to do so. I assume from what the Minister is saying that those people will be part of the reassessment, but what advice should Members of Parliament give those individuals now, because some will want to put in new applications? What support will they be given, because some of them have been left in a very difficult position, through no fault of their own, due to their mental illness?

Sarah Newton: We will be working with Mind—I agree that it is an excellent charity—and other organisations, and they will help us to shape this process so that it is conducted in a sympathetic and appropriate way to make sure that we reach all people who are entitled to PIP.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I thank the Minister for her statement and for the way in which the Department is going about this reassessment. Will she assure the House that, as the Department undertakes this major operation, it will still be able to deliver assessments for people moving on to PIP for the first time and that this will not affect their claims in any way?

Sarah Newton: My hon. Friend asks a really good question because, as I have demonstrated with the numbers I have shared with the House, more people are benefiting from PIP than from DLA, its predecessor benefit. I do not want people to miss out on the opportunity that PIP affords them. We are absolutely determined to make sure that there will be no reduction in the quality of service that we provide for new applicants or, indeed, people transferring from DLA to PIP.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Given that the Court's ruling has taken effect, what interim guidance has the Department provided to assessors pending revisions to the assessment guide?

Sarah Newton: We are working through every aspect of undertaking this complex and challenging task. At the heart of everything we will be doing is working very closely with Mind and our other key stakeholders to get this right. The process must be done accurately and it must be done safely.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): May I congratulate the Minister on the tone in which she has conducted these proceedings? It has been absolutely spot-on, and it really does refute some of the more accusatory comments from Opposition Members. Will she set out by how much spending on the main disability benefits has risen since 2010?

Sarah Newton: I very much appreciate my hon. Friend's question. We have a proud track record as Conservatives. In every year since 2010, the amount that we provide to people with health conditions and disabilities has risen, and it will continue to do so in every year of this Parliament. The figure is well in excess of £50 billion each year.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I receive many emails every week, as I am sure we all do, from constituents who are distraught about their PIP application being rejected. The whole process has been cruel beyond belief, and we now know it has all been for naught. Will the Minister reassure my constituents who have faced shocking suffering that they will be considered as part of this review, and what advice should I give them to ensure that that happens?

Sarah Newton: I simply rebut what the hon. Lady says about anybody in the DWP treating people cruelly. I assure her that we want to make sure that people claiming our benefits are treated with respect and dignity, and that the process is fair. Independent evaluations show that the majority of claimants rate their experience as good.

To answer the hon. Lady's question about the advice that she could give her constituents, they will be contacted by DWP if we feel that they are entitled to more money. Nobody is going to be called in for a face-to-face assessment, and nobody is going to have money taken away from them.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): We have all met constituents in our surgeries who have concerns about PIP, so I really welcome today's announcement, which will help people in my constituency. Will the Minister confirm what more her Department will continue to do, in the light of this announcement, to move forward the transformative benefits of getting disabled people back into work, which is one of the greatest levers for improving mental health for disabled people?

Sarah Newton: I thank my hon. Friend for her insight, because she is absolutely right that good work is good for people. A core part of our Work and Health programme is that we do everything we can to test and learn so that we enable more people to play their full part in society, including at work.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Portglenone medical centre in my constituency is one of the largest rural practices in Northern Ireland. It deals not only with

vulnerable people, but with some of the most marginalised in the country, because of their rurality. The practice has written to me to say not only that the system is deeply "flawed", but that it is already

"seeing multiple patients having to appeal inappropriate decisions".

I know that the Minister will not want to hear those words, which distress us all. Given that there is no Executive in Northern Ireland, will the Minister meet me and all party colleagues represented in the House to discuss how Northern Ireland can benefit from the decisions that she takes as a result of today's announcement?

Sarah Newton: Of course I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues. I hold regular sessions in Parliament—teach-ins on PIP and ESA, which any Member of Parliament and their caseworkers may attend, bringing their casework along, so that we can have a really good dialogue. However, if the hon. Gentleman would like to have a specific meeting about the situation in Northern Ireland and what we can do to support him in doing his very important job of representing his constituents, I would be delighted to do so.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): Would it be helpful to create a specific phone number that affected claimants or their advisers could contact to suggest that they think they ought to have a change of decision, rather than requiring them to wait while the Department searches through 1.6 million records to try and find them?

Sarah Newton: I thank my hon. Friend for his question but, no, I think that by far the best thing is to say that we will contact the people affected. I am concerned that if people started doing such a thing, it would be a distraction and could use up the resources that I want to put into ensuring that we get this sorted as soon as possible.

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): When the Government announced the changes to the regulations in 2017, their own assessment was that approximately 164,000 claimants would be directly affected. Will the Minister commit to recommending that priority is given to those people who were directly affected and lost money, and to addressing the problems with some urgency?

Sarah Newton: I am having a conversation about prioritisation with Mind and stakeholders. It is really important that we work with experts and stakeholders to help us to decide the prioritisation. I can absolutely assure the hon. Lady and everyone in the House that this is of the utmost importance and that we are acting at pace to get it sorted as soon as possible.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Supporting the vulnerable and people with disabilities and health conditions should always be the Government's top priority. Will the Minister confirm that personal independence payments are not subject to the benefits cap or means-testing, and that payments will continue to rise with inflation and to be untaxed?

Sarah Newton: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Keeping people safe and taking care of the most vulnerable people in society are the top priorities for this Government, and I know that my hon. Friend does

a huge amount of work in her constituency to support the most vulnerable members of her community. I can absolutely provide that assurance—PIP is a non means-tested benefit that is not subject to the benefits cap. It plays a vital role in enabling disabled people to play as full a part in society as they can, which is something I know that my hon. Friend and I both want.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): It is nothing short of a national disgrace that Ministers persisted with this utterly flawed and unfair system of PIP assessments despite all the warnings. It was only when the High Court ruled that Ministers' changes to PIP were "blatantly discriminatory" against people with mental health conditions and were a breach of their human rights—the opposite of parity of esteem in action—that the Government announced that they would review the 1.6 million cases. Can the Minister assure the House that PIP assessments will take into account the full range of symptoms and factors affecting mental health, especially those symptoms that we cannot see that present differently on different days, including due to bipolar disorder, depression and phobias?

Sarah Newton: I can absolutely assure the hon. Lady that we are utterly committed to making sure that mental health and how it affects people are properly and fairly treated throughout the PIP assessment process, but I do think we should look at the number of people who are now receiving help, and the number of people with mental health problems who are now receiving financial support through PIP who were not under DLA. Some 200,000 people now receive the highest level of support, and more than 100,000 people receive the highest level of mobility support. Clearly PIP is not broken, because it is supporting many more people than DLA did.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): My hon. Friend set out the potential costs of the review. Will she put that in the context of her Department's overall spending to support people with disabilities and health conditions? Will she reaffirm that spending in this area increased in the last Parliament and will continue to go up during this Parliament?

Sarah Newton: Every single year, the funding that we put into supporting people with health conditions and disability has grown, and that sum will continue to grow. At the moment the budget is about £51 billion, and we estimate—it will only be an estimate until we have undertaken careful review, and it is probably a worst-case scenario—that this process will cost £3.7 billion. My hon. Friend is probably much better at calculating percentages than I am.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): By no means an isolated case in my constituency, one of my constituents in Drumnadrochit, despite being clinically assessed with mental health issues, was marked as a fail for a mandatory assessment. That has exacerbated the conditions that she suffers from, and also the pain that she has to endure daily. How will the Minister ensure that my constituent gets the urgent help and review that she needs and deserves?

Sarah Newton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that constituency case and I would be delighted to meet him to review it.

I would sound a word of caution. I have met many people who would be described as having severe mental health problems, who play a really full part in their community and also work. We have put a lot of money into supporting innovative programmes that enable people with mental health problems to manage those conditions, so that they can stay in work. I have met people who have told me that the work we are doing has literally saved their lives. I have met consultants who have told me that they would never have believed that people with such severe mental health conditions could be so well supported to play their full part in society, including work. Each person is unique and each person's needs must be assessed individually.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): As part of this review, will the Government be looking at people who currently have one component of PIP, to see whether they might be entitled to both components, and will they be looking at people on the lower rate of PIP, to see whether they might be entitled to the higher rate?

Sarah Newton: As I say, we will be ensuring that we fully implement the findings of the appeal, and we will be doing that by working very carefully with our stakeholders to make sure that we get this right. We will be reviewing all 1.6 million PIP claimants.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): I thank the Labour party for securing an urgent question on this important issue. We know that the Government's attempt to prevent those with mental health issues receiving the higher mobility rate was, frankly, nothing but a shoddy attempt to save money. That was a disgrace. They then dragged it out through the courts for many, many months and I think that was absolutely disgraceful behaviour. I know that the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work is new in her post, but is she proud of what her Government did over this particular PIP episode?

Sarah Newton: It is disappointing that the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to recognise the contribution of Lord Freud, a fellow Liberal Democrat, who held the ministerial position that developed PIP when he was in the coalition Government; and it is disappointing that he is not celebrating the shared achievement of PIP and how it is enabling many more people to be supported. I do think it is really important that the hon. Gentleman listens carefully to what I have said—that we are going ahead with vigour to implement the full findings of this review.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister has been celebrating the Government's desire to ensure that all PIP claimants live as full a life as possible. Can she confirm that cases, like those in my constituency, where people have had their vehicles taken from them will be reviewed as part of this process, and that mobility vehicles will be returned where appropriate?

Sarah Newton: I thank the hon. Lady for that question, and suggest that she comes to talk to me with those constituency cases so that we can fully understand. As people are migrating across benefits, such as when people are on ESA, we have a really well worked out programme with Motability so that people do not have to lose their cars. Of course, the devil is always in the

[Sarah Newton]

detail, and without the details of her constituency case I cannot properly respond. I invite her to come and discuss it with me.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am a psychologist, and when I look at the PIP criteria it appears to me that they do not seem to lend themselves to a full assessment of mental health issues. It is also a concern that collateral medical information is not routinely sought from applicants. Will the Minister come to the all-party parliamentary group on disability, which I chair, to consider these issues pragmatically and to look at how people are trying to navigate the system, to ensure that the most vulnerable do not fall through the gaps?

Sarah Newton: I can assure the hon. Lady that PIP was co-designed with experts in the field. Where appropriate, medical information is of course used, but it is important to remember that the PIP assessment is a functional assessment; it is about the impact of someone's mental or physical health on them as an individual, and no two people are the same. Of course, medical information is important, but the impact of listening to the individual, their carers and the people who support them is just as important. As for her kind invitation to the APPG, I would be delighted to come along and meet her.

Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab): I welcome the fact that the Department will be working with Mind and that mental health has been mentioned so often today, but I have not heard enough about real, solid and tangible change that will support people with mental health conditions. Will the Minister commit to looking again at the assessment process to ensure that people with mental health conditions are assessed by a mental health clinician in the first instance?

Sarah Newton: The Government are deeply committed to supporting people with mental health issues. By 2020, we will be spending more than £1 billion a year, which includes a wide range of investment in services and in recruiting and training more people. I assure the hon. Lady that the people carrying out the PIP assessments, just like the people carrying out the work capability assessments, receive thorough training. We are always working with stakeholders to see what more we can do to improve the claimant and our customers' experience.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I recognise that the Minister has great compassion in her role, and the manner in which she has spoken today confirms that, but I was very disappointed by her response when Motability vehicles were mentioned. The Minister must take a much more robust direction in this regard. I have constituents who have definitely been refused PIP on

account of their mental health condition and have therefore had a letter sent to them notifying them that the Motability car must be returned by a deadline. My constituents cannot comprehend what is going on. So, we would like a much more robust approach to Motability cars and a stay on their removal until PIP assessments have been properly completed.

Sarah Newton: I thank the hon. Lady for her kind words and her question. I would be delighted to meet her to consider that specific case to see what more I can do to work with Motability to ensure that people who need their cars get to keep them.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): A constituent of mine, a 63-year-old man, was deemed by his doctor to be unfit for work, having suffered from coronary artery disease, and was placed on the higher rate of PIP. He subsequently received a review form, which he duly completed within the timescales and resubmitted. He was then informed by the DWP that the form had not been received, and that as a result he would forfeit his benefits and be liable to pay back everything he had received up until that date. That clearly caused him unacceptable mental anguish, on top of his bad physical condition. It was only after the intervention of my caseworker that that review form was identified, found and his payments were reinstated. What will the Government do to deal with the clear anguish that that has caused my constituent as part of a wider symptomatic issue? Will they reinstate a compensation scheme to ensure that these people are adequately compensated, particularly when they have fallen into severe debt?

Sarah Newton: The hon. Gentleman exemplifies the important role of a Member of Parliament in supporting constituents through their casework. He might like to meet me about that case. It is by reviewing individual cases that we find out how we can make improvements. I reassure all Members that if a decision is overturned and the Department has made a mistake, we back pay people to the date from which they are eligible for the benefit.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): We all want—at least I hope we all want—to make sure that all those in need get what they need to live, not just to exist. To that end, will the Minister confirm that the £3.7 billion that this is expected to cost will be an additional allocation from the Treasury and will not be found from existing DWP budgets?

Sarah Newton: The figure of £3.7 billion is an estimate of what this will cost. As we work through sorting out the problem, we will have a much better idea of the numbers, but I can absolutely assure the hon. Gentleman that we will not make savings in our Department to fund it.

Points of Order

2.36 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Following two similar points of order made last week by my hon. Friends the Members for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) and for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), I am sorry to have to make this point of order but I am beginning to fear that this pattern of failure is not an accident.

Last Friday, the following Members of Parliament came to my constituency: the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke), the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes), and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis). I was notified only of the visit of the Secretary of State, and that was after 8 pm the previous night. I received no notification from the other two hon. Members. What is more, I was not invited to a departmental, non-political event at Teesport in my constituency, whereas the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, who has neither a port nor the River Tees in his constituency, was. I can only presume that it was because he is a Conservative MP. The same situation arose last year with a visit from the Prime Minister and the Minister responsible for the northern powerhouse.

Can you advise me, Madam Deputy Speaker, as to whether this is an appropriate politicisation of a departmental visit and a breach of parliamentary protocol, and may I also seek your clarification on the fact that having a directly elected Mayor in a region does not mean that Ministers can circumvent Members of Parliament when visiting or engaging with constituents in an area? It is deeply disrespectful to the people I represent, who should have their voices heard at events in their backyard. It is also disrespectful to this place to seek to cut out parliamentarians to boost the profile of elected mayors of the same party as those other Members.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her point of order and understand that she has notified the Members concerned of her intention to raise it. There is certainly a strong convention that Ministers should give advance notice to hon. Members if they plan to visit their constituency on official business. Indeed, this requirement is spelled out in the ministerial code. I understand that notice was given by the Secretary of State, as she said, but rather late in the day, and she does not think that that was reasonable. She also indicates that notice was not given that another Minister would be attending, which was perhaps an oversight on the part of the Department.

I can confirm that the convention to give notice applies equally to Back-Bench Members. All Members should give advance notice to other hon. Members if they plan to visit their constituency on official business. It is, quite frankly, in everybody's interest that this convention is upheld.

The hon. Lady asks me whether the fact that a Government Back Bencher was apparently invited to the event when she was not represents an inappropriate

politicisation of a departmental visit and a breach of parliamentary protocol. It is not a matter of parliamentary protocol, but a matter for Government. However it strikes me as unsatisfactory, and rather curious, not to invite all local Members to an event that is intended to be non-political, as the hon. Lady indicates this one was.

The hon. Lady also asked me to clarify that the existence of a directly elected Mayor does not mean that Ministers can circumvent local Members of Parliament when visiting constituencies. I can certainly confirm that the existence of an elected Mayor has no bearing on the matter and the usual exemptions apply. I am sure that the point of order has been heard on the Treasury Bench, and I hope that it will be conveyed to the Secretary of State and the Minister.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was not aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) would raise that point of order, so I had not mentioned to the right hon. Member, to whom I will not refer by name, that I would respond to it. However, I found out last night that a Member of the Cabinet visited my constituency this week and certainly did not inform me or my office of that visit.

My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, which I might ask you to address again, Madam Deputy Speaker. What she described is apparently becoming something of a habit—a commonplace occurrence. Can you advise whether there are mechanisms, through the Chair or other procedures of the House, whereby we might monitor where these affronts are taking place, so that we can quantify them and see whether a pattern is indeed emerging that needs to be quashed?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will have heard what I said about the fact that it is in everybody's interest that the existing conventions are upheld, and I reiterate that. On being notified of other possible breaches of the convention, it is up to individual Departments to make sure that they follow the conventions. If individual Members wish to draw to the attention of either the Speaker or Government Ministers that they are not sticking to the convention, it is absolutely up to Members to do that.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm whether the same convention applies to members of the shadow Front-Bench team? I have had experiences that relate to this in exactly the same way, when I have not received due notification.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The convention applies to all Members. It is important that shadow Ministers inform Members when visiting their constituents, so the answer is yes.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think I saw the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) down on my Island during Cowes Week last year, sitting in a VIP tent, so I presume that he was there in part because of his role as a Member of Parliament. He is a

[Mr Bob Seely]

member of the Labour party, so it would be good if all sides respected the rules. Because we are terribly laid-back and chilled on the Island, I did not mention it, but I suppose that I could have made a drama out of it if I had wished.

Madam Deputy Speaker: We have to be sensible about this. Obviously, people will pay private visits to other people's constituencies. That is quite different from official visits or visits by Ministers.

Kew Gardens (Leases)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

2.43 pm

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide that the Secretary of State's powers in relation to the management of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, include the power to grant a lease in respect of land for a period of up to 150 years.

Kew Gardens is a priceless asset, not only to those of us who are lucky to live in west London or even to the UK, but to the whole world. I feel immensely fortunate that my constituency covers Kew, but my interest in, and support for, the gardens goes well beyond my role as the local MP.

Many Members will know the beauty of Kew. It is a UNESCO world heritage site that attracts nearly 2 million visitors every year, including 100,000 schoolchildren, and is an oasis of calm and beauty in our frantic and busy city. I am also honoured to represent the great Sir David Attenborough as one of my constituents—I might even say, my children excluded, that he is my favourite constituent—and he described Kew as “the premier botanical gardens in the world”.

Tourists flock from all over the world to see it.

Kew has the world's largest collection of living plants, but it also has one of the world's largest botanical library collections. Last November, I was taken round Kew's herbarium, where more than 7 million plant specimens are kept, including 350,000 type specimens—the original specimens on which new species descriptions are based. The plan is to digitise that entire collection and make it available to anyone in the world who wishes to access it.

Kew's real value derives from much more than being an attraction, or even a stunning garden: it has been a pioneer in plant science and research for well over 250 years. Kew is at the cutting edge of research to identify, for example, ways in which plants can help to combat cancer, diabetes, antimicrobial resistance and much more besides. It is worth pointing out that a quarter of all prescription drugs come directly from plants.

Kew is also leading the way on climate change adaptation of crops. Fifty per cent. of the calories consumed by our species come from just three big grasses—wheat, maize and rice—so the in-built vulnerability of the global food system is self-evident. The work being done at Kew to breed resilience into essential commodities is critically important. Kew truly is a national treasure.

Hon. Members may wonder why the management and finances of Kew Gardens are a matter for this House. Kew is Crown land and as such, is governed by the Crown Lands Act 1702. It is managed by the Secretary of State and a board of trustees, and it is partially funded by the Government through the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Four years ago, I led a debate in Westminster Hall along with the now shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), when it became clear that the Government's proposed cuts to Kew's funding were threatening its core scientific work. I was absolutely delighted that we won that argument. The right hon. Gentleman is not here now, but I pay tribute to and thank him for his help in delivering that change.

Since then, Kew has gone from strength to strength. The Bill that I am proposing would help to build on that success and ensure Kew's future for many more years to come. This straightforward and simple Bill would have a very big impact on Kew Gardens. It is backed by Kew Gardens and its trustees, and the Bill's previous incarnation—it was brought to the House during the last Parliament by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger)—was also backed by Members from across the House. It is also supported by the three councillors who represent Kew ward.

Simply, this is what the Bill would do. The 1702 Act prevents the sale of Crown land and limits the length of leases granted from Crown land to a maximum of 31 years. The Bill would simply allow the Secretary of State to grant leases of up to 150 years, in line with Crown Estate land. In practice, 31-year restrictions on leases are stifling, and Kew Gardens has struggled to find commercial interest. A 31-year limit is clearly not attractive to those who would seek to lease the buildings, but a 150-year lease clearly would be.

I stress that the Bill—this change—would not involve selling assets, nor would it be about renting out Kew Gardens. The sale of Crown land is forbidden already by law, and any leasing of land would be on non-core land and property, and not on the gardens. The Secretary of State, who has the power to grant a lease, can do so only with the consent of Kew's trustees, who are duty-bound not to approve anything that would affect the gardens' core purpose. The Bill would do absolutely nothing to undermine that. Kew's UNESCO world heritage status adds further protection.

It is difficult to give a precise figure for the financial benefits that accrue from 150-year leases, but Kew Gardens estimates that the revenue generated could amount to around £40 million, with the majority coming in the first decade. There would also be the added benefit of lower maintenance costs by transferring the liability for land and property that had been leased. That extra income would be significant and transformative for Kew Gardens. As Members will know from visiting it, much of the Kew estate is in need of improvement and conservation.

The phenomenal scientific research I have described can be continued only if there is sufficient funding. This simple Bill would help Kew become more financially self-sufficient. It is backed by Kew Gardens, Kew's councillors and numerous London MPs—many more than I could pack into the Bill. I am sorry I could not include the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) in the list I will be reeling off shortly, but she has expressed her support as well, along with other MPs. The Bill is entirely uncontroversial, and I hope it will receive the House's support today.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Zac Goldsmith, Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger, Richard Benyon, Ruth Cadbury, Theresa Villiers, Dr Matthew Offord, Robert Neill, Bob Blackman, Paul Scully, Mr Iain Duncan Smith, Chris Philp and Andy Slaughter present the Bill.

Zac Goldsmith accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 2 February, and to be printed (Bill 158).

High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill

[Relevant document: Tenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee, High Speed 2 Annual Report and Accounts, HC 454.]

Second Reading

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I inform the House that the amendment has been selected.

2.52 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is four years since my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin), stood at this Dispatch Box to seek powers for a new railway line between London and the north, the first new major railway line north of London for 120 years. At that time, it was simply a concept—an important one but one that seemed a long way off. We have come a long way since. In February 2017, Parliament granted powers to construct phase 1 of the scheme, from London to the west midlands, and works on part of this route have now begun. This project is now a developing reality. We came a step closer to an operating railway when we announced the shortlist of companies that will bid for the west coast partnership and design, launch and operate the early passenger services on HS2.

This vital new rail capacity project, under construction from London to Birmingham, is only the first part of the project. We need to deliver capacity to our northern cities and bring our country closer together. I am pleased to stand here today, therefore, to start the next phase of this vital project. Phase 2a extends HS2 from the west midlands to Crewe. The first stage of the new line, which will take the midlands engine through to the northern powerhouse, connecting the two together, will accelerate construction of the first section of phase 2 by six years and bring us a step closer to delivering a complete brand-new high-speed line all the way to Manchester. That is the importance of today's debate. It is this link that will take the railway line towards Manchester—finally to one of our great cities and industrial centres of the north-west.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): As the Secretary of State will be aware, the statement of funding policy that accompanied the last comprehensive spending review awarded to Wales a 0% Barnett consequential rating for HS2, whereas Scotland and Northern Ireland both had 100%. Unless he can assure the House that Wales will get a 100% rating in the next CSR, my colleagues and I will have no option but to vote against the Bill this evening.

Chris Grayling: If the House does not support the Bill, the Crewe hub and the links to north Wales that it will provide will be simply an illusion, so the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues would be doing down Wales, which would be surprising—though, of course, it is typically Conservative Members who are the real champions of Wales. We will continue to ensure we provide the right connections to Wales.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way so early in his speech, and I ask him to forgive me as I may not be able to be here for its entirety because I have other duties outside the Chamber, but I hope to return. He says he is very proud of this new railway the Government are building, but can he explain why he is building a railway with old technology? Back in 2015, the Japanese beat all their records with a Maglev train, whereas we appear to be building something from the last century, not something for the future.

Chris Grayling: It is interesting. I have travelled on the Maglev line in development in Japan. It is a project that has a role to play in the Japanese transport system, but, having studied it at first hand, I do not believe it is the right project for this country, and nor do I believe it could deliver the level of capacity that HS2 will. HS2, of course, is a capacity project that brings with it speed, not the other way around, and that is what our transport system needs more than anything else. It is crucial, too, to the development of the north of England, which has a population of more than 15 million and over 1 million businesses, and which has exports worth upwards of £50 billion. The north of England makes a huge contribution to the success and prosperity of this country, but it needs strong and effective new transport links, and this project will be an important part of that, which is why it is so important to the whole UK.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: The Secretary of State says this is now about capacity, but please can he not change history? When this was first proposed, including the route through my constituency, it was all about speed; otherwise it would not have been allowed to travel on a route that will cause so much environmental damage.

Chris Grayling: My right hon. Friend will know that I have been consistent all the way through in talking about this as a capacity project. I know that she and I are on different sides of the argument, but, from the time I was shadow Transport Secretary a decade ago, I have always talked about this improvement in terms of capacity, and I will continue to do so, because that is the most important part of it. We can debate the rights and wrongs, but I believe it is a capacity project—the speed is a bonus. I do not believe in building something with old technology—we should have a state-of-the-art railway—but the big difference this will make will be to capacity.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Bill, but I note that the Minister referred to connecting the west midlands to HS2. What about the northern powerhouse and Liverpool's connection to the new high-speed line?

Chris Grayling: I did mention the northern powerhouse. In terms of Liverpool, which, as the hon. Lady knows, is a city I have great affection for, as we move beyond the Bill and develop northern powerhouse rail and integrate what needs to be done in the north with the north-south routes and HS2, I believe that all the great cities of the north—Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle, York, Hull—will benefit, as indeed will places further north, such as Carlisle and Scotland. I will come back to Scotland in a moment.

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): If that is the case and Ministers are concerned for the north, why has electrification between cities in the north been cancelled?

Chris Grayling: As I have said many times in the House, we are delivering a process of modernisation on the midland main line that will transform journey times and deliver much improved rolling stock and brand-new trains much sooner. Our proposed model will deliver the improvements people want in the early 2020s, which is sooner than any other project would have done.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way; he is being very generous so early in his speech. I agree with him: it is about capacity. We cannot have an effective, modern society unless we have capacity, and we have to have good infrastructure, which means connectivity. Would he therefore consider advancing the Government's excellent plans for HS2 by bringing on the other piece of the Y to Leeds? I believe that people throughout the whole of the east midlands support HS2, and we want it as soon as possible, please, especially at Toton in Broxtowe.

Chris Grayling: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. Toton is going to be a fantastic centre in the east midlands for commercial development—transport and residential—whose benefits will ripple out across the area and have a hugely positive effect on the whole of the east midlands. I understand her point. We are working as fast as we can to bring before the House the powers we need for the east midlands and Yorkshire leg. I want to get it right—there are sensitivities on the route, as she will know—and I have travelled much of the route myself and looked at the issues as and when they arrive. We will do everything we can to minimise the impact on residents—I understand that such major projects have a negative effect on some people—but I assure her that we will bring the measure for the rest of the route before the House as soon as we can.

I have talked a bit about the north. Let me now talk about Scotland, because I want it to benefit from HS2 on the day it opens. When the full Y network opens in 2033, HS2 trains will run seamlessly on to the west and east coast main lines from the network that is then built. My Department and Transport Scotland are working closely with Network Rail in looking at options that will go beyond HS2. We want to identify options for strong business cases that can improve journey times, capacity, resilience and reliability. Our ultimate ambition is for three-hour rail journeys between London and Scotland's central belt—a further strengthening of the Union that we all hold so dear. That, I think, is the point: HS2 will be a transformative project for the entire United Kingdom, including the parts that it does not serve directly. The benefits in terms of job creation, business opportunity and technological development will be enormous for the whole country.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): I strongly support the Bill, and agree with my right hon. Friend's comments about capacity in our rail network and the positive impact that HS2 will have on our northern economy. Can he tell us a little more about the impact on job creation in the north and elsewhere outside London?

Chris Grayling: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work that he has done on this project. He has been a very distinguished Transport Minister. He has not only made a major contribution to its development, but has been immensely sensitive in dealing with residents. He should take great credit for that.

The point about jobs is crucial. Our industrial strategy sets out a vision of a Britain that is confident and competitive, a global trading nation that is in charge of its own destiny, and HS2 can play a big part in that. Last year we announced which train builders were vying for the £2.75 billion to deliver Britain's state-of-the-art high-speed trains. That investment alone will create many opportunities in this country.

I have said previously that during the procurement process, as we pick the organisations that will build these trains, it must be clear that they will have to leave a substantial skills and technology footprint in this country. We will not countenance trains being built in another part of the world, put on a ship and delivered to the UK, with no benefit at all to the UK itself. This project will have a lasting impact. Indeed, the whole construction of this railway will create jobs, careers, technologies and expertise that will last a new generation of engineers for a lifetime. That is another reason why it is so crucial.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Siemens in my constituency has been shortlisted to provide the signalling for HS2, and Chippenham hopes to benefit from the fact that 70% of the new jobs will be outside London. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this project has the potential to benefit the south-west as well?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is right, and I am delighted that Siemens has been shortlisted for that work. I want as much of the work as possible to be done in the United Kingdom, so that we can develop that skills footprint, developing those young apprentices and developing the engineering skills that we need for the future. That must happen throughout the United Kingdom: south-west, north-east, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, south-east, midlands, the north and East Anglia. I want to see jobs and opportunities for British businesses, and businesses based in Britain.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have Crossrail as a model? It is being finalised this year, and will be operating next year. That project was built on the use of suppliers in the United Kingdom, and the spread of its supply network throughout the UK. Although it was a London project, many parts of the country have benefited from it. What HS2 is doing is the natural follow-through from what Crossrail did.

Chris Grayling: Absolutely. Crossrail may be a project for transport in London, but it is also a project for engineering and industry in the United Kingdom as a whole. It brings benefits to all parts of the United Kingdom, and HS2 will bring benefits to all parts of the United Kingdom. Northern Powerhouse Rail, when it is built, will bring benefits in southern as well as northern England, and, indeed, throughout the United Kingdom. The more that we invest in these projects, the more economic benefits we will deliver across the UK.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): May I ask my right hon. Friend not to take his eye off a distant ball, which is the future of the west coast main line after HS2 is constructed? More than 44 stations on that line will not be served by HS2. It is very important for passenger traffic to be maintained on the west coast main line, and to ensure that it is not used just for freight traffic.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is right. As one who has sailed through his local station many times, on Pendolino trains, I believe that we can and should do better at such intermediate stations. We should provide better commuter links to Birmingham and to towns such as Northampton and Milton Keynes, and we should provide better links within the Trent valley—from Nuneaton to Lichfield, and up to Stafford. We will be able to do all those things to a greater degree in the future. Yes, there will be a freight benefit. We all want a freight benefit, because we want fewer trucks on the M6 and the M1, but the fact is that we can do both. Creating that extra capacity on HS2, or via HS2, is, to my mind, its great benefit. It will of course be a fast, state-of-the-art railway, but first and foremost it is about giving our transport system the capacity that it will need to enable us to grow in the future.

I know that there are people for whom this project is bad news. There are people who are affected by the routes, many of whom are in my hon. Friend's constituency. I genuinely wish it were possible—I am sure that Members in all parts of the House wish it were possible—to deliver infrastructure improvements like this without human consequences, but it is not possible. What we must do is try to treat those people decently.

HS2 has not always got it right, and we will not always get it right, but I give the House today an assurance that I have given it before: when an injustice is being done, we will do everything we can as a ministerial team to sort it out. Members need only come to us and say, "This is unfair", and we will look at it. Indeed, I have already done so in places up and down the route, and I will continue to do so, particularly in respect of this part of the project. A number of constituencies on the route from the Trent valley up to Crewe are affected. As the two Ministers responsible, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), and I will happily talk to colleagues during this process. There will, of course, be many opportunities for them to make representations about the impacts to the Committee, assuming that the Bill is given a Second Reading today.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I appreciate what my right hon. Friend is saying today. We have also had many conversations about the ways in which some of my constituents are affected. That has been going on since 2013. We may get there in the end with compensation and agreements, but the problem is that it takes so long—far too long for some people. Some of my constituents are very elderly, and some are quite ill. Can my right hon. Friend reassure me, and my constituents, that we can improve the process?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. There are processes that we must rightly follow to protect public money, but there are exceptions that always step outside what is planned. Part of the job

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that we have, as Ministers, is to ensure that when those exceptions arise—and I know that there are two in my hon. Friend's constituency, which she and I have been talking about—we must resolve them before we reach a point at which those people are suffering in their lives. We are a little bit of time away from the phase 2 Bill and the process involved in phase 2b. As I have said to my hon. Friend and to other Members, we will try to sort out those exceptions so that people do not suffer inappropriately. I will continue to work with my hon. Friend to try to resolve the situation.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): While the Secretary of State is handing out assurances, may I, on behalf of the people of Stoke-on-Trent, ask for an assurance that the existing direct and frequent services from Stoke-on-Trent to London, Birmingham and Manchester on the west coast main line will in no way be diminished or reduced as a result of HS2 taking up some of the capacity through the classic compatible services?

Chris Grayling: As the hon. Gentleman will know—and I have given this assurance to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton)—I am acutely aware of the issues in Stoke-on-Trent. I want to ensure not only that the high-quality service that it deserves is protected, but that HS2 trains run through it, which is also what it deserves. I have given that clear commitment to the people of Stoke. I want them to have a first-rate rail service, and HS2 will make it possible for them to have an even better rail service than they have at present.

Let me say more about the affected communities. Last week we announced an additional £5 million for communities and businesses that are disrupted by the construction of phase 2a, which can be spent on public projects, community centres and so forth. That will add to what we have already committed in terms of the mitigation and compensation in place, and we will carry on looking at ways in which we can minimise the impact on local people and the areas affected.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am totally in favour of the project, as train travel is environmentally friendly because it gets people out of their cars and on to trains. But will the Secretary of State reflect on the potential loss of ancient woodland because of HS2, and whether consideration might be given, where possible, to using tunnels so that we keep these wonderful, magnificent trees? We have only 2% of them left in the whole country. Will we consider doing this? If not, and if there is unavoidable loss, could we consider 30% amelioration, as recommended by Natural England, rather than the figures bandied about today?

Chris Grayling: I am very well aware of the potential impact on ancient woodland. We have already made changes to the design of the project to try to mitigate that impact, and there is an absolute commitment to look to plant afresh and to develop environmental measures to compensate for any loss of woodland. Also, there are some exciting potential projects on the route that can enhance the natural environment at the same time as we are having to make changes elsewhere.

I assure my hon. Friend that we are very sensitive to the issue she mentions, and we will do our best to make this project in as environmentally friendly a way as possible. We cannot build something new like this across the whole country without having some impacts, but we can try to mitigate them and put money into positive alternatives. That is what we are committed to, and that is what we will do.

This is a step on the way towards creating a 21st century new rail network: phase 1 to Birmingham, phase 2a to Crewe, eventually phase 2b to Manchester and Leeds, and then across the top with Northern Powerhouse Rail, and then, through that, the connections to the north-east, which the shadow Secretary of State will hold dear, to Scotland—colleagues on both sides of the House representing Scottish constituencies are keen to see that connection put in place—and into north Wales through the Crewe hub that we are working on at the moment.

This project will provide the capacity our transport system needs in the 21st century. It will deliver better journey times and, particularly importantly, much better connections between our northern cities—Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds—where there are poor connections at the moment; this will make a huge difference to them. But above all this is about making sure this country has a 21st century transport system. I hope the project commands support across the House. I know that some Members have issues both about the principles of the project and constituency impacts. To those with constituency impacts I simply say again that we will do our best to minimise those and to work as closely as possible with them to make sure that people who are affected are treated as decently as possible.

This Bill is enormously important to this House, to the future of this country, to our nation, to strengthening our Union, and to delivering economic growth across the whole country, and I very much hope that this House will give it its support today.

3.13 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I am pleased to stand here today to support a project which was instigated by the last Labour Government. National infrastructure investment is too important to be left to the vagaries of the election cycle. It is to the Government's credit that they have continued to back both HS2 and Crossrail since 2010. Labour has always maintained that HS2 must be built as a network rather than a standalone piece of infrastructure. It is this approach which will deliver the maximum economic benefits. Both main parties can agree that HS2 is about more than transport. High-speed rail is about unlocking the economic potential of the north and the midlands. It will drive a rebalancing of the UK economy by improving connectivity between the north and south.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman talked about HS2 being an integrated network, but one of my criticisms of HS2 is that it is far from integrated. The original plan was for it to go direct down through the channel tunnel and into continental Europe and I can give other examples—I will probably will do so in my speech—but this is far from integrated: it is stand-alone, meets at Crewe and does not actually go into Birmingham New Street. Why is this?

Andy McDonald: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and it is key that HS2 integrates. We have just heard words from the Secretary of State about the need to ensure that it does connect with our northern cities, but we are yet to see those plans unfurl. We have heard about Transport for the North's aspirations, but this cannot be a stand-alone project; it is essential that it links into our great towns and cities throughout the nation.

Linking the great cities of the north and midlands is equally important and will bring much-needed economic benefits to those regions. Labour supports the nearly 30,000 jobs the construction of HS2 will deliver and the huge uplift it will give to apprenticeships and training, particularly outside London. It is not too early to consider how we will retain and develop those skills in the future in other infrastructure projects both at home and abroad. I would be interested in any comments the Secretary of State has on this point, particularly with regard to Northern Powerhouse Rail and Crossrail.

I also make a plea that we must not repeat the catastrophe of the Carillion experience with apprentices. Apprentices in my constituency are being left flapping in the wind, not knowing whether they are going to be paid. We hear today that their employment will come to an end at the end of this month. It is a disgrace that £6.5 million of public money has gone into an apprenticeship programme that leaves our apprentices short of their qualifications and without employment. The Government should intervene now to guarantee that those apprentices will receive that assurance from this Government today.

Chris Grayling: I am grateful to the shadow Secretary of State for giving way, and he and I share that view. I can assure him that, on the HS2 project, the apprentices who were employed by Carillion are migrating to work for Kier and those employed by Carillion have been moved on to the project with the other two partners. So not only should there be no hiatus in the work taking place, but, more importantly, the people on those projects are moving to different companies involved in them. There are obviously some very difficult circumstances elsewhere as a consequence of the collapse of Carillion, but I have been very keen with this project to make sure we have the seamless transition we contracted for last summer, and I am delighted to see the apprentices move on in a way that enables them to carry on with their apprenticeships.

Andy McDonald: I am grateful for that reassurance in the context of these projects, but I am particularly concerned about these apprentices in the here-and-now; there are 100 out of the 1,400 who have been prejudiced in my community and we want to see this Government respond by coming to the table and making sure those young people have a future. It is difficult enough to encourage people into these industries in the first instance without leaving them high and dry, as has happened on this occasion.

I welcome the commitments contained in HS2's environmental principles. It is imperative that environmental standards and air quality are at the forefront of the project. Many of the arguments about why we need HS2, and why we do not, have been well rehearsed in this House over many years: passenger rail numbers

have doubled since 1995; rail freight has grown by two thirds over the same period; and the existing network has been operating at full capacity for years. No amount of timetable-tinkering can change this; I trust that all Members are in agreement about that.

Although it is important to maintain our vital road network, there is an urgent need to secure modal shift across transport: we cannot build our way out of congestion on our roads, and we must be watchful about the sustainability of domestic air travel. In addition, we face the prospect of the population of Britain reaching 70 million by the end of the decade. So the question is: how are we going to move our people around our nation? It is no exaggeration to say that the very economic and social livelihood of this country is at stake. Our capacity to move people by rail and bus is therefore crucial.

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Given those circumstances and the pressure on the system, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the last thing this country needs is the nationalisation of our rail system?

Andy McDonald: I am grateful to the former Minister for his intervention. If he will be patient for just a few more minutes, I will happily address that point in full detail.

I was proud that Labour forced the Government to introduce much tougher reporting on HS2 spending through an amendment to the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Act 2013 before the previous Bill came to the House in 2014. I pay tribute to my predecessors, my hon. Friends the Members for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) and for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), in that respect. We also amended that Bill to improve integration with existing transport networks and the specific reporting of the jobs and skills created by the project.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I do not want to digress too much, but this is all relevant. We only need an incident on the west coast main line for everything to stop, and that certainly needs to be looked at. Also, I have constituents who will not qualify for compensation as a result of this project.

Andy McDonald: One of the main points about this project is that it will allow us to build resilience into the network. That is not an either/or; this is not simply about building HS2. My hon. Friend is right say that we need to build greater resilience into our network. On the point about compensation arrangements, it has been noted on both sides of the House that we need to ensure that proper compensation is paid. These are really sensitive issues, and people should not be left wondering whether compensation arrangements will come forward. My hon. Friend is right about that as well.

I am keen to hear the Minister's views on striking the right balance between HS2 services and freight on the parts of the network where high-speed trains will run on conventional tracks. HS2, the Department for Transport and Network Rail need to resolve the important concerns that are being expressed by freight operators. Elsewhere, there are significant questions to be answered about how the new high-speed railway will integrate with the

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existing rail network. During the Second Reading debate in 2014, the previous Secretary of State for Transport boasted that

“upgrading Britain’s rail infrastructure is a key part of this Government’s long-term economic plan”.—[*Official Report*, 28 April 2014; Vol. 579, c. 567.]

He also said:

“we will be electrifying more than 800 miles of line throughout the country”.—[*Official Report*, 28 April 2014; Vol. 579, c. 561.]

It is quite clear that the Government have broken those promises over the past four years. They made commitments on rail ahead of the 2015 general election, only to break them days later. The reality is that the last two Transport Secretaries have cut upgrades to rail infrastructure and cancelled the electrification of rail lines. Of course, HS2 is but one piece of the jigsaw. I am therefore concerned that if the other pieces are not right, the whole thing will not fit together properly.

The current Secretary of State for Transport came to the House in November to announce his strategic vision for rail. The problem was that his plan was neither strategic nor visionary. It was a smokescreen to cover up a blatant multibillion pound bail-out of the east coast main line franchise. It is clear to passengers and taxpayers that this Government are defending a broken franchising system. Under this Government, protecting private companies comes before the public interest. Giving Carillion a contract for HS2 last July while that company was imploding was an appalling decision, and the Minister’s legal justifications for that decision were risible. His bail-out of Stagecoach-Virgin on the east coast was yet another serious misjudgement in which his dogma won out over pragmatism and common sense.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I think the hon. Gentleman has wandered into the wrong debate. We are talking about HS2, not about Carillion. Can we stick to the subject, please?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. That is a matter for me, actually.

Andy McDonald: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman will find out what HS2 has to do with the east coast and west coast main lines if he can be patient just a little longer.

The Secretary of State’s promised east coast partnership between track and train by 2020 is unworkable and undeliverable. No one in the rail industry believes that it is actually going to happen. Another of his pet projects is the west coast project—perhaps the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) will want to pay attention to this—which is going to be awarded later this year. The winner of that contract will run services on the west coast main line and oversee the introduction of HS2 services. The Government have a track record of accepting bids from the private sector that are either too high or too low, and the Department for Transport has proved unable to manage such projects. Given that the Secretary of State has been found wanting so often, what makes him think that his west coast partnership will work any better than his east coast partnership?

High Speed 2 will be the jewel in the crown of Britain’s rail network when it begins operations in the next decade. It will be a shining example of Britain’s capability and talent, and it will encapsulate our technological and engineering prowess. However, I can tell the Secretary of State that there will be uproar across the land, should this piece of the family silver be handed over to Virgin Trains, Stagecoach or others of their ilk. I can tell the House today that there will be no gift of HS2 to Richard Branson or Brian Souter under the next Labour Government. HS2 will be built with public money and it will stay in public ownership.

3.26 pm

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on bringing forward this Bill. I also congratulate all those people in the Department for Transport and in HS2 who are working to finalise these proposals. It is a pleasure to follow the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), although I think he slightly spoiled his speech by going off piste and talking about electrification. We will take no lessons from Labour on electrification, given its record between 1997 and 2010, during which time it electrified 10 miles of railway. I would like to say that that was a snail’s pace, but I think that a snail would have travelled further in 13 years than Labour did with its electrification.

Andy McDonald: The former Secretary of State seems to have totally forgotten the 67 miles of HS1 that were electrified then. Those 67 plus 10 miles add up to a lot more than this Government have ever electrified.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I think that HS1 was operating before Labour came into government.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab) *rose*—

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I will make some progress.

It is right to say that we have seen a renaissance on our railways since privatisation, and that renaissance continued under the last Labour Government. Indeed, in their 13 years in government, they did not seek to change the franchising at all. They felt that that was the best way to operate the railways. We had the private sector and the public sector involved, and we saw our railways improve tremendously. If we get to a situation—I hope we do not—of the railways going back to a fully nationalised body, what happened in the ’60s and ’70s will happen again. Rail was always at the back of the queue for investment. Hospitals and education took priority; the railways were left without any priority whatsoever. There is no doubt in my mind that privatisation has led to the rejuvenation of the rail industry, and so much so that passenger numbers have increased from something like 700 million to some 1.6 billion, which speaks for itself.

I am pleased that the Bill has been introduced. David Higgins recommended that we should try to bring the investment and benefits of HS2 more quickly to the north. Should this Bill get its Second Reading today, it is worth remembering that we will see high-speed services to Crewe by 2027. In infrastructure terms, and given the

necessary planning, that is not that far away, so I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on bringing the Bill forward.

I know that the Government are well aware of this, but I want to talk about the importance of continuing to develop skills in engineering. The National College for High Speed Rail, which is based in Doncaster and Birmingham, will enable people to get the engineering skills that are so important. All that follows on from the remarkable Crossrail project, which will start to open to the public later this year. We saw such skills in the television programmes covering its development across London.

This important Bill is about capacity. There are those who say that the Department for Transport and its Secretaries of State have changed their mind and that they talk about capacity more than speed, but the very first HS2 document that was published referred to capacity, too. The west coast main line is one of the busiest lines in Europe, if not the busiest. We need a massive injection of infrastructure, and this Bill is the answer

Mr Jim Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman is quite right that we want to speed things up and that the west coast main line is very busy, but to go back to the point that I made to my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), what are we going to do about the bottlenecks? There were cancellations yesterday, and there only has to be one incident for everything to stop. That affects freight as much as anything else.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I completely accept that, but the simple fact is that that is one of the reasons for the new line. We want resilience, alternatives and something that is much more modern. We have spent a fortune on upgrading the west coast main line from Birmingham up to Manchester, although I understand that we did not carry out any upgrade south of Rugby. The upgrade was essential, and if the then Government had been a bit more forward thinking, they could have built a new high-speed line then rather than doing an upgrade.

An upgrade has been undertaken, however, and it is very visible near Lichfield, for example, where the bridge has been changed as the line goes through Armitage to accommodate four tracks instead of two. There has been a huge amount of investment in the west coast main line, and that answers the question asked by the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) with regard to the need for greater capacity, more alternatives, and the modern engineering that we will get from HS2. I cannot remember the exact year, but there was a time a few years ago when every single railway line in the country had problems because of weather disruption apart from HS1, which was built to a high specification with modern engineering.

Anna Soubry: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way and for his excellent speech. Does he agree that capacity and speed are not mutually exclusive? Not only will we get a world-class new line to deliver new capacity, but we are improving our existing lines. With that in mind, will he confirm how much is about to be invested in the new signalling programme in Derby, a place he knows very well?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: More than £200 million is being spent in Derby on re-signalling and a new platform to ensure that London trains no longer have to cross the lines going to other parts of the country, thereby enabling those trains to go straight through on the main line. That is the kind of investment that is already happening in our railways up and down the country. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been successful in securing extra investment not just for HS2, but for all the other railway lines that so badly need the kind of upgrades that we will see in Derby. We will no doubt complain when the station has to be closed for a period over the summer, but such a thing is inevitable if we are to achieve such overall benefit. We saw something similar just a few years ago at Nottingham station.

Mr Seely: My right hon. Friend speaks eloquently about busyness, capacity and bottlenecks on the west coast main line. Does he have anything to say about the south and south-west rail routes into London? Those routes are busier and have more capacity problems than many northern routes, but they will be unaffected by HS2 and might have their funding skewed because of it.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I do not think that that is the case, but there is nobody better than the Secretary of State to answer those points. The tremendous investment at Reading station has improved the whole network to the south-west. The investment at that station alone was in the region of £800 million or £900 million. Extra flyovers were put in to improve capacity down to the south-west.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): The improvement in overall capacity is brilliant for the people we represent in towns such as Redditch that are outside the major conurbations. The improved capacity will create an opportunity for more services from Redditch to Birmingham for commuting and jobs.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is right that HS2 will free up a lot of capacity that is currently used not for local services, but for services from London to Birmingham and on to Manchester. That is one of the answers provided by HS2.

Gareth Snell *rose*—

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I give way for the last time.

Gareth Snell: I thank the former Secretary of State for giving way. What does he think will be the extra capacity for commuter services around Staffordshire? There are no additional plans for commuter services under the proposals. There is no additional infrastructure, other than the HS2 route itself, so there is no immediate benefit.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman wants us to have a detailed timetable for 10 years' time, but extra capacity will become available for new services. I believe that Stoke-on-Trent will benefit greatly from HS2 because of its link, its service and its closeness to Crewe. We then have to improve some of the road structures in and around Stoke-on-Trent so that people can receive the benefit. That will represent far more

[Sir Patrick McLoughlin]

investment than Stoke-on-Trent saw in any year under a Labour Government, so we can be rightly proud of what we are doing.

I fully accept—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State addressed this—that any big infrastructure project will always lead to certain people being inconvenienced. If there were a way of ensuring that people would not be inconvenienced, we would all move for it. I am afraid that inconvenience is inevitable. It is worth remembering that the first time a railway was proposed between Birmingham and London, the idea was defeated in the House of Commons because everybody said that the canals were perfectly adequate. That was part of the problem with the west coast main line, and it is why certain diversions were built into it.

The line from the west midlands to Crewe will be of significant benefit to transport infrastructure in this country, the United Kingdom as a whole and our cities outside London by creating connectivity not just between London and our cities, but between those cities. The line is important, and it is moving in the right direction. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on this proposal.

3.38 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): As we look at the current Secretary of State for Transport and his predecessors around him on the Conservative Benches, it is like old times.

The Scottish National party supports the development of the HS2 project, which we have discussed on a number of occasions. Even the Secretary of State would concede that the Scottish Government have worked very positively to advance the project, but that does not mean we are not critical of quite a number of aspects of it.

For HS2 to establish the benefits that have been suggested, it needs to be expanded much further and much faster—and, as we have heard, not just to Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, but to Scotland, and with some haste. If this project was to be truly inclusive—the Secretary of State talked about the parity in this family of nations that we are supposed to have—there is a strong argument that HS2 should have started in Scotland and made its way down through the north of England, arriving eventually at London. The economic benefits would have been dramatic had that choice been made, and it was indeed a choice. Had the Government been serious about including the nations of the UK, that could have been done. While we are talking about being serious about being inclusive, let me say that if journey times are to be improved, perhaps one thing that would help to reduce delays dramatically, as this is one key reason for delays in Scotland, would be the devolution of Network Rail. Even at this late stage, the UK Government can make a difference if they choose to do so by committing to extending the service to Scotland without hesitation.

Mr Goodwill: The hon. Gentleman talks about starting the project in Scotland, but that is not a sensible idea at all. The whole point about capacity is that every morning we have 5,000 people standing on trains into London

Euston and 3,000 standing into Birmingham New Street. If the project started in Scotland, that would just mean more Scottish people standing on trains as they tried to get into the capital.

Drew Hendry: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have enjoyed debating with him and that I respect him greatly, but we always end up highlighting the fact that none of that was even looked at. No research was conducted on it. Unless he is willing to intervene to tell me about research that was conducted—[*Interruption.*] That tells us everything about how—

Mr Goodwill *rose*—

Drew Hendry: The hon. Gentleman wants to get in—please do.

Mr Goodwill: It is patently obvious from all the traffic flows and the passenger numbers that as one gets closer to the capital, the congestion due to passenger numbers builds. As I say, we have 5,000 people standing every morning into London Euston, and there would be more Scottish people standing if we did not start in London and work our way up. It is, however, great that the time saving is going to benefit people in Scotland from day one.

Drew Hendry: I wish to remain consensual throughout this debate, but I must point out, once again, that all the hon. Gentleman has done is to confirm that no work had been done to look at the economic benefits for Scotland and the north of England.

The Secretary of State's argument that Scotland will already be on the HS2 line is weak. I agree that journey times to and from Scotland will be faster, by virtue of the increased speed in the south of England, but given that Scotland and its people are paying for a proportion of the new infrastructure, it would be wholly wrong for the new infrastructure not to come also to Scotland.

We support HS2 because of the benefits it could and should bring, but those benefits could be greater if the missing investment were made. Clarity is also required, and with some urgency, on the Barnett consequential. The question of the Barnett consequential has been raised again in this House today, yet the Government have failed time and again to answer it, despite being asked to do so on many occasions.

Although this will not be well received by Conservative Members, I agree with the shadow Minister that questions need to be asked about the governance and management of HS2, given the absolute shambles the Government have got themselves into with the contract—and, of course, the honours system as well. We are talking about £2 billion-worth of contracts awarded after profit warnings were issued. Why did the Government want Carillion to continue after a 70% drop in the share price and the issuing of profit warnings? Ministers need to give answers about that, and they should take the opportunity to provide them now. There are clear examples to show that the Government knew there were more than just superficial problems at Carillion, yet the contracts just continued. Why was that?

I said earlier that the Scottish Government are committed to working in a continuing partnership to reduce rail journey times—we are working closely with the Minister

to hit the three-hour target—but the Government still have not recommended a route to Scotland. Is it going to be on the east or the west coast? They must now start to work on the best options for Scotland, consider the benefits and different business cases, albeit belatedly, and deliver so that people in Scotland get some value.

If the Government share the ambition of delivering sub-three-hour journey times, we will support that, but the project should not be about only times or the physical build. As the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin) said, we must consider skills and opportunities. He mentioned Crewe and other locations, but unfortunately he did not mention Scotland. This project can and should build skills, expertise, capability and jobs for a generation, but it also needs to be inclusive in terms of its opportunities and STEM objectives. We should be alive to the chance to provide opportunities to young people, especially girls and young women, who do not get mentioned enough in this context. Scotland has successfully delivered major infrastructure projects, with the Borders rail link a prime example among many others, and is already positioning itself as a hub for rail expertise. The Heriot-Watt high-speed rail centre of excellence has put Scotland firmly on the map as a place for specialist high-speed rail knowledge.

Let us expand the network to Scotland with some hitherto unseen urgency. Let us hear the answers on the Barnett consequentials. Let us have guarantees from the Government on the future governance of the project. If a true partnership is desired, as the Secretary of State has stated, let us see some ambition on the preferred route, a commitment to utilising the expertise and talent of the men and women of Scotland, and investment in our centre of excellence.

3.46 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “That” to the end of the Question and add:

“this House, while recognising the increasing need for additional north-south rail line capacity to relieve congestion on the West Coast Main Line south of the Midlands and to improve connectivity between major cities and with London, declines to give the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill a Second Reading because (1) there are better ways to address any rail capacity issues north of the Midlands, (2) the line set out in the Bill is routed through unspoiled countryside unnecessarily damaging the environment including wildlife habitats, ancient woodlands and waterways, fails to connect via HS2 Phase 1 with HS1, the Channel Tunnel and the European continent, fails to connect directly through HS2 Phase 1 with potential airport hubs for London and the south-east of England, and fails to connect directly to existing major mainline stations and the existing rail network, (3) the Bill provides inadequate compensation to those blighted by the route and those whose property is subject to compulsory purchase orders, (4) the Bill fails to provide for sufficient public transport to disperse HS2 passengers disembarking at London Euston, and (5) the Bill does not implement a more environmentally sympathetic, better integrated, and more cost-effective route, such as the route originally proposed by Arup which would have used existing transport corridors minimising environmental damage and reducing costs by around £10 billion, and which would have connected directly with HS1 and the continent, London Heathrow Airport, Birmingham International Airport, and major conurbations.”

First, may I say how much I welcomed the Secretary of State’s answer to my question about Lichfield? Many of my constituents will be reassured by what he said.

If he is half as good as his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin), he will be very good indeed.

Having said that, I am afraid that I must now destroy the cosy consensus that seems to be prevailing on the Opposition and Government Benches. I shall explain why. When HS2 was first envisioned, people spoke about people in Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham being able to get on to a high-speed train and end up in Paris, Lille and, indeed, even Berlin, with Deutsche Bahn. But that is not to be. We heard from the shadow Minister that HS2 is an integrated railway, but it is not. It is nothing like that at all.

Let me present a hypothetical situation. One of my constituents from Lichfield, together with his wife, two children and all their luggage, decide that they are going to give up travelling by dirty aircraft and will instead travel by clean rail down to Paris. What is the reality going to be? Imagine my constituent, the wife, the children and the baggage. They get on the train at Lichfield City station—although this applies to stations up and down the country—and end up at Birmingham New Street. Then what happens? They have to leave Birmingham New Street with the two children and all their bags and walk for 22 minutes. At this point, I wish to praise Councillor Tony Thompson in Lichfield who has done the walk and timed it. Without the children and all the bags, it took him 22 minutes to tramp across Birmingham to get to Curzon Street to the proposed HS2 station.

After all that, can the family then relax, knowing that they will end up in Paris? No, they cannot—because, instead, the train arrives at Euston. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, when he was Mayor of London, pointed out, quite rightly, that Euston has a capacity problem—not with trains arriving, because Euston is to be extended, but with getting people away from Euston, because there is not the public transport. Even if there was sufficient capacity, the family then have to tramp, yet again, either down a series of escalators and back up again, with children and with all the bags, or they walk across London to get to St Pancras.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab) *rose*—

Michael Fabricant: I will give way in a moment.

Finally, when they get to St Pancras, they can settle on the train. So much for a quick and easy journey from the north-east down to Paris.

Ian Mearns *rose*—

Michael Fabricant: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman who has been trying to get in.

Ian Mearns: For 15 months, I was a member of the HS2 Bill Committee, and I did that very walk myself. I did not get a friendly councillor to do it for me; I did it myself. It took about six to eight minutes top whack. I know that, in future, the route will be better than it was then because an awful lot of construction work was going on around New Street at the time. It was six to eight minutes top whack.

Michael Fabricant: But the hon. Gentleman is thin, lithe and athletic. I am talking about a harried husband, a wife, squabbling children and loads of luggage. That is what I am talking about.

Chris Grayling: May I take my hon. Friend slightly closer to home, not perhaps in his own constituency, but alongside? Those people who seek to commute from Rugby, Coventry, Birmingham International and intermediate stations into Birmingham find that their daily journey is delayed by the fact that this line, which is two-track only and which can only be two-track, has express trains, local trains, intermediate trains to Northampton and even some freight trains on it. It is chaotic and jammed all the time. HS2 takes off the express trains and gives those people a better commute into Birmingham. Is that not something that the west midlands should champion?

Michael Fabricant: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. I do not think that there is any argument about the capacity problem. It was he, or perhaps it was my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales, who said that the west coast main line is operating at 100% capacity and that it is the busiest line in Europe. In fact, it is a triumph in that people have moved on to those trains in their millions since the time when a Labour Government were in power, and certainly since the time of nationalisation—and we all remember those curling sandwiches. Of course there are advantages, too, but it could have been done in a much better way. It is not a connected service. What do we have now? The genesis of it all was Lord Adonis who, in 2007, came up with the idea of the route. I can tell Members that he was astonished when the Conservative Government accepted that route. Again, let me say very clearly that I am arguing not against HS2 itself, but against the way in which it is being executed. That is what I am criticising. Lord Adonis wanted an ultra-high-speed line. As a consequence, he got rulers on maps, drew straight lines, crashing through countryside, which had previously not been damaged, destroying ancient woodlands, and generally messing up the entire area.

Anna Soubry: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. I do not agree with the overall drift of where his speech is leading us to, but he makes a very good point, which is about the importance of connectivity. There is no point in spending billions of pounds on a brilliant new service unless the connectivity is there. Does he agree that, when we look at other projects, we know that the ones that work—wherever they are in the world—are ones where a person can get off one line, and move swiftly and easily, in comfort, to another line, or another piece of transport.

Michael Fabricant: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. And that, really, is my main criticism of HS2—that it is not integrated. We cannot get on in Birmingham and end up in France and it does not connect with HS1. The sadness is that Arup originally came up with a proposal that would have done just that. The original Arup proposal would have been more on the surface, using existing transport corridors, so it would have been £10 billion to £12 billion cheaper. At the same time, it would have been less environmentally damaging, and that would have made sense. Under Arup's plan,

we would have been able to get on a train at Birmingham New Street and, as a consequence, end up in France. But no—because we were at that point obsessed with running at ultra-high speed, we decided that we would do this project with straight lines going through virgin countryside.

Thank goodness that there will now be kinks and loops—thanks, in part, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales—so that HS2 does not go smashing through the middle of Lichfield cathedral or, indeed, so that it does not damage Tatton. I remember that my former right hon. Friend, George Osborne, managed to get a few kinks in the line as well. But do you know what the irony is, Madam Deputy Speaker? The irony is that, because of all the kinks and loops, HS2 trains cannot now travel at ultra-high speed. Quite frankly, with the benefit of hindsight, we could have had a more connected train service that was less environmentally damaging and £12 billion cheaper than the present one. At the same time, it could have been something that people would cherish in years to come. Yes, they may cherish the route from Coventry to Birmingham, but I think that young people wanting to travel seamlessly to the continent by train will be sorely disappointed.

Now, I mentioned how phase 2a would affect Lichfield. By the way, Lichfield has had a double whammy because we were affected by phase 1 and are now being affected by phase 2a. Phase 2a will cause the loss or damage of 18 ancient woodlands—just on that short route—and the loss of 27 veteran trees between Lichfield and Crewe.

Anna Soubry: Twenty-seven?

Michael Fabricant: Twenty-seven, yes. Do not knock that, though. We are talking about ancient trees and woodlands, which cannot be repeated. We cannot dig them up and then replant them because—hey!—they are not ancient anymore. The definition of an ancient woodland is that it has to be 400 years old with a soil structure that can only be generated when it is 400 years old. As the Secretary of State said, all large infrastructure projects will cause damage, and of course I accept that. But if we had gone with the original Arup route, which Lord Adonis thought would be far too slow—it would only run at high speed, not ultra-high speed—we would not have had so much damage.

I am very pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Sir Robert Syms) in the Chamber. He ought to be a right hon. Member because he chaired the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill Select Committee for phase 1. I praise all the Members who served on that Committee, because at least I can offer my constituents the hope that, if the Committee that will be set up if this Bill goes through Parliament is half as good as his Committee, there will be improvements. If people petition and petition well, there will be changes to the route.

Finally, I re-emphasise the point I made earlier in a question to the Secretary of State. It is important that we do not lose sight of the west coast main line and continued passenger services. I believe that 44 railway stations on the west coast main line will not be directly affected or served by HS2. We still need our Virgin trains and our slower trains including the excellent service that is now being provided by London Northwestern

Railway, which succeeded London Midland, which, incidentally, started off badly but improved a lot during its franchise period.

There will come a time when the Pendolinos will become unusable because they have reached their age limit. It is hugely important that the Department for Transport begins to start thinking about a replacement for that high-speed service, because Lichfield commuters do not just commute into Birmingham, Stafford and places like that—they are commuting down to London daily. One very senior guy at the BBC said to me, “Michael, I don’t have to send my kids to a private school”—this is the BBC for you, but we know about their salaries—“because the schools are so good in Lichfield, and I can afford to live in a large house with lots of land around me, which of course I could never do in London.” That is thanks to the Pendolino service.

Rachel Maclean: With regard to broadcasters and where they could be located for their jobs, does my hon. Friend not think that HS2 is a great argument for Channel 4 to be relocated to the west midlands, because the Channel 4 executives could commute from London, or wherever they like to live? They could be based in Lichfield and make their programmes there.

Michael Fabricant: They could be based in Lichfield, yes, or in Birmingham. I hope that Channel 4 will indeed move out of London. I know that this is completely out of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I am now putting in our bid for the west midlands on that.

I have explained why I cannot support this Bill. I will not press my amendment to a vote, but if, as I expect, there is going to be a Division on the substantive motion, I am afraid that I will have to vote against the Government on this occasion.

Anna Soubry: Shame!

Michael Fabricant: It is a shame, as my right hon. Friend says. I very rarely vote against my own Government, because we are so successful in what we do, but there is this blindness about the design of HS2—and it has permeated across to the Labour Front Bench as well. I could not believe it when the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) said that it is an integrated railway line, when it very clearly is not. I will vote against this Bill, and I hope that other colleagues in the House will join me.

4.3 pm

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant). I am not sure if my speech will be quite as colourful, I must say.

The significance of this Bill for my constituents cannot be overstated. Crewe is a proud railway town. In fact, it is believed that Crewe was named after the railway station, rather than the other way around. The current station was completed in 1837 and has been recognised as one of the most historically significant railway stations in the world. Crewe was chosen after the nearby town of Winsford rejected an earlier proposal, as had landowners in Nantwich, which is also in my constituency. Nowadays, there are 23 trains passing through the station every hour, with additional, less frequent, services. The railway

has shaped our history, our heritage and our culture in my constituency. It still plays a part in our local industry at Crewe Works, which has been owned by Bombardier since 2001. At its height, Crewe Works employed more than 20,000 people, but that dropped to fewer than 1,000 just over a decade ago. That gives a feel of just how much my constituency has changed.

Many of my constituents see HS2 as an opportunity for Crewe to regenerate economically and reconnect with its identity as a key player in the country’s national transport strategy. Today, I will set out the reasons why I support the Bill and the case for HS2—a project that was, indeed, proposed by a Labour Government. In doing so, I hasten to add that my support for the project is not unconditional.

One reason why HS2 has had support in my constituency is that it is not simply another project designed for the benefit of the south-east, but would benefit regions across the country. However, there are concerns in Crewe and Nantwich that as the project increasingly comes under budgetary strain, the Treasury might lack the appetite for the level of spending needed to deliver the greatest return on investment.

I am particularly concerned by comments made previously by the Secretary of State for Transport that decisions regarding the future of my constituency will be subject to affordability. We cannot afford not to get this right. As such, I ask the Secretary of State to clarify today when we will hear the outcome of the Crewe hub consultation and the Government’s plans.

If all that HS2 achieves is a fast track between London, Birmingham and Manchester, there is a very real possibility that it will reduce my constituency to little more than a bedsit on a commuter belt, where the next generation are priced out of living in the towns that they grew up in.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): I apologise that I could not be here for the beginning of the debate. I fully support my hon. Friend on the need for a proper, integrated hub at Crewe, not least because that makes the spur that was proposed through Warrington absolutely redundant. A proper hub would enable many more towns in the north-west to benefit from HS2.

Laura Smith: I agree, and I will come on to connectivity shortly.

Such short-sightedness would be a huge strategic miscalculation and a missed opportunity to future-proof towns such as those in my constituency from the troubling economic trends that we face. This cannot be about helping to expand the cities at the expense of squeezing out growth in the communities that I represent.

Limiting the service to two stops per hour at Crewe is simply a nonsensical proposal that will not only hold back my constituency for generations but will have consequences for areas beyond the north of Crewe and north Wales. For Government to overlook the clear business case for seven stops per hour at Crewe, or to act as a barrier to the strong local and regional ambitions, would be unforgivable.

Regional inequality is a major threat to the UK economy. Despite talk of a northern powerhouse, we are being presented with further evidence that the north-south divide remains as deep as it has ever been. Many living

[*Laura Smith*]

in left-behind towns look to the past with nostalgia and to the future with cynicism—and who can blame them? Their communities have suffered all the worst consequences of aggressive globalisation, and for very little reward. In Crewe and Nantwich, there are almost 4,000 children living in poverty, and wages are below the UK average. In fact, 28% of workers are paid less than the living wage, which is worse than the average for the north-west. Young people struggle to see a future filled with opportunities, and work no longer provides an escape route from poverty for struggling families.

In many ways, it is getting worse. A report this month by IPPR North suggests that the attainment gap between the north and the rest of England has widened to 5% at NVQ4 level, setting the north up to be the worst affected by an adult skills crisis. Another report this month by the Centre for Cities predicts that the rise of robots will deepen the economic divide if current trends continue, with almost a third of jobs in the north and the midlands vulnerable to automation and globalisation. Another report by IPPR North this month indicates that planned transport investment in London is two and a half times higher per person than in the north of England.

Many northern towns and cities are still struggling to recover from the industrial decline of the 1970s and 1980s, and this north-south divide threatens to hold back our national productivity. Some businesses choose to pay almost four times as much per square foot for their premises in London and the south because of poor connectivity in the north. Decades of inaction by successive Governments have left the north at the mercy of the markets.

There is no greater example of the need for Government intervention and strategic economic planning than the unsustainable situation we find ourselves in. The market has failed to provide any answers for the north, and HS2 provides one way in which the Government can begin to address this problem as part of a wider strategy. If delivered properly, this project will place my constituency at the heart of the UK's most vibrant economic area, providing a successful and sustainable future for the next generation. Britain's future in the world is surely as a knowledge-based economy, excelling in areas such as high-tech manufacturing. Such an economy will require a national transport strategy that prioritises high levels of connectivity. This requires increasing capacity and reliability, not just decreasing journey times.

Crewe is already a gateway station for the north-west, with regional and long-distance connections to the wider north-west, the east midlands and Wales. The phase 2a link will help to provide much-needed additional capacity for freight and will improve reliability for commuter services. It should be welcomed that the Government have brought forward the opening of the phase 2a link to 2027 as that will provide benefits to the north-west and beyond. Making the most out of connecting HS2, classic rail and the motorway network at Crewe could create 120,000 jobs across seven major local authority areas. Work undertaken by the Constellation Partnership indicates that 20,000 jobs would be created at the Crewe hub campus alone, with 17,000 additional jobs in the wider area.

My vision for HS2 is not as an end in itself, benefiting only businesses and commuters, but as a catalyst for the radical rebalancing of our economy, redistributing wealth

from London to places such as Crewe and Nantwich and the rest of the UK. I must stress that this is not about asking London to lose out to the north; it is simply about achieving sustainability for London while allowing the north to achieve its full potential, which will benefit our entire country.

I want everybody in my constituency to feel the benefits of HS2, even if they never ride a train in their lives. Rail lines from Crewe reach out across to the smaller towns of Cheshire, to Warrington and the Wirral, to Manchester and Liverpool, to Lancashire, Shrewsbury, Derby and Stoke, and even to Scotland and Wales. A proper regional hub at Crewe, with a new northern junction to allow for maximum onward connectivity, will provide unrivalled opportunities for the whole of Cheshire, north Staffordshire and beyond. It is imperative that Crewe has direct high-speed services to key destinations, including London, Old Oak Common, Birmingham, Manchester airport, Manchester Piccadilly, Preston, Liverpool, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

As such, I support not only this Bill, but expanding the scope of the current HS2 programme to enable the interventions needed to deliver the services I have described. Although the services that run on our high-speed network will not be determined by statute, our legislative framework will determine what we are capable of achieving. It is vital that this Bill is supported today, and that future Bills do not limit our options. A proper regional hub could take advantage of existing connectivity and extend the benefits of HS2 to millions of people in the north, including those in our often forgotten towns beyond the major cities.

4.14 pm

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith). May I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) to her new role and wish her all the best? It is very good to see her on the Front Bench.

I welcome the Government's very considerable investment in our rail system—it is very good to see—and I support their ambitious railway agenda. There are lots of good things happening in our railway system. However, I find it hard to believe that the £52 billion being spent on HS2 could not have been better spent more broadly across the system.

I am not opposing or voting against the Bill, because I think there is little point: HS2 is going to happen. However, I think it would have been significantly better for our economy to have prioritised HS3, which is a good idea and clearly important for the north of this country, and then, if HS2 was to be built, to have started in the north and worked south, rather than the other way around.

What seems to be clear is that HS2 is extraordinarily expensive. There are poor returns, and by the Government's own admission, a 1:2.3 ratio of return is extremely poor. HS2 harms the environment. It seems to be a bit of a muddle. Once we had straight lines and we were going superfast. Then we had bends and we could not go superfast. Then the stations did not quite integrate, and there does seem to be a problem with that integration up and down the network, which other Members have rightly spoken about.

However, my main concern is the cost to the other parts of the rail network. Again, Members have spoken eloquently about the need for greater capacity. HS2 does nothing for capacity for southern rail or for south-west rail. The south-west rail network is crying out for investment. We need rail flyovers at Woking and at Basingstoke to get more services on that line. We need to update the signalling system between Waterloo and Woking, and eventually elsewhere on the line, to improve speeds and services. We need infrastructure on the Portsmouth line, to increase capacity. Getting from London to Portsmouth, you travel at an average speed of around 45 miles an hour, and the idea that we are spending billions building a rail network to go superfast up north when we are still travelling at branch-line speeds on mainline routes in the south of England is very galling to very many constituents in constituencies across southern England.

We need also, probably, to double the track between Southampton and Basingstoke. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State talked about a bright new future for the railways. We do not see that on southern, and we do not see it on south-west rail main lines. If I remember correctly, my right hon. Friend, whose agenda I very strongly support and for whom I have a high regard personally, has assured me that south-west rail projects are not affected by the HS2 project. So can he—or can she—put on record a confirmation that HS2 has not delayed, or has not affected the funding and supply of, south-west rail mainline improvements, or of Crossrail 2, which will benefit the users of south-west rail, if they use Clapham?

Michelle Donelan: I agree, and I want to see benefits to connectivity in my constituency, including a new station in Corsham. But will my hon. Friend accept that HS2 does benefit the UK as a whole, in the form of jobs, as I said, or because we all have a wealth of SMEs in our constituencies whose supply chains and customers are based throughout the UK, and they can only benefit from this extra connectivity?

Mr Seely: In principle, my hon. Friend makes a very good point and I thank her for her intervention. The problem is this. I return to the profit ratio—or the cost-benefit ratio. If any of us were to go to a Minister or Government Department and say, “This is a fantastic project and it has a ratio of 1:2.3,”—which are the Government’s own figures for HS2—we would get laughed at. To get a project off the ground, according to Green Book assessments, a ratio of 1:5 upwards is needed, and preferably 1:7. So 1:2.3 is a very poor return for Government money by the Government’s own figures. Anything that helps, within reason, expenditure and our economy is to be welcomed, but by the Government’s own figures this cost-benefit is dubious. I thank my hon. Friend for the intervention.

If HS2 will cause no delay to south-west rail projects, will my right hon. Friend commit to prioritising the necessary work on the south-west rail route that could speed up journey times between London and south coast destinations such as Portsmouth, Southampton, Bournemouth and, yes, the Isle of Wight—my constituency? I know that my right hon. Friend is a user of south-west rail and feels the pain of the half a million people who travel in to Waterloo every day. Will he—or will she—

consider setting Network Rail and the new franchise a speed target of a 60-minute service to Southampton and Portsmouth? You can get two trains an hour down the main line to Southampton. They take about one hour 17 at the moment. If we are interested in high-speed rail, can we set a new target of getting people to Southampton and Portsmouth within the hour?

In addition, I will write to my right hon. Friend tomorrow in connection with the Island. He has been kind enough to sound positive about the needs of my constituents for better public transport, especially since we get precious little infrastructure money. In my letter, I will ask about the programme of reopening branch lines and investing in the Island line. Earlier this month, Isle of Wight Council voted to support a feasibility study on extending the branch line in possibly two directions and, working with our wonderful heritage line, the Havenstreet steam railway, to get people into Ryde, which would be very important.

My letter will cover support for investment, support for a feasibility study, and, dependent on the results of that study, support for the branch line and capital work on Ryde Pier Head to ensure that the railway line there stays feasible, continues and has a future. I am supportive of my right hon. Friend on his agenda, which is excellent, but will you assure me, considering that you are spending £52 billion on one line, that the Department will not tell me that you cannot afford a feasibility study?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the Minister, he must say the Minister, not you. I apologise for interrupting him, but this is becoming a widespread habit of Members all around the House and it must not go on. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is the person who is hearing this, and I am sure that other people will now be rather more careful. He is not a consistent offender; he is normally very proper in his behaviour.

Mr Seely: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do apologise; I had noticed that I had written a few yous, and I scrubbed them out and put hes and shes. If my notes still contained a few yous, I apologise. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not here, I was trying to work out whether I should be using he or she, or whether we have reached a post-gender age for Ministers as well as for the rest of us.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman and the House. The word “Minister” is very useful, because it covers just about everything and anyone, no matter which gender they might be on that particular day.

Mr Seely: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. On that point, I will wind up.

I am very supportive of the Minister’s agenda, whichever one we are talking about, but given that we are spending a great deal of money, will the Minister assure me that the Department will not be telling me that a feasibility study is not possible because of cost? Will the Minister assure me that if a feasibility study recommends extension of our lines, that will be supported, given that the costs involved, £10 million to £30 million, are margins of error in Government accounting in the Department of Transport? Will the Minister assure me that there will

[Mr Seely]

be support for infrastructure projects both for the South Western Railway network and the Island line, notwithstanding the considerable amounts of money that are been spent elsewhere?

4.23 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): What a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely). If he will forgive me, I might disagree with him on one point. In my view—the figures are overwhelming—the investment in infrastructure in London and the south-east, although it perhaps does not extend entirely down to his patch, is around nine or 10 times as much as that in my area in the north-west and the north of England. Plenty of people will look at the HS2 expenditure and say it is about time that the north-west of England got some expenditure.

In principle, I am very much in favour of HS2—and HS3, HS4 and HS5. Infrastructure spending is good for the economy; it generates growth, it drives growth and connectivity, and it is a good thing for the whole country. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith), however, I share the concern that what we might get is, to coin a railway phrase, the wrong type of HS2, on the basis that all we will have is a fast line linking London, Birmingham and Manchester, and no benefits will accrue to the surrounding areas. In terms of growth in this country, the cities are already overheating, whereas towns and counties—

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con) *rose*—

Christian Matheson: I give way to my good friend.

Kevin Hollinrake: Does the hon. Gentleman therefore welcome the £300 million that has been set aside to connect HS2 with HS3—also known as Northern Powerhouse Rail—which will stretch from the west coast of the north to the east coast?

Christian Matheson: I will welcome it when it is built and when we actually have something going. HS3, or Northern Powerhouse Rail, is a slogan rather than a railway, and I look forward to its being a railway rather than a slogan. There is a real danger that the benefits that accrue will not do so for the whole country. This is a national project and the benefits that derive from it should be national, too.

In particular, I want to discuss the Crewe hub, which I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State refer to several times. We get lots of positive, warm words—if that praise is not too derogatory—about the importance that Ministers at the Department for Transport attach to the Crewe hub. However, time and again, after two years of pressing, we still have had no firm details about what format it will take or how it will integrate into the rest of the network.

I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), the shadow Secretary of State, talking about the need for HS2 to be integrated into the rest of the network. The hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) might have misunderstood, but that was very much my understanding, and that is exactly where the Crewe hub would come in. With the

greatest respect to my good friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith), Crewe does not have a large enough population to justify an HS2 station, but the lines and connectivity radiating from it as a central hub in that part of the north-west and the north midlands would provide the services and the weight of gravity to make the Crewe hub essential to HS2.

Michael Fabricant: What the hon. Gentleman says about Crewe is absolutely right, but does he understand my disappointment that there will be two separate stations in Birmingham and two separate stations in London, instead of it being integrated there as well? While the north is important, so are the midlands and the south.

Christian Matheson: I do understand the hon. Gentleman's disappointment. Actually, I share some of it, and if he bears with me I will come on to that in a moment.

The lines that would radiate from Crewe would include the existing west coast main line, which my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) talked about, so Warrington, Wigan and south Lancashire would benefit, as would my constituency and hopefully, the north Wales line. Again, I say to Ministers that for the real benefits to accrue, the Chester and north Wales line would need to be electrified; I have not given up on that, even if they have.

The Crewe hub would mesh nicely with the Growth Track 360 proposals that leaders in Cheshire West and Chester and across the border in north Wales have put together to really try to mesh our railway offerings. I know that Ministers have seen those. My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State was extremely helpful when I talked to him about my concerns. He took them to HS2 Ltd, which was asked about the benefits that somebody from Chester might gain. This is where I come back to the hon. Member for Lichfield. Apparently, under the current HS2 proposals, those benefits would include HS2 freeing up capacity on the west coast main line, so that more trains would be able to go through, between Chester and Lichfield, on that line. He talked about the potential, over time, for the west coast main line to wither on the vine, and I share that concern. Those of us who are not in London, Birmingham or Manchester may not get the full benefits, because we will be asked to take the benefits of the west coast main line instead. Much as those are benefits, that is not the high-speed line on offer.

I detect a certain disconnect—I ask Ministers to look carefully at this—between HS2 Ltd and its proposals and the plans from Network Rail and the Department for Transport for the development of the railways. HS2 Ltd has been tasked with building the HS2 line and some amorphous idea of a Crewe hub, but we are still not sure what or exactly where it is in Crewe or of the layout of Crewe station. The plans do not fit in with the broader sub-regional plans for the growth of the railways. All HS2 Ltd seems concerned with is the delivery of the new high-speed line. I urge Ministers to look carefully at ensuring that the proposals for HS2 and others, such as Growth Track 360, mesh together in the connected way that my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State talked about; otherwise we will not accrue the full benefits.

I welcome the Minister to her place, and I make this plea to her: I ask that she think carefully about how the Crewe hub can be given a reality that benefits not just the big cities but north Shropshire, south Lancashire, all of Cheshire, all the railway lines radiating from Crewe, and particularly—as far as I am concerned—the Chester and north Wales line. It has to mesh together. At some point, we have to stop kicking this particular can down the road and come out with firm and deliverable proposals for a Crewe hub that will share the benefits of HS2 that will not otherwise accrue.

4.30 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and to contribute to this debate. I too welcome the new Minister to her place. I am sure we will be having many conversations over the coming months and years.

I would like to speak specifically to the reasoned amendment in the name of my hon. Friends. Although I cannot support it, I have some sympathy with it, specifically on the issue of property compensation. The compensation packages agreed under the Bill will have a significant impact and influence in the future when similar measures are agreed for phase 2b, which affects my constituency. It is extremely important, therefore, that we get it right now for those affected by phase 2a and phase 2b.

I am sure that my residents are not unique in their frustration with the process, but what are unique are the specifics around the property market in Long Eaton. The plus 10% on offer through the express purchase scheme for residents in the safeguarded area is not enough for many of my homeowners to buy a new home just two streets away. This is not acceptable. These residents, some of whom have lived in the same home for many years—often 40 years and more—are losing their homes, and for them their home is their castle. There must be an alternative for my constituents, and I hope that a way forward can be found.

I am sure that my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister agree, as they have both said in this place, that no one should lose out as a result of HS2. On 17 July last year, the Secretary of State said:

“I am clear that I do not want people to lose out as a result of this”—[*Official Report*, 17 July 2017; Vol. 627, c. 674.]

On 11 October, in a response to a question of mine, the Prime Minister said:

“my hon. Friend the Rail Minister is determined to see that fair and comprehensive compensation for those directly affected by the route is paid, and it will be paid as if HS2 did not exist, plus the 10% and reasonable moving costs.”—[*Official Report*, 11 October 2017; Vol. 629, c. 328.]

I would suggest that Long Eaton is the town most affected by HS2 across the whole of the country along any part of the line. It may not have a long stretch of the rail line—indeed, it is estimated to be only 3.3 miles—but those 3.3 miles will be directly through the town on a 16-metre high viaduct. That is why it is so important to get it right for residents who are losing their homes and those left behind, and why I ask the Minister to take another look at the compensation packages, not just for my constituents but for those affected along the whole line. For residents in relatively low-cost housing areas, such as New Tythe Street and Bonsall Street in Long Eaton, I would like to suggest a scheme that encompasses an

equity share option. We should also recognise, however, that it is not just about money; it is about keeping communities together, and I believe an equity share scheme would do just that.

HS2 Ltd has a specific question to answer about why it is pursuing and progressing with special measures for the Shimmer estate in Mexborough but not applying the same principles to Long Eaton. I am also concerned by the way it is interpreting current guidelines and so often appears to be working against residents rather than with them.

It is also important to consider the impact that HS2 will have on businesses that are blighted by the project. For my local businesses, the uncertainty has existed since early January 2013. It has been over five years, with no end in sight yet. It is imperative for HS2 Ltd to improve on its poor record of engagement by engaging in early and meaningful interaction with businesses on which compulsory purchase orders have been served.

Michael Fabricant: It was certainly my experience with phase 1 that the constant changes of personnel within HS2 Ltd caused problems. There was not just disengagement between HS2 and our constituents, but, apparently, disengagement between HS2 personnel themselves, with one hand not knowing what the other was doing.

Maggie Throup: Not just people but processes seem to change, and HS2 Ltd is not passing the information on to the chartered surveyors who are working on its behalf or to those who are working on behalf of the residents.

The Country Land and Business Association has reported that rural business owners who go through the compulsory purchase process find it difficult to secure funding to develop their businesses, or have existing finance agreements reviewed. Whether it is rural or urban, the problem is the same, as some of my local businesses in Long Eaton have discovered.

The Country Land and Business Association has also told me that the Government have committed themselves to enacting legislation to provide for advance payments, and I ask the Minister to comment on that today. Business cannot continue to be successful with such uncertainties hanging over them. As many Members know, all successful businesses have short, medium and long-term business plans but they cannot operate, given the current air of uncertainty.

Let me issue one final plea. At present, many of the areas affected by the line of route have only a very narrow safeguarded area on either side of the line. I ask the Minister to urge HS2 Ltd to be realistic about the amount of land take required, and take action now to safeguard the true area needed so that residents can get on with their lives.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I do not know whether my hon. Friend agrees with me that, so far, HS2 Ltd’s approach has been to limit the amount of compensation that it pays, and reduce it. Although it has, I believe, acknowledged that it may need to pay more to finalise claims, it is the interruption to lives, businesses and landowners that is causing so much aggravation. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should immediately enact the legislation to provide for advance payments, and that that really must happen soon?

Maggie Throup: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend. We need to get these things moving. I know residents whose properties, under the need-to-sell scheme, were being valued at over £200,000, but under the express purchase scheme, they were offered £140,000 for the same properties. Many of these people are elderly, and they are often quite ill. It is really distressing to see what they are going through.

In 2015, the then Secretary of State—my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin), who is no longer in the Chamber—said that the Government were committed to going above and beyond what was required by law, including discretionary measures to help more people. That is what we are talking about today—going “above and beyond”.

The HS2 residents charter aims to ensure that residents are treated in a fair, clear, competent and reasonable manner. I hope that, as we debate this hybrid Bill today and when, in the future, we debate the hybrid Bill providing for phase 2b, the charter will feature front and centre in the treatment of constituents along the whole HS2 route. They deserve that: it is the least we can do for them when we are taking their homes away.

4.39 pm

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): May I begin by making my apologies, Madam Deputy Speaker? I was present for the opening of the debate, but I had to leave afterwards because I had a meeting with Mr Speaker. May I also welcome the Minister to the Front Bench?

I supported HS2 for many years. I truly believed that it would help to bridge the divide between the north and London in the south. I even defended the astonishing cost to my constituents, as I thought that it would benefit people in my constituency. However, I now believe that the case has become flaky at best, owing to a number of factors.

A Public Accounts Committee report raised a number of serious issues. It said there was a “serious risk of fraud, corruption and error” due to a combination of poor financial controls and other systems. It highlighted the fact that HS2 was set up eight years ago with substantial Government backing yet still shows a lack of organisational maturity. Given the huge budget that HS2 has been provided with, this is truly concerning.

The Government currently say HS2 will cost £55.7 billion to build. The costs originally started at £32.7 billion in 2010 and were last updated in 2015. Yet the National Audit Office stated in 2016 that HS2 was running £7 billion over-budget, which is not contested by HS2. This should put the official cost at £63 billion. I believe we can do so much more with this money, in particular on the electrification that this Government scrapped.

Most business leaders believe that if the north is to thrive the links between northern cities need to be improved, not just by having another route to London. Another Public Accounts Committee report says that HS2 made £1.6 million of unauthorised payments to staff during 2016-17; that is not a massive amount of money, but it is a shocking waste of taxpayers’ money. The report states that the unauthorised schemes proceeded due to weak internal processes and that there is no means for these sums to be recovered. It should concern us all that we have an organisation spending public money in such a way and that those sums cannot be recovered.

Both the Department and HS2 need to address these issues as a matter of urgency, and I believe that the relationship between the Department for Transport and HS2 was an unhealthy one and the necessary checks and balances were not in place. I do not think they are now either, but I will not raise issues that concern me at a local level because we are discussing a different part of the plan.

With all this in mind, I no longer believe that HS2 is likely to fulfil the aims it was designed to achieve. I will therefore vote for the amendment declining to give the Bill a Second Reading. I no longer have confidence in HS2 Ltd or the Government’s ability to oversee it.

4.42 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I want to make clear straight away, on behalf of my constituents and in the light of my personal views on this Bill, my vehement objection to the proposals before us. I will vote against the Bill if there is a Division, which I rather think there will be. I have discussed my objections on various occasions both before the House and locally; they derive from the vast impact on my constituents in Baldwin’s Gate, Bar Hill, Whitmore and Madeley and the surrounding area, and Yarnfield and Stone and surrounding areas, as well as from my scepticism about the Government claims on the benefits of the HS2 scheme in general.

The Government in their 2012 national planning policy framework set out the three pillars of economic, social and environmental factors that all new plans must satisfy. I find it incomprehensible that the Government can so ignore their own framework on a national scale in relation to the HS2 scheme.

First, I shall comment on the lack of benefits in the proposed phase 2 scheme. Its cost is £3.48 billion, a figure that is bound to rise as the project proceeds. This has not been enough to stop it being characterised by the Country Land and Business Association as full of “delays, secrecy, broken promises, and poor management.”

This has directly damaged already-strained relationships with those most affected by HS2 and is preventing the complaints of those involved from being heard effectively.

Moreover, the actual overall costs, which are escalating all the time, are incredibly badly accounted for. As the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) indicated, we have seen report after report, including economic reports and independent assessments, from the Public Accounts Committee and all kinds of other committees, and it is inconceivable that the amount of money that is currently expected to provide for all this will be adequate.

There is also the problem of providing proper compensation for those affected, including advance payments, as was said by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan). I also understand the concerns being expressed by some of my constituents, who are deeply worried about the possibility of terrorist threats to the service. Associated with those threats is the inevitable delay that will be built in to the security needed to avoid them. That will increase the amount of time it takes people to get on to the trains. HS2 might go very fast, and it might increase capacity, but there is no doubt that there will also be an enormous amount of delay, because its security arrangements will have to be similar to those used for other methods of travel such as air.

Phase 2 of HS2 will also have an immensely destructive effect on the environment. The Woodland Trust has noted that, unbelievably, given the impact on the environment that phase 1 will have, phase 2a will be more destructive per kilometre. The whole scheme will damage or destroy 98 ancient woods, with 18 alone coming from phase 2a. Over 10.5 hectares of irreplaceable ancient woodland will be lost in phase 2a, as well as at least 27 ancient and veteran trees. That loss is completely unacceptable.

The environmental impact does not end there. The National Trust has stated that phase 2a of HS2 will “impact adversely on the conservation of the special places”

that it is charged with conserving, operating and managing, “affecting both the experience of our visitors and the lives and livelihoods of our agricultural and residential tenants.”

The preservation of our natural heritage will be jeopardised by this project.

Michael Fabricant: I am listening to my hon. Friend with considerable interest. Does he not agree that the saddest thing of all is that Arup came up with an alternative proposal that would not have damaged all those ancient woodlands because it would have used existing transport corridors? We could have done this so much better.

Sir William Cash: I absolutely agree, but unfortunately that advice has not been taken.

Secondly, I have no confidence whatever in the Government’s stated outcomes for HS2 phase 2 in building costs or in social and environmental impacts. This comes from the dismal experience of their failures over their own reports on phase 1. The House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee cast doubt on phase 1 from the beginning of the process, arguing that the evidence used to calculate the magnitude of benefit was out of date and unconvincing. The Library briefing shows how the benefit to cost ratio of phase 1 has fallen consistently over time. Nothing has been done to address these flaws in the economic modelling.

Progress on the delivery of phase 1 is similarly criticised by the National Audit Office in its 2016 review, which stated that the Department for Transport had

“set HS2 Ltd a schedule for achieving delivery readiness that was too ambitious”,

and that:

“There is a risk that the combined impact of cost and schedule pressures result in reduced programme scope and lower the benefit cost ratio.”

It also stated that:

“Effective integration of High Speed 2 with the wider UK rail system is challenging and poses risks to value for money”.

The NAO attacks the cost estimates for phase 2, which it says are

“at a much earlier stage of development than phase 1”,

with some elements currently unfunded. For the past four years, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority has put HS2 just one step above appearing what it defines as

“unachievable unless significant, urgent and often substantial action is taken.”

I ask the Minister what evidence there is that this will be done.

Cost overruns and delays have long been associated with public construction, but HS2 dwarfs the problems of the past. Think about the amount that could be made available to the public services if these billions and billions of pounds went towards something other than this white elephant in the making. We are doomed to exist in a perpetual cycle of departmental over-promising and under-delivering. In the light of concerns about the phase 1 Bill, it is impossible to trust the Government’s assertions as to the benefits of phase 2.

Thirdly, I must cast doubt over the ability of HS2 Ltd. The Public Accounts Committee accuses HS2 Ltd of having a culture

“of failing to provide full and accurate information to those responsible for holding it to account”

and states that it

“does not have in place the basic controls needed to protect public money.”

There cannot be a bigger condemnation than that. Those basic failures underline the incompetence with which the project has been conducted. Most damningly, the PAC accuses both HS2 Ltd and the Department of not appearing

“to understand the risks to the successful delivery of the programme”.

This is a Second Reading debate, and I am saying that all the reports indicate that we can have no trust in how the principal objectives of the project are being conducted. That is evident in the employment of Carillion as a key contractor on the project. A clear lack of oversight and due diligence has jeopardised public money. Those arguments mean that the Bill fails to meet the standards required of this House.

Moving to the local issues that affect my constituents, I am thoroughly dismayed with the entire project. Not only does the proposal carve through my entire constituency from top to bottom, without any immediate benefit to my constituents in terms of communication or railway stops, but many will acknowledge that the current west coast main line provides a good service and short journey times. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham has indicated, this HS2 project will be overtaken by new technologies, such as the possibility of a maglev system or a hyperloop system, and the technology used in the HS2 project is increasingly out of date. Within the timespan for the completion of the project, the money would be better spent on other programmes and public services.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the project involved running autonomous passenger and freight vehicles or other vehicles of the future up and down the line, it would probably be slightly more popular? The trouble is that the technology and the whole approach involved will produce something that is from the last century.

Sir William Cash: That is completely right. It is also perhaps true that travel times were quicker in those days than they are now. This project is about not simply capacity but efficiency, and I do not believe that its objectives will be achieved.

Turning to my local objections, a railhead will be established at Yarnfield during the construction period and will later be turned into a permanent maintenance facility. The relocation of the planned facility away

[*Sir William Cash*]

from the original destination in Crewe has caused massive consternation to all my constituents in Stone and Eccleshall, and in all villages around the area, particularly Yarnfield. On 24 November 2016, I secured a half-hour Adjournment debate on the matter, and I have spoken in a variety of meetings both locally and in the House since then. Most recently, I had a meeting with the Stone Railhead Crisis Group on Friday 19 January. I will be offering help with petitions to anybody who wants it. I have invited the Clerk of Private Bills to meet the group, and I hope that that meeting will take place soon.

I reiterate that the way in which alternatives to the final proposition were considered was appalling. The original proposal for the railhead to be at Crewe was not selected. I believe that there has been serial misdirection and misinformation about employment and environmental issues. Crewe would have been far better, but now HS2 has decided to go for Yarnfield and the vicinity thereof, which will do appalling damage to my constituents, and their traffic and schools. Every single aspect of the development will have the most serious and deleterious effect on my constituents.

The disruption due to works at Norton Bridge has already started, and the HS2 works at Stone and Swynnerton belie the notion that disruption will be minimised—it is liable only to get worse. The HS2 phase 2 environmental statement draws attention to lighting being visible along Yarnfield Lane and on the north eastern edge of Yarnfield itself. That is on top of the significant and noticeable noise that the facility will generate, the destruction of woodland, the destruction of visual landscape and the substantial noise from construction traffic.

I am also deeply concerned about the impact on the elderly, and it is shameful that retired people who seek a peaceful rural life will find their area violated. I am also concerned about the communities that are being directly destroyed, such as two properties in Shelton under Harley. There will be noise from construction on Pirehill Lane. There are also problems for several grade II listed buildings, including Blakelow farm, the water tower on Stab Lane and the Swynnerton Heath farmhouse, in addition to non-listed heritage sites such as Darlston pool, the milestone near Cash's pit and areas of the Shelton under Harley farm. That is yet another example of the damage that will be done.

In an update statement on 17 July 2017, the Secretary of State for Transport assured me that Yarnfield Lane will remain open. I am afraid to say that that assurance is useless without any consideration of the impact of heavy goods vehicles travelling along that narrow road, rendering it impassable during peak hours as if it were fully closed. That is bound to have a very bad effect on my constituents' health and welfare. The proposal to use Eccleshall Road as an access and supply route will block the whole area, which is already oversubscribed.

Cold Norton is a cluster of 40 dwellings within 500 metres of the M6, but it does not appear to be included in the documents. If the works lead to the closure of the B5026 and Yarnfield Lane, my constituents in Cold Norton, Norton Bridge, Chebsey, Yarnfield, Swynnerton and Eccleshall will not have access to their main travel route into Stone. There will also be an impact on Great Bridgeford and many other areas in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy).

Trains will go straight down my entire constituency, from top to bottom. Baldwin's Gate, Bar Hill, Whitmore and Madeley are in a rural area of outstanding natural beauty. The proposed scheme will cut straight through it, with two viaducts at the River Lea valley and Meece brook valley, and two tunnels along the way. There will be an enormous amount of construction work in a delicate area.

I will meet the Whitmore2Madeley action group on Friday 2 February to examine the proposed Whitmore construction site. I met the group in July 2017, and I have organised a meeting so that the group can meet the Clerk of Private Bills.

The environmental impact assessments show there will be significant quality-of-life problems at the Stone railhead. The views from Rectory Lane, Manor Road, Madeley cemetery, Madeley Park, Bar Hill Road and Wrinehill wood will all be negatively affected, and there will be traffic problems, too.

Then we have the A51 London Road and A53 Newcastle Road to consider. At least five footpaths will be closed in the process of construction. Communities and cultural heritage in the area will also suffer. Viaducts at Lea valley and Meece brook will prove to be eyesores. Nine properties will be permanently affected, including Rose Cottage and Wood Croft. Construction will cause impossible chaos for 29 residential properties in Whitmore and Whitmore Heath, 20 on Manor Road, 43 on Bar Hill Road and Mallard Close, and five at Moor Hall and Bower End farms. Furthermore, Hey House, a grade II listed house, will have its setting permanently degraded.

I now turn to the environmental cost in the area. Most prominent is the destruction of at least part of two woods—Whitmore wood and Barhill wood. The Woodland Trust points out the possible cost of this damage, noting that the

“Stone constituency will suffer loss or damage to 11 ancient woodlands, totalling 8.9 ha of loss. Whitmore Wood will suffer the greatest single loss of ancient woodland on the entire HS2 route. Tunnelling must be considered to avoid this loss.”

That is an attack on our woodland environment.

An additional 0.2 hectares will be lost at Barhill wood to allow for the Madeley tunnel portal. This forms just a small part of the argument for a longer, deeper tunnel to limit the environmental damage of the scheme, which I know that the Minister is examining. Such a tunnel would not completely remove the damaging local impact of this proposal, but it would nevertheless prevent the inefficient upheaval generated by involving multiple sites. There is an argument about this tunnel and I have been given certain assurances, but I am deeply concerned about whether the money will be made available in any case—we have no certainty about that at this stage. More specifically, the proposal for a tunnel from Whitmore to Madeley would, it is argued, avoid the destruction by HS2 works of 33% of Whitmore wood, the viaduct and embankments in the Lea valley, and the disruptive work on Manor Road. This has to be pursued vigorously so that we get to the bottom of exactly what will be involved. I understand the assurances that have been given, but there are also complications due to the relationship between the northern part and the southern part of my constituency, which will doubtless be the subject of petitions from the two groups in question.

In conclusion, I will be voting against the Bill, as I did on the previous Bill for phase 1. My constituents will be petitioning against the Bill and will appear in front of the Select Committee. I urge the Government and that Committee to do all they can to pay the most careful attention to these petitions if this Bill goes through today, and to provide my constituents with every opportunity to be heard. This is a very, very big thing for them—it is massive. Hon. Members should think what it would be like if this were to happen to any other constituency on the scale it is happening to mine, which is similar to the situation in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham. She has done a fantastic job and we will try to do the same in our area. At the moment, I am deeply disappointed with these proposals and I shall be voting against them.

5.2 pm

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, welcome the Minister to her place. I support the Bill because it brings the potential benefits of HS2 to parts of the north earlier than was envisaged—2027 is a lot better than 2033. HS2 is visionary, but that vision will be realised only if the high-speed network is linked to the existing classic network and if regeneration takes place not just at high-speed rail stations, but in areas around those stations and beyond, in supporting transport links and investing in businesses. Local enterprise partnerships, perhaps working together and looking across regions, need to put together regional strategies to ensure that transport investment leads to more opportunities for business, employment and skills.

We have said a great deal about the importance of high-speed rail, and HS2 specifically, in bringing new capacity on to our rail line. That is, in essence, what this is all about. But in ensuring that that increased capacity is maximised, we have to look at how we can develop services on the classic line once the high-speed line has been built. We also have to remember the importance of developing freight links, as freight routes are essential. In areas such as Liverpool, among others, where port trade is developing, it is crucial that new freight lines are made available. One of the strong reasons for HS2 is that the existing lines running passenger services on the west coast main line are virtually full and there is simply no space for freight. As we develop HS2, it is essential that thought is given to freight.

Let me turn to some specific issues that affect the north in general and Liverpool in particular. I emphasise the importance of Northern Powerhouse Rail, which has already been mentioned, for people throughout the north. I certainly welcome Transport for the North's having been put on a statutory footing in the past couple of weeks. Nevertheless, when will the transformational changes promised by Northern Powerhouse Rail and Transport for the North actually be realised? It is important that those changes happen so that places such as Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Newcastle and Hull have much better lines of communication between them as part of the development of their economies.

I welcome the setting up of Northern Powerhouse Rail because it goes beyond the parochial and shows that we are looking at things on a regional and cross-regional basis. That is the only way we are going to bring real economic changes to our communities, but those changes

have to take place in a reasonable timescale. They must not remain simply promises for the future that do not actually happen. It is important to restate that although Northern Powerhouse Rail is extremely important for Liverpool and for the north, it is not an alternative to HS2. It is foolish for people to suggest that.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): I, too, welcome HS2 for the very same reasons. There needs to be investment in the north. What with the £70 billion of investment in Northern Powerhouse Rail over the next 30 years, we have an opportunity to get the vision off the ground and really make a difference in the north of England.

Mrs Ellman: I agree with the hon. Lady. It would be a grave mistake to have a new high-speed line from London to Birmingham that stopped there and left the rest of the country to deal with lesser investment that will bring fewer economic development returns. We need both.

The case has long been argued that Liverpool needs a direct link to the new high-speed line. I recognise that the existing plans will bring benefit to Liverpool in terms of increased capacity and quicker journeys between Liverpool and London and between Liverpool and other cities. Nevertheless, for Liverpool to benefit in a way that is comparable to other major cities, there needs to be a direct link. Proposals have been developed for a new line so that Liverpool can have a direct link to both Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2. However, the exact status of those proposals is unclear to me. They have been worked up in considerable detail and put into various potential plans, but will the Minister tell me exactly what their current status is?

I asked the Secretary of State about this at the start of the debate. I welcomed his comments about his support for Liverpool—indeed, he said that he was very fond of Liverpool and reiterated that it would benefit from HS2—but he was not specific about how anything was going to happen. What progress has been made on linking Liverpool directly with both HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail? Liverpool is increasingly successful, partly because of its transport links, but for its potential to be realised fully, we must improve this even more, which means having a proper connection to high-speed rail, along with investment in the classic rail system and in Northern Powerhouse Rail.

Liverpool's new deep-water container port is extremely important. It is important to have freight links to the northern ports. We are developing as an increasingly important logistics centre and as a visitor destination, and the growing cruise line sector is extremely exciting, which means that Liverpool needs to maximise its transport links. I hope that I will get a proper answer from the Minister on those issues.

I will just refer, too, to some concerns about how the Crewe hub is intended to develop based on the information that is available now. There are proposals to do with splitting trains at Crewe, which could adversely impact on current plans for high-speed Liverpool to London journeys. I query whether improvements will be made on Liverpool to Birmingham journeys in the way that they were first envisaged. I ask for that to be looked at again during the further discussions that will inevitably take place.

[Mrs Ellman]

In summary, I welcome this Bill. It is a great step forward. I support high-speed rail; I think it is visionary, but for that vision to be realised, there must be continued investment in the classic line, new lines where they are required and business regeneration connected with that transport development to develop new regional economic strategies that will help to transform the north.

5.10 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I rise to oppose the Second Reading today for reasons very similar to those given by my hon. Friends the Members for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and for Stone (Sir William Cash). I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield—I am not at all opposed to additional rail capacity, or indeed to relatively high-speed rail capacity. The problem with the Bill before us now is that it is capable of pretty much no amendment. Yes, there can be very small adjustments made, but none of them would do anything for my constituents who are hugely affected by this development.

First, I want to talk about why the Bill, and indeed the whole project, is wrong in principle; secondly, about the specific problems that we face in the Stafford constituency; and thirdly about some suggestions for how those problems might be ameliorated. We do not need a 400 km an hour line in the United Kingdom, with the little connectivity that these proposals give us. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield has said, the line is forced to go so straight that it does not take the most appropriate and sensitive route. A line of 250 km to 300 km an hour would have been easily adequate. In fact, it is very unlikely that the trains will ever reach anything more than that.

In my constituency, the line seems to head straight for the villages, and not for the open countryside. It affects four villages directly, and it is adjacent to a fifth. I would welcome any hon. Member who wants to come for a visit to note the impact on this part of the world—in Staffordshire and in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone. Lots of alternatives have been put forward. We have already heard about the Arup alternative. There is also the High Speed UK alternative, which provides much better connectivity between 32 prominent cities of the UK. I have looked at it in some detail. I am sure that holes can be picked in it, but those holes will be considerably smaller than the ones that can be picked in the proposals that are before us now. This is the wrong solution to a problem that we undoubtedly have.

Just before people say that this is simply a nimby attitude, I point out that both my hon. Friend the Member for Stone and I have supported an extremely large rail project in our constituencies, which came at some inconvenience to our constituents, but nevertheless we saw the benefit of it. That was the Norton Bridge junction, which has increased speeds on that line, and increased capacity on the west coast main line. Indeed, before I was elected, I supported the proposal of the previous Government on the Stafford bypass, which also had an impact on my constituency.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I was in Committee upstairs, and came down particularly to hear the hon. Gentleman's speech. He knows that I

passionately oppose HS2. I applaud his opposition, and would love to make the visit to his constituency to see the degradation, because £100 billion of expenditure should go not on this, but on a decent railway service across the north of England.

Jeremy Lefroy: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He is welcome to visit my constituency; we will make an arrangement. He will see the beautiful countryside of the upper Trent Valley, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Stone would also show him across Swynnerton Park and up towards Madeley, so that he can see the effect of the line on those areas.

The business case is another reason I believe this is the wrong project. We have heard from other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely), that the business case is not particularly compelling. In fact, our former colleague and former Chair of the Treasury Committee, Andrew Tyrie, said that HS2

“has the weakest economic case of all projects”

within the infrastructure programme. As has been mentioned, there is a hole in the business case. That is, there is no business case that I can see for the continuation of the existing west coast main line without the revenue from the high-speed services that currently use it and generate most of its revenue. How will that line be maintained? Will it be maintained purely with the revenue from local and regional services, on which prices can be extremely low? Will that generate enough revenue? Alternatively, will it be maintained using revenue from freight services? I do not know, but there is not a business case. I have asked for it and it has not been provided. I urge the Government—particularly if they are about to put out to tender for the package of HS2 and the west coast main line—to insist that we have a proper business case for the entire package, not simply for HS2.

Sir William Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that this has all the hallmarks of a vanity project and that that is why there is not a proper business case? To a certain extent, that answers his question.

Jeremy Lefroy: Well, I am not sure that it is a vanity project because, if constructed, it certainly will bring benefits to the country, although probably at much more expense than it should and at a huge cost to our constituents. When I challenged a very senior person who has been involved in this project in the past, they said, “Well, actually, it's gone too far. We wouldn't have started it here but we have gone too far.” The west coast main line was started, I think, in the 1850s—possibly even earlier—so this project will last for 200 years. What is a few years to get this right and to put it in the right place? I shall return to that point.

On the problems, let me start with the problems for people because people are the most important. I get pretty frustrated when HS2 staff come around to count bats. Yes, bats have importance, but my constituents are more important. HS2 is prepared to spend an awful lot of time and money counting bats and various other things, but not talking to my constituents. I have constituents who have waited for a visit for a year. These constituents have dairy farms, and HS2 wants to take 100 acres away from their farm, which would make a dairy farm unviable. Only last week, a constituent of mine suddenly received

a letter from HS2 indicating that his entire property was needed, when it had previously only needed a very small part. I have a strong objection to the uncertainty and inefficiency with which my constituents have been handled. That is not to criticise every single employee of HS2. I have met some extremely good ones. There have been some who I would praise for their work, but there have been others who, I am afraid, have fallen short.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I do not entirely agree with my hon. Friend that bats have no importance whatever, but I do agree with him that people are important. He may actually experience what I experienced in my constituency, whereby HS2 implied and said that it was going to take a property and then decided that it was not going to take it, which can also have severe implications for businesses affected in that fashion.

Jeremy Lefroy: I entirely agree. I apologise if I gave the impression that I do not care about bats at all, but I care about my constituents a little bit more. There are also the issues of the slow process, the lack of engagement, totally unnecessary arguments over valuations and a lack of knowledge. For example, one constituent of mine was not aware of what was going on. He sold the property after the line was announced and made a huge loss, but was then unable to claim for that loss because he was told that he should have gone through the process. This elderly gentleman was basically robbed of tens of thousands of pounds simply because he did not quite understand the system. Will the Minister see whether there is some way that we can get compensation for my constituent, who deserves it? I have constituents, an elderly couple, whose property is going to be boxed in by the works on HS2—literally boxed in. Yet, as things stand, they are not going to be allowed to sell their house to HS2, for reasons I fail to understand.

Then there is the impact on communities and the environment. The line runs adjacent to Great Haywood. It goes through Ingestre, Hopton, Marston and Yarlet. These are mainly old and ancient villages with strong communities. Hopton has lost a lot of its population already because people have moved out. There is not the community there that there was, because HS2, although it is renting out to people some of the properties that have been sold to it, is not doing so quickly. Naturally, the people who are coming in, perhaps for the short term, are not able to join in the community as much as others would.

Sir William Cash: Does my hon. Friend recall the impact that this will also have on Yarlet School, which is a very serious problem for those who have this fantastically good school and the facilities that go with it?

Jeremy Lefroy: I do indeed. The line goes pretty much straight through Yarlet School, and not only that but through Yarlet wood, which is one of our ancient woodlands. I think it is even noted in the Domesday Book, so it is the best part of 1,000 years old.

Another very important part of Staffordshire life that the line goes straight through, or almost straight through, is Staffordshire showground, which hosts not just the county show but hundreds of other events every year, with probably the best part of 300,000 or 400,000 people attending. It is a very important employer and economic entity within my constituency.

The line goes very close to Shugborough. The irony of this is that when the west coast main line was put through Shugborough in the 19th century, the Earl of Lichfield persuaded the railway company to build a cut-and-cover tunnel through Shugborough, which one still sees when going on the main line up to Liverpool. We have been unable to persuade HS2 to provide such tunnelling for my constituents. Clearly, where the railways would listen to the Earl of Lichfield 150 years ago and more, they do not listen to the ordinary people today who would like to have some protection from this line. The line also goes pretty much straight through the beautiful Ingestre and Tixall parklands and landscapes.

The next issue is transport infrastructure. The line cuts straight across several major roads, including the A51, the A518, the A34 and the M6, and goes over the west coast main line. As far as I can see, HS2 and Highways England do not seem to have a plan on how to manage the inevitable disruption to local, regional, and indeed national transport that is going to be caused. I hope they do have one, because the M6 must be, if not the busiest motorway in Europe, then one of the busiest, and the A34 is a kind of relief road for the M6. If both of those are going to be disrupted, particularly if it happens at the same time, the consequences for the regional and national economy, right up to Scotland, will be quite substantial.

Another problem is connectivity after HS2. Clearly, connectivity from Stafford will be better. There will be a faster journey from Stafford to London than at present. It is already an extremely good and fast journey—nobody has complained to me about it in the past—and it will, I admit, be a few minutes faster. Northbound, we are really concerned about connectivity, because we understand that the trains through Stafford and Stoke will end at Macclesfield. I have nothing against Macclesfield; in fact, it is a wonderful town. However, most of the time my constituents tend to prefer to go further to Manchester and Liverpool rather than to stop at Macclesfield. As I say, I have nothing against Macclesfield.

The next problem is the impact on businesses. Last week, I heard from a business that received, out of the blue, a letter saying, “We want all your land.” This business employs a large number of people in a rural area; it is possibly the biggest employer in that area. Yet suddenly, with literally no notice, we are suddenly told that HS2 needs the entire plot that it is working from, without any alternative.

Mr Sheerman: I rarely agree with the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), but I do in this case, about this being a vanity project. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that this is not really about connectivity or helping local industry? As he says, it will damage local industry. The French experience already shows that it does not liberate and rejuvenate the provincial cities and towns. It actually drains even more power and influence down to London and the metropolitan area around the south-east.

Jeremy Lefroy: I largely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I fear that that will be the case unless, as speakers both in favour and against have said, connectivity is taken much more seriously. I urge Ministers to look at the proposals of High Speed UK, even if they do not like

[Jeremy Lefroy]

those proposals, because it has some extremely important points to make about connectivity for other major cities in the UK.

If the line goes ahead—it seems there is a majority in the House at the moment for it, but that may change—I would like to make some proposals. First, for my constituents and my colleagues' constituents, we must employ full-time sympathetic and responsive liaison officers who work together with businesses and constituents to ensure that problems are dealt with quickly, efficiently and compassionately. We must also give additional support to local health services. Quite a large number of my constituents have found this a very difficult time and have needed additional support, particularly with their mental health, and local surgeries have not necessarily had the resources to provide that.

It is very important that local people see that there are local jobs in this, and that people are not just brought in. Obviously we need the right skills, but as far as possible, local businesses and local people must be employed.

On the issue of mitigation, I urge the Minister, who I welcome to her position and congratulate on her appointment, to look at more tunnelling, particularly in the area of the Staffordshire showground, Hopton, Marston and Yarlet. I think it is possible. A green tunnel was proposed for Hopton, but it was removed on spurious grounds, or at least grounds that could have been overcome.

I ask the Minister to ensure that we have full planning well in advance for local, regional and national transport, including additional roads. I suggest a link between the A34 and junction 13, just as we have a link between the A34 and junctions 14 and 15. The very long viaduct at Great Haywood must be of outstanding design and faced with traditional stone or brick. I also suggest that the bridge constructed over the M6 for the railway or at least the supports for it should be put in place when the M6 is widened between junctions 13 and 15, rather than having to close the motorway for two separate civil works.

In conclusion, I would rather the Government paused, rethought and built for the whole country, with much better connectivity than this proposal gives us. If this goes ahead, at least for the time being, I ask that all the mitigations that my colleagues and I have put forward be taken seriously, because to date, they have not been.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind Members that, as they can see for themselves, seven hon. Members are still seeking to contribute to the debate, therefore there is a premium on reasonable brevity. If each contributes for no more than 10 minutes, all should have the chance to do so before the winding-up speeches begin.

5.28 pm

Jo Platt (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): You will be glad to hear, Mr Speaker, that I intend to speak only briefly, to raise one particular concern that I believe needs urgent consideration by the Government as the HS2 process continues.

HS2 has the ability to rejuvenate the northern economy, bringing with it the much-needed investment, jobs and social transformation that the north deserves. However, to me, HS2 is not just about connecting businesses and bolstering economies. It represents a crucial mechanism to connect people with the skills, education and employment opportunities that could improve life chances.

As I have been clear since my election to this House, connectivity into HS2 stations must be addressed by the Government, because unless connectivity is adequately addressed, HS2 is at risk of becoming a token flagship project that will fail to produce the important benefits we are promised in the north. Such connectivity means connecting our towns and outer cities seamlessly into our HS2 stations, creating a united and interconnected northern economy.

As my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) so rightly pointed out, the Government need “to stop kicking this...can down the road”. At the Tory party conference, the Transport Secretary announced that £300 million would be allocated to HS2 connectivity in the north. However, inspection of the detail of the announcement showed that this money was already allocated to just six city hotspots across the north, totally neglecting the economies and opportunities of our northern towns.

Furthermore, the new Minister suggested two weeks ago that my constituents could access HS2 from Manchester airport, but Manchester airport is a one hour 30 minute bus trip away. How can the Government ever claim to be committed to our town economies when they believe that that is acceptable and that, despite HS2 cutting through the middle of my constituency, it will take longer for my constituents to connect to HS2 at Manchester airport than to travel onwards to London?

The connectivity plans as they currently stand are completely unacceptable to our region, but it is for the young people in Leigh that I wanted to speak in this debate. They are growing up in the context of an evolving economic landscape that they will not easily be able to participate in. In the words of the former Conservative Education Secretary, the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening), the

“bottom line is that while talent is spread evenly in our country, opportunity isn't”.

Until the Government either invest in our northern towns or provide our transport bodies with the funding to do so, these enormous infrastructure projects will benefit only those growing up in our inner cities. The divide between our towns and our cities is growing ever larger under this Government. This will restrict the life chances of an entire generation who are being held back solely because of their postcode. I therefore urge the Government to review their connectivity plans and seek to widen the opportunities that HS2 could provide to our young people.

5.32 pm

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leigh (Jo Platt). I share her pain, because HS2 phase 1 goes right through the middle of my constituency and brings no benefits, just burdens. I think there are many such seats, as we have heard from other hon. Members on other occasions, as well as today. I agree with her about the north. My father was in steel in the north of

England, and we have always known that to assist in increasing the prosperity of the north of England, the cross-Pennine links should have been prioritised a long time ago. It is a pleasure to follow her short but elegant speech.

May I welcome the Minister to the Front Bench? My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) is an extremely capable person, although I have to say that I do not envy her her task. She follows in the footsteps of no less than—let me see—one, two, three, four, five Secretaries of State and one, two, three, four, five, six junior Ministers. Since 2010, it appears that no Minister has managed more than two years in this position in charge of HS2. I would not have wished HS2 on her, but I hope her ministerial career will last a great deal longer than that. I wish, however, that her colleagues would listen and that we could have a Minister dedicated to HS2 on its own, because this project is such a gargantuan one that it really deserves to have ministerial attention focused on it completely. If we look at the project's history since its inception, with the catalogue of failures and problems it has thrown up, we can see that a Minister dedicated to it is much needed and would be very welcome.

Mr Speaker, I feel like saying, "Here we are again, and yes, I am on my feet." I think we probably do divide into sheep and goats on the Floor of this House as far as HS2 is concerned. Whether I am a sheep or a goat I do not know. I am probably an old goat, but I am happy to stand up here with some other old goats, like my hon. Friends the Members for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), for Stone (Sir William Cash) and for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), and even the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman)—most of whom happen to be in the Chamber at the moment. I have been really heartened by the support that I have had over the years as I have tried to fight this project, and then tried to have it altered and modified so that it did less harm than was envisaged.

Mr Sheerman: In passing, I congratulate the right hon. Lady on becoming a dame. Is it not a fact that she and I have campaigned against this project for a very long time, on the grounds that it will not deliver, it will never deliver, by 2033, and it will be superseded by different forms of transportation by 2033, and also on the grounds that £100 billion of national treasure that could have flowed—I say this as a Labour MP—into the national health service and transport across the north will have been wasted?

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I am loth to agree with the hon. Gentleman entirely, but I find myself tempted to do so, because the first point I want to mention is cost.

The cost of this project will go up exponentially. When it was first announced in 2013, the cost of the whole project was about £16 billion, and by 2015 those costs were updated to £55.7 billion. The National Audit Office published a report on HS2's progress and preparations, and it highlighted the fact that the £55.7 billion funding package does not even cover the funding for the activity needed to deliver the promised growth and regeneration benefits that the hon. Member for Leigh so desperately wants for her young constituents. I think that still continues to be a problem, and I would ask the Minister to have a look at when she can update the costs of this project, and ask her to lay out clearly for the

House what extra funding will be required from the Treasury to deliver those growth and regeneration benefits that have been so much boasted of.

I think HS2 will turn out to be, as Michael Byng said, the most expensive railway on earth, at £403 million a mile. In fact, Michael Byng, who created the method used by Network Rail to cost its projects, made the estimates for the DfT and said the line would cost double the official figure, and 15 times more than the cost per mile of the TGV in France. We need to be very careful about how those costs are escalating.

I want to mention the environment. I have had some notable gains in Buckinghamshire—our own county—to save the Chilterns from even greater damage than was first anticipated. I am grateful for the tunnelling. It saves some 9.2 hectares of ancient woodland in three separate woods, but the Woodland Trust has estimated that on phase 2a and 2b it is losing 24 irreplaceable woods, and we shall still lose 63 ancient woods on phase 1 to start off with. I say to the House: once they have gone, they are lost forever. You cannot replace ancient woodland, however much planting you do in other areas of the country.

I want to mention the process. I think the hybrid Bill process for phase 1 was a travesty of our procedures, and I pay tribute to the Chairman of Ways and Means and the House authorities who looked at the Standing Orders and changed some of the aspects of a hybrid Bill to improve the petitioner experience. I want to place it on the record that I think our Clerk who is no longer with us, Neil Caulfield, who was so excellent, would have been pleased to see adjustments to these procedures. Although it is still an arcane process, I think it was important that we fed back the agonies of going through the hybrid Bill process, and that the House responded. I think the positive changes that have been made, particularly the changes to the language, which will increase accessibility to the petitioners, will make a difference and protect the rights for petitioners to be heard. I also think that submitting petitions electronically is a way forward. I still think that the fee of £20 to fight for one's house, business, land or property is insulting, and I see no reason why petitioners must pay £20 to have their case heard when the state is trying to take their property.

I also feel that corridor deals need to be stamped out. Corridor deals conducted by silks and barristers acting on behalf of the Government are completely opaque and have no enforceability. There is intimidation and pressure from the QCs and the legal teams, hustling up to people in the corridor right before their petition is heard. I hope that the Government will listen and ensure that corridor deals are stamped out completely in this next legislative phase.

I want to refer to engagement by HS2 and the attitude towards the people affected. My colleagues have spoken eloquently already about the ways in which HS2 and its staff and personnel still fail to engage with the people who are most affected by this project. I am still hearing of poor engagement up and down the line, and the Country Land and Business Association reports delays, secrecy, broken promises and poor management.

We are still waiting for answers on various matters, such as the incident that took place in the Colne Valley the other day. I asked for the outcome of the investigation, because I thought that was quite a serious incident.

[*Dame Cheryl Gillan*]

I have still not had any response outlining exactly what happened and why people behaved in such a fashion to people crossing land that would be affected by HS2.

I would also very much like to find out what is happening in my own constituency, in Buckinghamshire. The other day, the Secretary of State promised that I and other MPs would be informed where works were taking place and that has not yet happened. The Secretary of State gave a categorical undertaking at that Dispatch Box, but messages I have had none.

Only today, despite a clear, agreed contract with HS2, a constituent has found that the payment they were due to receive within 21 days is still outstanding three months later. I will give details to the Secretary of State because it came in just today, but that just proves to me that HS2 still cannot keep its commitments or treat the people who are being affected by the project in a rational, decent and respectful manner. It is a gross miscarriage of justice for people to be treated in such a way by the Government and by HS2 Ltd.

Michael Fabricant: Like me, my right hon. Friend has gone through the phase 1 experience—I am, of course, affected by phase 2a as well. Does she not think that HS2 as an organisation is dysfunctional? One official does not speak to another, the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing; surely that does not augur well for the construction of a railway line.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A project of this nature needs to be run in the most professional fashion possible. It needs good governance. It does not need its top executives to be paid 10 times what an MP is paid. It has been criticised up hill and down dale. We have seen it handing out £1.7 million of unauthorised redundancy payments. We have seen the conflicts of interest that have caused major companies to pull out of the bidding process and the contractual process, the failure to carry out due diligence, a turnover of staff, and an attitude towards the people they deal with that can only be described as arrogant.

I still hope that this project can be pulled back into shape. That is why I encourage my colleagues to think about dedicating the Minister's career over at least the next two years solely to looking after HS2. I thought long and hard, and I have the freedom of the Back Benches, which is a great pleasure, and it is with a heavy heart that once again I have to say that although I know that my hon. Friends will not press their amendment to a vote, if anyone does call a vote on Second Reading, I will again be forced to walk through the Lobby against it.

5.44 pm

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): It is an honour to follow the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan). I too welcome the Minister to her post and wish her very well.

In the UK, we are rightly proud of our status as the birthplace of the railways. However, our rail infrastructure—much of it from the Victorian era—requires significant investment if it is to continue to serve the people of Britain in the 21st century. In our 2017 manifesto, Labour promised to create a national transformation

fund to invest some £250 billion over 10 years, and we remain firmly committed to investing in our nation's infrastructure.

HS2 represents one of the largest infrastructure projects in Europe. The scheme will provide much needed capacity to support future demand for rail services, and it aims to deliver wider economic benefits to the regions that it serves and beyond. Although very few would argue against those goals, it is crucial that the project is conducted in the right way: by providing jobs and opportunities to our young people, minimising the disruption caused to our communities and protecting our precious environment.

Although I support the HS2 project in principle, I think it is important to focus on a number of issues. London's economic output is more than double the rest of the UK average. For the country as a whole to prosper, the balance needs to be redressed, not to the detriment of Londoners but for the benefit of all. According to Government figures, when HS2 is fully completed, it will deliver a benefit-cost ratio of 2.3 when wider economic impacts are included. I want to make sure that those benefits are shared by as wide a group as possible, and especially the areas that are directly affected by the construction of the line. Billions of pounds of taxpayers' money is being spent on this project; that money must benefit more than just the shareholders of a handful of large companies.

Both the Birmingham chamber of commerce in my constituency and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull local enterprise partnership support HS2, recognising the economic benefits that better connectivity will bring. I want Birmingham's economic output to continue to grow, its people to find well paid, secure and skilled jobs, and the city's potential to be further recognised as a result of the project. I want to see the construction of HS2 ignite greater interest in engineering among our young people, and apprenticeships to be made available to all young people in our communities, whatever their background.

Rachel Maclean: I completely agree with the hon. Lady about the benefits and how they should be spread across Birmingham and the region. Does she also agree that this is a great opportunity to capture the talents of women, particularly in engineering, in this Year of Engineering?

Preet Kaur Gill: I absolutely agree; we need to see more women coming into engineering.

However, one of my concerns is that the recent fiasco surrounding the east coast main line franchise, combined with the demonstrable success achieved after the last private sector rail bail-out by Directly Operated Railways, serves only to highlight the need for public ownership of our railways. At a time when living standards are squeezed, wage rises are not keeping pace with the cost of living, and rail passengers have just had to endure the largest fare rises in five years, it is not acceptable for private companies to table inflated offers for these vital services, extract the profits, and then simply walk without honouring their commitments.

Finally, this project should not come at the expense of our environment either. In future, when our children are using HS2, I want them to benefit from the cleaner air that the increased use of rail will bring, but I do not want the construction of the tracks that they are travelling

on to have caused untold damage to the environment. Organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts have raised concerns about the loss of ancient woodland, sights of special scientific interest and nature reserves. The construction of HS2 should serve as an example of how large-scale infrastructure projects can be conducted in an environmentally friendly way—changing the environment, yes, but not destroying it. This is an opportunity to achieve a net gain for nature.

The sums of money involved are too great and the potential impact on communities too large to get this project wrong. That is why the Government need to ensure that the process is as transparent, cost-effective and environmentally friendly as possible, so that HS2 delivers for the many, not the few.

5.49 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): As an enthusiastic supporter of improvements to our rail network, I welcome the principle behind the Bill—establishing a high-speed railway beyond Birmingham—but I have some concerns, so I welcome this opportunity to set out how I think the Bill could be improved, particularly for the ambitious and growing city of Stoke-on-Trent.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, as a recent and welcome visitor to my constituency, will know exactly how ambitious we are. The scale of the local rail improvements we are seeking and planning for are, like HS2 itself, unmatched since the Victorian era. We are keen to embrace the many opportunities arising from HS2. HS2 is going to happen—that is no longer the debate; phase 1 preparations are already under way, and the actual building of phase 1 begins next year. Time is marching on. The section we are debating in the Bill, phase 2a, is due to open to passengers by 2027—the end of the next Parliament. We must get on with the Bill, or it will not be long before we are living with the consequences of getting it wrong.

The principle of a high-speed railway line from the west midlands conurbation to Crewe is sound—releasing capacity for passengers and freight services on the existing network, while cutting the fast times to Crewe from London to under an hour—and in principle I welcome it, but for the social and economic benefits of HS2 to be maximised in practice, there needs to be much better integration, as many hon. Members have mentioned. Improvements to infrastructure on the existing network around Stoke-on-Trent, as well as local rail improvements for connecting trains from Crewe, including the Crewe to Derby line, which serves Longton in my constituency, are vital.

The Secretary of State joined me on that service earlier this month and has seen at first hand the improvements needed on it. I welcome the much-needed investment in our local transport infrastructure that he proposed when he visited, but there is much left to be resolved around how the benefits of HS2 will be delivered in and for Stoke-on-Trent. As the briefing note that the public affairs department of HS2 Ltd kindly sent to MPs for this debate puts it:

“Detailed work and consultation is currently being undertaken on options for the development of the HS2 Crewe Hub, with the potential for a HS2 service at Stoke.”

That is a tantalising, and potentially a very lucrative, assurance for the city.

There is clearly a need for Stoke-on-Trent to be connected—it is fundamental to HS2 being of maximum benefit to my constituency. We are told by HS2 Ltd that the Bill “could” mean better commuter services and the potential for extra freight trains, and we are assured by the Rail Delivery Group that it “will” add much-needed space for more and faster trains. I say that it “must” deliver these benefits. To do that, the Government need to be clear that a viable option for the Stoke connector, as promoted by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, is firmly on the table, to ensure that the infrastructure around Stoke-on-Trent receives the vital upgrades it needs.

This would mean getting, in addition to the proposed Handsacre link, which is appropriate for Stafford, a low-impact five-mile line designed to take classic compatible HS2 trains from the main HS2 line through the very significant Stoke-on-Trent catchment and on to the rest of east Cheshire, Macclesfield and Stockport. Such a dedicated Stoke connector would provide the necessary link to improve connectivity and boost capacity. It would do so by getting around the bottleneck that will otherwise remain on the west coast main line to the south of Stoke-on-Trent. That is the way to maximise the full opportunities for more housing and jobs, and I will continue to pursue this matter as the Bill progresses.

It is also imperative that Stoke-on-Trent continue to enjoy regular fast train services to and from London—at least one service every half hour or more frequently. HS2 compatibility should offer my constituents improved journey times as well as helping us to maximise both housing and commercial development in the city, fully seizing the economic opportunities that Stoke-on-Trent offers.

It is essential to address the lack of fast, direct services between Stoke-on-Trent and Birmingham, to match the good quality of the services currently offered between Stoke-on-Trent and Manchester. Through the Bill, HS2 has the potential to address the severe overcrowding and poor connectivity that are currently experienced between Stoke-on-Trent and Birmingham. There is also the potential to improve connectivity further by providing the direct intercity services that are currently lacking between locations such as Stoke-on-Trent and Liverpool. That would fully exploit the potential for economic growth from the midlands engine and northern powerhouse initiatives, with Stoke-on-Trent as the gateway to the north.

As well as improving services, it is essential to do more to improve both the capacity and the offer at Stoke-on-Trent railway station. Although it is the main station serving the potteries conurbation, which consists of more than half a million people, it currently has limited platform and concourse capacity, as well as poor-quality retail facilities. Again, Stoke-on-Trent City Council has stepped forward with detailed proposals. The Stoke-on-Trent HS2 master plan sets out the ambition to transform the station, vastly improving capacity and facilities, and leveraging significant redevelopment in the wider area on the back of those improvements. It is important for those proposals to be realised if we are to ensure that the station is HS2-ready and playing a full part in the city’s regeneration.

I fully support the principle of the Bill, and it will receive my support tonight. I am a positive and enthusiastic supporter of improvements in our rail industry, and I am keen for us to finally emerge from the legacy of the

[Jack Brereton]

disastrous erosion of Stoke-on-Trent's rail network that we saw under nationalisation. I know that the Secretary of State is equally committed to large-scale improvements, and I thank him for the commitment to invest in our local transport infrastructure that he gave during his recent visit to my constituency; it was hugely welcome. However, I take very seriously the need to improve infrastructure interconnectivity, and further work needs to be done on that. I also take very seriously the opportunities promised by the Department for Transport and HS2 Ltd, which have said that detailed proposals will continue to be refined for HS2 as the Bill progresses. I look forward to playing my part in that process to the full.

5.57 pm

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton), in this important debate. I disagree with him about the support that should be offered to the Bill this evening. The principle behind a high-speed rail network is absolutely fine, but the Bill should actually be entitled the devastation of Staffordshire Bill. It will lay an iron scar across our county, and it will bring very little in the way of economic benefits. All that it does is seek to take all the potential benefits and, through a bottleneck, funnel them down to London and the south-east, where there will be no benefit for my constituents or those of the hon. Gentleman.

I find myself in what some might describe as the invidious, or perhaps I should say unusual, position of agreeing with the hon. Members for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), for Stone (Sir William Cash) and for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy)—the holy triumvirate of Staffordshire Members when it comes to matters of logistics—who have drawn attention to the fallacies in the Bill. Like the hon. Member for Stafford, I have no problem in principle with high-speed rail. I have no problem with the idea of providing additional capacity for the west coast main line and an opportunity for new rail networks to come through Staffordshire and service his constituency and mine. What the Bill does not do, however, is match that aspiration with reality.

The hon. Gentleman has already pointed out that the services that will be coming north from London through our constituencies will terminate at Macclesfield. If we were serious about how we could provide better economic benefits for Staffordshire, the line would go all the way to Manchester. Crucially, that would also offer a new opportunity for a direct service from Stoke-on-Trent to Manchester airport. That would provide a huge growth opportunity for business and tourism, and it is supported by Staffordshire chambers of commerce, which has done so much to promote the venture. It would not necessarily involve a high-speed link, but it would involve the wider issue of funding the regeneration of rail networks out of Stoke-on-Trent. We must not focus purely on high-speed rail enabling us to get to and from London quicker than we currently can. The purpose here is interconnectivity of the regions going north as well, and what we are being offered in this Bill does not provide any sort of hope for that.

I want to look at what I consider to be a mismatch in Government policy. The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy highlights the potential

benefit of a ceramic deal in Stoke-on-Trent, and the fact that Stafford is a growth point in our county and that we could have new jobs and regeneration and place-based economic growth through a potential ceramic park bordering my constituency and in the constituency of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South. Yet although we are told that a place-based industrial strategy is important, we are also told that Stoke-on-Trent station, which has 2.8 million rail users a year, is not worthy of anything other than a single one-hour service that will only go north to Macclesfield and will terminate in London, when the journey time of the current service to London is adequate and capacity on the Virgin line is not too much of a problem.

The bigger capacity issue in Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire involves the line run by CrossCountry that services Stafford, Wolverhampton and Birmingham and Birmingham International, where it is often standing-room only in some of the most unpleasant circumstances we can imagine. Yet while we are talking about trying to bring Government policy on regeneration strategy together, there is no economic benefit not to having a greater presence in Stoke-on-Trent.

There is the issue of where the services coming north go to. The hon. Member for Lichfield rightly pointed out that there are potential benefits in using existing railheads, and I was glad to hear the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South endorse the work done by Councillors Mohammed Pervez and Andy Platt on the Stoke option, which sought to use the existing rail infrastructure in Staffordshire to take high-speed trains north. The estimate done by the city council at that time suggested that that system could be delivered seven years quicker than the previous timescale and at £5 billion less.

We have here a system that does not necessarily deliver economic benefits for the people of Staffordshire, and it certainly does not help address the ecological issues raised by the hon. Members for Stafford, for Stone and for Lichfield, nor does it provide any great comfort that the northern powerhouse and the midlands engine will be properly connected.

The hon. Member for Lichfield stole most of the things I wanted to say, and he made the point that this is meant to be about connectivity but it really is not. Connectivity does not mean having to traipse across London to make a change, and it does not mean having to change stations outside Birmingham—and Birmingham Curzon Street to Birmingham New Street is quite a long walk for those carrying a bag or if there are a lot of people in the town centre that day.

The system does not address the east-west connectivity of Stoke-on-Trent, which is a greater issue. It does not look at the route that goes from north Wales all the way through to Derby. It does not seek to change the single-carriage railway we currently have that is often oversubscribed. It does not seek to deal with the fact that parts of the M6 are still not in the managed motorways system, so we drive north on the M6 and hit junction 13 and all of a sudden we drop down to three lanes and the traffic is a bit gnarly and not particularly flowing well, and then we reach junction 17 and all is fine again. That is part of the connectivity that we need.

The system certainly does not recognise the fact that junction 15 of the M6 is one of the worst junctions to navigate of all time. I have sometimes had to wait longer there to get on to the M6 than it has taken me to

get to Birmingham once on the M6, simply because of the way that junction works. So if we are talking about connectivity and there being a need for greater integration of transport provision, we must look at that as well as looking at high-speed rail.

The Secretary of State is not in his place at present, but the new Minister is and I welcome her to her role. Can we get some clear and categorical commitments that the existing Virgin service that we have from Stoke-on-Trent will not be diminished? Every time we ask that question, we get a slightly different answer; we get some sort of, “Yes, but, maybe, if,” but those terms do not fill us with confidence that any options that come out of the Crewe hub will not lead to a reduction overall in rail service from Stoke-on-Trent. If we include journeys from the constituency of the hon. Member for Stafford, we find that 5 million rail journeys are conducted out of Staffordshire every year. That is a large number of people, and they deserve to know what the future of their rail service will look like.

I would be grateful to the Minister if she gave greater consideration to ensuring that trains going north go past Macclesfield. There is a genuine economic boom to be harnessed in north Staffordshire and south Cheshire if we can have a proper high-speed rail link to Manchester and Manchester airport. That is a proposal that the local chambers of commerce have been putting together. I would welcome any words from her or her colleagues in the Department for Transport about the managed motorways system on the M6. We need to take a holistic approach if we are to make north Staffordshire and south Cheshire a good place to do business, deliver economic regeneration and, most importantly for my constituents, provide the rail service that they need. I support the principle of the Bill, but I cannot support its content, and if there is a Division on it, I am afraid that I will not offer my support to the Government this evening.

6.5 pm

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate, and I commit my support for the Bill's Second Reading. I have listened with interest to the entire debate, and I want to thank all those Members who have talked about the changes that need to be made. As a former resident of Birmingham, and someone who now lives close to it, I endorse what colleagues have said about connectivity across that city. I very much hope that the issues can be addressed in the final plans. We have heard arguments about how long it takes to walk between Birmingham New Street and Birmingham Curzon Street. My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) is obviously a very speedy walker; other Members walk more slowly. If that route could be joined up, it would be beneficial for everyone who passes through what is one of our nation's great cities.

I want to touch on the question of productivity, which is a key theme in the debate and links closely with what we are trying to achieve with transport infrastructure in this country. This is the main reason why I am supporting the Bill tonight. The Government brought forward many measures in the industrial strategy to boost productivity across the country. That is really important to all of us who live outside London and the south-east. We all acknowledge that wealth, jobs and

productivity are not spread evenly across our country, and one of the major things that we can do to address that is to build a decent high-speed train service that will enable our constituents, wherever they live, to travel up and down the country to access jobs and opportunities. The Government are making a fantastic commitment to this project, which underpins their mission to spread wealth and growth across the country.

Michelle Donelan: Is my hon. Friend aware that this is the biggest infrastructure project in Europe?

Rachel Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, because she reminds me of the significant amount—about £100 billion, I think—that Governments, including the previous Labour Government, have put forward. We have not built any new railways in this country since Victorian times, so it is really important that we are committing this funding now and in the future to build our railways. The project will be important to our constituents' quest to travel not only from London to the midlands, but from the midlands up to the north. It will also help our quest to take pressure off the overheated south.

Maggie Throup: My hon. Friend makes a very good argument. Does she agree that this is not just about freeing up the lines to the south, because there will be help for lines to some of the smaller stations where services do not stop at the moment? This is not just about people who want to travel from city to city; it is also about travel between towns.

Rachel Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I am sure that many of her constituents, like mine, have to travel to the nearest big city or town to get to work or leisure destinations. The project will help to free up capacity on those secondary lines.

The project will make an important contribution to our global competitiveness as a nation. Thanks to the Government's economic programme and their management of the economy, the UK is seen as a highly attractive destination for business investment. I want to see that continue. When foreign investors look at our country, they consider the transport links, because they want to invest in places from where it is easy to get around the country so that people will find their businesses attractive and want to work for them.

HS2 will benefit not only my constituents in Redditch, but the country as a whole. Although we will not benefit directly from HS2, we live only a short distance away from Birmingham, which will be a major stop on the line. Many of my constituents work, play and socialise in Birmingham, and the economic prospects of a place such as Redditch are intertwined with those of Birmingham and the larger west midlands conurbation. When the project is completed, we will see benefits for business and residents, and transport routes up and down the country will be opened up.

Michelle Donelan: Does my hon. Friend share my passion for the National College for High Speed Rail? It will not only help to fill the skills gap for high-speed rail, but train people so that we deal with the long-term skills gap in the engineering, design, technology and construction sectors.

Rachel Maclean: My hon. Friend is a great champion of engineering and I have been inspired by what she has done in her constituency. HS2 will definitely provide a boost for engineering careers. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) rightly said that we do not mention careers for women in engineering enough, and I want to go at least some way towards rectifying that. I hope that the National College for High Speed Rail will have a mission to bring more women into engineering so that this project provides a boost to help to address the dire lack of women in engineering and construction, particularly given that it is the Year of Engineering and also 100 years since women got the vote. There are many reasons to focus on that issue and ensure that we get things right.

Maggie Throup: We need engineers to construct the line, but we need them in the supply chain, too. Bombardier's base is close to my constituency, and I have met the female apprentice engineers who build the underground trains that we travel on every day. That is just one example of how much more we can do to spread the word that engineering is for men and women.

Rachel Maclean: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. We can all encourage employers to be role models and women to speak out. Businesses that value such careers should pay people decent salaries so that they do not all go off to work in the City. That is what this country needs. We need a dynamic economy that works for everyone.

Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I was until recently the Minister for the Year of Engineering, and I looked at the possibility of establishing an advisory group to examine exactly the issue my hon. Friend describes: how groups that are under-represented in engineering can get a foothold and, beyond that, a greater share of the opportunities. I wonder whether the current Minister will take that up and perhaps establish such a group, which would be in the spirit of what my hon. Friend suggests.

Rachel Maclean: I thank my right hon. Friend for his work. He is a champion of women not only in engineering, but in all other spheres, and I hope that the Minister will take up that suggestion.

Redditch's small businesses are hoping to take advantage of some of the contracts that are being awarded through HS2, both now and in the future. For example, Arrowvale Electronics makes world-leading equipment and hopes to benefit from the boost that an HS2 contract would provide. I know how hard it is for small businesses to tender for large-scale Government contracts, so I urge the Minister to say what she is doing to ensure that they can get a slice of the pie and benefit the diverse economy that we all want.

Gareth Snell: The hon. Lady makes the apt and correct argument that there ought to be opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises to get government contracts. What I fail to see is the logic behind her support for both this Bill and that argument, because if there were other projects to deal with regional rail inequalities and road upgrades—other large infrastructure projects that were not HS2—such opportunities would still exist.

Rachel Maclean: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I confess that I am not sure that I entirely followed its logic, but I think I get the point he is trying to make. There will be opportunities for small businesses, even if not directly—I am thinking of first contractors and even the supply chain further down, because many of these contracts involve a multitude of contractors. It is important that the Government look at this area, as I am sure that the Minister will. There will be a benefit for people and businesses in my constituency, and we hope there will be a particular benefit for women. Although the HS2 college is located in Birmingham, I hope that it will see what it can do to spread its opportunities for training beyond Birmingham city centre.

I have mentioned the process of contracting already, but I wish to touch on it again briefly. I am a member of the Select Committee on Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and just this morning we held our joint inquiry with the Select Committee on Work and Pensions on the collapse of Carillion. We have questioned the regulators and we will shortly be questioning the Carillion directors. Clearly, there are many lessons to learn from this collapse, which has affected many businesses and people, including those with pensions. I very much hope that when the Government award contracts for HS2, they will learn those lessons quickly so that we do not see the sorts of decisions that enabled companies such as Carillion to continue operating in a way that put pensions and small businesses at risk. I very much hope that the Minister will address those concerns, which I am sure we all have.

If this project is done right, we have an opportunity to do contracting right, and to boost not only small businesses but larger businesses up and down the country, providing opportunities for people to gain new skills. I am talking about apprenticeships, and getting more women in engineering and new sectors such as the rail industry. Such sectors might not have been traditionally attractive for people to consider, so let us make careers in them something to which young people aspire, so that we are going forward with the jobs of the future.

Michelle Donelan: Does my hon. Friend agree that one area that has been neglected in today's debate is the social and wellbeing aspect that the project can bring to people? We talk often in this place about loneliness and boosting tourism around the country, and improving our connectivity in the UK is an example of how we can achieve that.

Rachel Maclean: My hon. Friend makes an extremely perceptive point and I completely agree with it. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) was talking about the investment figures, and sometimes there are intangible benefits that are not always captured in an economic forecast. I hope that the Government are looking at that and looking at how we can maximise what my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) describes. Loneliness is a real scourge and when people who live in London can get on a train and go to Birmingham, or vice-versa, and people can go from Birmingham to the north, they can explore new parts of our beautiful country. We can also reduce the carbon footprint that would come from their getting on an airplane. Let us have more staycations. Let us explore our country, because we are blessed in our island nation with some of the most beautiful landscapes.

Sometimes that tourism benefit is lacking from our debate. How much better it would be if we could encourage holidays at home and boost the tourism—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I am trying to have the debate at least somewhere in scope, and I am sure the hon. Lady wants to get back on track—excuse the pun.

Rachel Maclean: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise for deviating a tiny bit off the track.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin) said in his extremely eloquent speech, it is impossible to build a major infrastructure project in any country without it having some impact on people, but we have to make sure that it is managed sensitively, that people are treated well and that their voices and concerns are heard. I hope that the Government reassure us that that will be done properly.

Infrastructure underpins our productivity. There is a strong push in our country towards devolution, and investment in high-speed rail is critical to that. Will the Minister say how this project will link to the devolved combined authorities agenda? I am close to the West Midlands combined authority—Redditch is a constituent member—where the Mayor holds powers over transport. It is important that HS2 links to transport in the mayors' regions so that we have an integrated solution to local transport issues. I have campaigned vigorously for better links between Birmingham and my town of Redditch, and I shall continue to do so. I hope that we see a push on that as capacity is freed up when the express trains leave the lines, thereby freeing up more scope for faster and better express services from secondary hubs into the main cities.

We in the west midlands are leading on jobs and growth. We have a booming economy. We are creating more jobs and more businesses are starting in our area than in any other part of the country. Redditch is on the edge of that, but we benefit from it and we want to harness it. We want our region to take control of our own destiny, as do, I am sure, colleagues from across the country. This high-speed rail project and other infrastructure projects will enable us to take charge of our own destiny and live our own lives and will encourage prosperity for all our constituents.

6.21 pm

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): I rise to speak in support of the Bill. It is positive that we are debating it and I very much enjoyed playing a role in its development.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin) said, passenger numbers on our railways have grown from just over 700 million to nearly 1.6 billion. That is a fantastic turnaround for an industry that had seen decades of decline. The industry now faces the challenge of how to cater for the growth it is experiencing. It is a completely different mindset, so it is positive that we are seeking finally to bite the bullet and construct some new capacity in the UK rail network. We have deferred this decision for far too long. Things such as small upgrades to reduce pinch points and thereby increase capacity have only deferred the big decisions. If we consider the fact that we have

not built a new railway line in England north of London since the reign of Queen Victoria, we realise just how overdue HS2 is.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that part of the reason why we now face a capacity issue and need to deliver HS2 is that the frailties of the nationalised rail service caused the shutdown of so much of the capacity throughout the country?

Andrew Jones: My hon. Friend makes an insightful point. We had decades of decline when the rail industry was in public hands. The turnaround post-privatisation has been dramatic. Opposition Members take that for granted and suggest that nationalisation is a way forward, but they have forgotten the complete change we saw, with the focus on customers and growth, and how that has delivered and been a key part of the UK's economic growth.

Christian Matheson: Will the hon. Gentleman not concede that that turnaround has taken place on the back of several hundred million pounds of public money being given to the train operators every year?

Andrew Jones: Well, the hon. Gentleman suggests that even more public money should go in, so I am not sure where his argument takes him, apart from round in a circle. We are seeing long-overdue public investment in the rail industry.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: We do not want to spend too much time on this issue, but the simple fact is that in the past, when the nationalised railway had to rely solely on the Government, the Government cut off its funding. With privatisation, it has attracted funding. The truth of the matter is that that has seen growth in the rail industry that has made something like HS2 absolutely necessary.

Andrew Jones: My right hon. Friend is as wise as ever. Not only do we have public money going into our railways, but we are seeing private investment attracted into our railways and therefore more investment in aggregate. We have this urgent need for capacity within our network to cater for the growth both in passengers and in freight.

After years of decline, this decision has been taken to go for growth. The next question that successive Governments have faced is what form that should take. Should it be investment in the classic rail network, or should we be embracing new technology? Well, we should of course be embracing new technology. Perhaps it is again worth remembering that that has not always been the case under nationalised industries. The UK built its last steam engine in 1960, and it was only in 1964 that the Japanese introduced the bullet train. The Government are buying investment not in phone boxes, but in fibre broadband. Technology should of course be at the heart of our investment decisions.

Gareth Snell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way; he is being generous. I do not disagree with his arguments about the need for infrastructure investment or the need for additional capacity, but this Bill in particular is about the route between the west midlands and Crewe. The route that has been chosen is the most

[Gareth Snell]

expensive that it could be, delivering the least economic benefits for Staffordshire and causing the most ecological damage. That is what we should be discussing this evening.

Andrew Jones: That has been part of the discussion throughout the day. I have to say that I missed some of the speeches. I am sorry to hear what the hon. Gentleman had to say, but I simply do not agree with his basic premise. I have travelled the route, met local communities along the route and met local government leaders and local businesses along the route. I simply do not agree with his premise.

The issues raised by colleagues along the line of the route are of course entirely fair and legitimate, and they are right to speak up for their constituents. It is difficult delivering infrastructure—whether it is transport, digital or housing infrastructure—without causing some environmental impact. It is clearly right for the Minister to listen to the concerns raised by Members and to respond appropriately. I know that when I was part of the Transport team, we did nothing but listen and try to address those issues. I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), will be in the same grain.

Despite all the sensitivities that have been raised, it is very encouraging that we have a Government who are seeking to deliver HS2 as fast as possible and have brought forward HS2 phase 2a. Views have been well articulated today. The reasons why I am so supportive of the development are that it will deliver key strategic benefits for the UK in terms of economic growth and the skills legacy. I have visited the two HS2 colleges in Doncaster and in Birmingham—only during their construction phase; not since they have progressed further—and I was incredibly impressed by what I saw. They offer great facilities for skills development for people taking apprenticeships. They will learn all the skills that we will need not just for this project, but for future high-speed rail projects.

Rachel Maclean: I hope the House will forgive me for raising this issue again, but because he has visited the college and I have not done so, will he tell me what progress he saw on the initiative for getting more women into the train and engineering industry while he was there?

Andrew Jones: My hon. Friend makes a very interesting point. It was reasonably hard to see that from the project in development, but the teams I met working in the colleges were absolutely clear that they will be drawing on as much talent as possible, which will obviously mean bringing more women into engineering. We have a huge shortfall in the number of engineers in the UK. Historically, we have failed to draw on as wide a talent base as possible. The more we talk about the matter in this place, the more we follow it through within communities, and the more we offer a series of careers that can deliver high-quality jobs that solve community problems, the more women we will attract into the industry.

Mr John Hayes: Cutting-edge strategic decisions always bring with them a certain degree of contention, which is why Governments in democratic polities too rarely make

such decisions. They also bring with them opportunity. One thinks of Crossrail. At the beginning, there were doubters, but Crossrail has, without doubt, led to the development of skills of the kind my hon. Friend described, the creation of opportunities, and the seeding of jobs, which have led to us being world beating. The same thing can happen in respect of HS2.

Andrew Jones: My right hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I entirely agree with him. For those who have not yet had the opportunity to go to see Crossrail, the opportunity may well occur again as Crossrail has been taking people down to have a look at its sites. What Crossrail has achieved is fantastic. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch will shortly be able to visit one of the HS2 colleges, where she will see just the difference that the project has made.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I would just say in response to the previous intervention that there would have been far fewer problems had the tunnel gone the entire way under the Chilterns. It would have been advisable to do that. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a real danger that we will not have the engineering capacity to complete these projects on budget and on time, and that, as we currently lack so many skills in engineering, it will be hard to make up that deficit?

Andrew Jones: My right hon. Friend makes two points. We have previously discussed the issue of tunnelling in the Chilterns. I feel more optimistic about the project as a whole. I do not feel that the current skills gap will hinder the delivery of the project, and I am clear that that will not happen because of the actions taken to bring more people into the sector. The fact that we have to deliver skills via building colleges suggests that the Government have been taking seriously the issue of skills in the railways.

The key reason that phase 2a is such a positive project is that more people will benefit from HS2. Crewe is a rail hub. More passengers will be able to access the benefits that the HS2 network will deliver. I want us to go forward to further develop high-speed rail in other parts of the UK. I am particularly thinking about Northern Powerhouse Rail across the Pennines. I look forward very much to seeing the progress of the Bill and the rail line that will come from it, and how the Government will work with local communities and local government to maximise the opportunities that this line presents.

The HS2 argument has changed from whether we should have it, to how we can maximise the opportunities when it arrives. Those opportunities will be commercial, environmental and in skills. I see huge opportunity throughout the project, which is why I will support the Bill should we divide on it this evening.

6.32 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I have listened carefully to today's debate and thank all hon. Members for their contributions. I have heard the concerns and opportunities that the second phase of HS2 will bring. The high-speed rail journey began under the last Labour Government, who recognised the need for greater capacity and better connectivity.

The Victorian rail network has served us well, but nearly 200 years on it is overstretched. If we are to see a significant modal shift in the future—as Labour encourages—and if we want to see rail as the vehicle of choice for distance travel, we cannot stand back and do nothing, nor should we. It was from the Victorian age that our nation witnessed the foresight of a new generation of engineers to radically advance our country and the world. Yet today our trains are slow, crowded, and depend on outdated technology and infrastructure. It is therefore vital that, as a nation, we put ourselves in the driving seat again, strive to be world leaders and propagate the next generation of engineers, with both women and men taking on new careers in the sector.

Sir William Cash: Does the hon. Lady agree that it was not only the engineers of the Victorian age—great as they were—but also the capital that was provided which ensured that these schemes were actually put into effect?

Rachael Maskell: We could spend a long time talking about the shenanigans that also took place in this House over the creation of the Victorian railways.

Future capacity is vital. Although longer trains, digital signalling and infrastructure upgrades connecting with new rolling stock may get us through the current period, we will need more lines if we are to look further ahead. If we are to develop more lines, it is right that we seriously consider where they go.

HS2 gives us a real opportunity to think about the future of our country and how we connect it to address the unacceptable levels of inequality across Britain. HS2 is not just about the route itself but about freeing up capacity on the west coast main line and on our roads. This will bring benefit to current road and rail users, as well as creating new opportunities for further development of passenger and, importantly, freight paths on the west coast, as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) highlighted and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) asked for.

Of course, Labour would, as always, be looking at the bigger picture, embedding HS2 at the heart of a wider rail and transport strategy. It would be absolutely nonsensical to make such significant investment in a new rail line if we were not properly upgrading the north-west to north-east routes—the HS3 routes. The Secretary of State is not in his place at the moment, but I hope that he will take heed of this. It is not too late to reverse his decision to de-electrify the plans and put power back into the northern powerhouse. The cities in the north demand it. We believe that HS2, integrated with a new, dynamic rail plan, must bring economic investment to the midlands and the north, creating good jobs for a secure future, not least with the new skills required in designing and constructing HS2 through the 30,000 jobs it will create.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) eloquently set out a strong economic case for proper connectivity through a regional rail hub at Crewe, this being at the centre of a network to feed Cheshire and the wider counties, and north Wales. That is vital for the future economy of Crewe. I can think of no better politician than my hon. Friend to speak up for her town and to make that case.

We must remember that HS2 is not an entirety in itself but a bridge to enable economic growth and industrial investment. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) made a similar point, again focusing on how to build the economies of the north-west by ensuring connectivity. It is vital that HS2 talks to the region, and we must dissect this in Committee to ensure that it does. I note his calling for the line to north Wales through Chester. We should not dismiss this opportunity for some of the communities in the UK who most need this infrastructure stimulus. My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Jo Platt) also stressed the need to focus on connectivity. A clear call for integration has been made—one that Labour will support.

Phase 2a is set to deliver nearly £4 billion of benefits over the 60-year appraisal period, with a cost-benefit ratio of 1:9 and wider economic impacts. This indicates upper-end medium value for money, but accelerating this phase will represent very high value for money. Around Crewe, we will see 40,000 new jobs and 7,000 homes, opening up the life chances that have not been seen in the area before and starting to address the complete economic imbalance that we have in our country. Extending this to the Constellation Partnership will deliver 100,000 new homes and 120,000 jobs—20,000 in the Cheshire science corridor alone, putting the UK on the international stage in terms of science and technology.

I assure the House that Labour will never stand in the way of providing such opportunities to communities that have been crying out for investment—a point powerfully made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill).

Jonathan Edwards: I take the point that the hon. Lady is making. However, the KPMG report that looked into the impact of HS2 on various economies across the British state indicated that south Wales would be absolutely hammered. Is the Labour party not at all concerned about the economy of south Wales?

Rachael Maskell: Of course we are deeply concerned about the economy of south Wales. That is why we electrified the line to south Wales that helped to boost the economy in that region, and also ensured that HS2 fed into north Wales, helping the whole of the Welsh economy to grow.

We have some concerns, and it is absolutely right that there is tight scrutiny of every part of the project, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) highlighted. At a time when the economy continues to fail, not least in the north, Labour understands why people are questioning the economic benefit of spending £55.7 billion on a rail route. This 36-mile section will cost £3.5 billion. At a time when our public services are crying out for investment, it is right that critical questions are asked about the project. However, the benefits are also clear, and it cannot be an either/or. This is about getting the Government's economic strategy right. We will make sure that every decision brings maximum inward investment, as the economic opportunity is already estimated to be £92 billion across HS2.

We hear the concerns about the environment. It is vital that real consideration is given in Committee to the impact of construction and of the final network on

[*Rachael Maskell*]

the environment. That cannot just be about mitigation elsewhere, and I will push for us to maximise this opportunity. I will also want to ensure in Committee that modern, advanced engineering is able to find answers to the many questions raised about the environment and how the habitats directive, no matter which side of Brexit we are on, is seen in its fullest sense.

The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), who spoke particularly well on behalf of his constituents, highlighted how important it is to ensure that his constituents' concerns are picked up. I assure him that in Committee, we will listen carefully to the points he has to make. The right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) spoke of her vast experience in dealing with HS2. It is really important that lessons are learned and that there is good communication, and we must certainly end corridor deals.

Sir William Cash: The hon. Lady just said that in Committee, we will do such and such. I think she may have misunderstood the nature of the procedure. It will be a hybrid Bill Select Committee, not a Committee of the House.

Rachael Maskell: I thank the hon. Gentleman, but I do understand the process. Petitions will be brought forward, and we will listen carefully to them.

Labour will want to ensure that all opportunities for cyclists and walkers are harnessed from the HS2 route. Not much has been said about that to date. Labour is committed to cleaning up our air and our environment by cleaning up on the actions of Government when it comes to transport. Labour believes that investment in public and, I must add, publicly owned transport—we are not going back to the past, but moving forward to the future—is the way forward to deliver a rail system fit for the 21st century.

6.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): It is with great pleasure that I close the Second Reading debate. This is my first Bill, so there is no pressure; I will try to do it some justice.

HS2 presents a huge opportunity for the country as a whole. It is a major undertaking but an essential one. Throughout history, improving connectivity has led to innovation, economic advancement and increased productivity. HS2 is no different. This project is a significant long-term capital investment in the country's infrastructure. It will deliver substantial economic growth and returns, creating the wealth we need to spend on all our priorities, whether those are health or education programmes.

We are ambitious for our country. My hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) spoke about productivity, being ambitious and ensuring that we train engineers for the future. We are ambitious for all of our country and determined to leave no one behind. HS2 is what the Government are all about, as it will enable future generations to thrive.

HS2 is a significant investment, but it is also a necessary one, and it is important that we get it right. With that in mind, I would like to thank all right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions. There were 21 contributions in all, and I will do my best to respond to all of them.

HS2 has the potential to transform our rail network. As a brand-new line, it is the best option for creating more space on our busy railways. By freeing up space on the west coast main line between the west midlands and Crewe, phase 2a has the potential to deliver much-needed additional capacity on a constrained part of our network—reducing overcrowding and making journeys more reliable, creating the opportunity for more varied and frequent services across the region, and benefiting Nuneaton, Tamworth, Lichfield and Rugeley.

The benefits will spread well beyond the railway itself. Faster and easier travel will put more opportunities within reach of millions of people. HS2 will connect people to jobs, and businesses to suppliers. It will bring new investment, employment and regeneration to towns and cities up and down the country. HS2 has the potential to support hundreds of thousands of jobs, including 2,000 apprentices. Most importantly—this was mentioned by many Members—70% of jobs created by HS2 will be outside London. It will help to train a new generation of skilled workers, including through the National College for High Speed Rail.

Many Members—such as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill)—spoke about investment in the north. The north of England, in particular, stands to benefit from HS2. This part of the route, between Birmingham and Crewe, has been brought forward by six years so that we can deliver more of the benefits of HS2 more quickly.

We want to transform journeys for passengers and create the capacity the north needs to flourish, and delivering HS2 is an essential part of that. We are already carrying out the biggest investment in the north of England for a generation, spending £13 billion on northern transport, which is the largest such amount in Government history. This is not about the north against the south. Investing in our rail network is a key part of the Government's plan for a connected Britain, and we are committed to improving journeys for passengers throughout the country.

HS2 will bring benefits to cities across the north before the construction of phase 2. Phase 1 will reduce journey times towards, for example, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow, and will release capacity between Birmingham and London. By shifting long-distance services on to the brand-new railway, HS2 will release capacity on existing routes and provide options for new or additional local, cross-country, commuter and freight services in many areas.

Phase 2a, between the west midlands and Crewe, will further improve journey times and bring more benefits to the north. HS2 is a key component in the delivery of Northern Powerhouse Rail, our vision for significantly improving journey times and service frequency between major cities in the north of England. This is why we have announced £300 million of funding to future-proof HS2 to accommodate future junctions. With Transport for the North and Midlands Connect, we are developing a clear set of proposals for connections that would allow Northern Powerhouse Rail and Midlands Connect services to use HS2.

Several Members have spoken about Crewe and Stoke, and I hope to be able to respond to some of their questions. The HS2 business case has always included a

plan to run high-speed train services to Crewe, but I know there is a strong ambition to achieve even more. I visited Crewe just last week, and I was impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of Cheshire East Council and the Constellation Partnership to make the most of the opportunities that HS2 will bring, including jobs and homes.

I agree with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) that a Crewe hub would generate significant opportunities not only for Crewe itself, but for the surrounding region. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) spoke very clearly in support of Stoke being served by HS2. As the Secretary of State set out in his opening speech, we are very clear about the important economic role that Stoke-on-Trent plays in the wider region, and we want it to be served by HS2.

Gareth Snell: Under the current plans, Stoke will be served by just one HS2 train an hour. Will the Minister consider upping that to two an hour to generate the economic benefit she has just committed herself to?

Ms Ghani: We are a long way from the timetables, but if the hon. Gentleman will let me continue for a moment, I will talk about how and when we will respond to the consultation undertaken on this very section.

We are looking at what would be needed for phase 2a to support a future Crewe hub, but as the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich is aware, Crewe is a strategically important location on the rail network and the existing infrastructure is very complex. In our plans for HS2, we must ensure that we get things right. That is why last year we launched a consultation to look at whether we can provide an even better service to Crewe—one that could serve more destinations and allow more trains to stop. We are considering the responses, and will respond shortly. Realising the full vision would need the local council to work with us on funding, and my Department is working closely with Cheshire East on this. Some elements could be taken forward by Network Rail, under its existing permitted development rights, and we understand the whole-hub vision would require a junction north of Crewe back on to HS2, but that has to be a decision for phase 2b, as we will not build the relevant part of the HS2 line north of Crewe in phase 2a.

Laura Smith: I am wondering whether we can get some clarity as to when we will get the answer to this consultation—not a “You will get it in due course” answer. We would quite like to know when that will be.

Ms Ghani: We are working through the details. We will try and do it as quickly as we can, but it will be shortly—this year. I am sorry; I cannot provide more details now, but I will write to the hon. Member and let her know. This is very complicated and cannot be rushed. We need to make the decisions for the right reasons.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I welcome the passion with which the Minister is approaching her brief, but may I bring her back down to reality? The constituent I mentioned in my speech, who has been so badly affected by HS2 phase 1 and so badly let down by HS2 Ltd, which is not paying the bills it promised, and is contracted, to pay, is now on antidepressants and fears that this sort of thing

is happening to many other people up and down the line. Could the Minister put some of her passion for the project into protecting the people who are so badly affected by the project?

Ms Ghani: My right hon. Friend has raised many issues about HS2 Ltd, its relationship with our constituents and its poor performance in communication previously, with the Secretary of State and with Ministers who have held my current position. I will indeed endeavour to hold HS2 Ltd to account. I am more than happy to take on board any cases that my right hon. Friend wishes to present to me, and I am grateful for her words in opening her speech. I will do my best to outlive previous Ministers in this position.

To turn to the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), the consultation on the Crewe hub that we published last year included service pattern options that will reap benefits for Chester, north and south Wales, Shrewsbury and the wider region. As I mentioned, we expect to respond to that consultation shortly.

Sir William Cash: I think I can say this on behalf of all those who are liable to petition in Staffordshire, thus representing several constituencies here: will the Minister do everything possible to help those petitioners to present their case, and show maximum understanding of what is affecting them, right the way through from one end of Staffordshire to the other?

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend has been a great champion for his constituents and has made his concerns known to me, the Secretary of State and previous Ministers. The Committee is the best place for him to represent his constituents and encourage them to petition the Committee.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) raised an incident in Colne Valley. I expect HS2 Ltd and any contractors to treat everyone with respect. The reported behaviour that she mentioned is completely unacceptable and falls well below the standard that I would expect. I am happy to take up the case on her behalf.

The My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) gave a very passionate speech, which I believe is now trending on YouTube, with his walk back and forth in the Chamber. I am not quite convinced about his journey times within Birmingham, and as a proud Brummie I would not mind spending eight or 22 minutes walking around Birmingham as I think it is a great place to be, but HS2 is connected to existing rail stations up and down the network, including Euston, Manchester, Crewe, Leeds and Sheffield.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) raised a number of concerns. I know that she has spoken repeatedly to me, my predecessor and the Secretary of State, and that too she is a strong champion for her constituents. On Long Eaton, HS2 Ltd has had meetings with my hon. Friend, valuation agents and residents to try to progress this issue. HS2 Ltd is mindful that there are elderly and vulnerable residents involved, and these cases are getting very senior attention within HS2 Ltd to try to find a resolution. I do not doubt that my hon. Friend will continue to work with me to ensure that her constituents are satisfied with the responses that they get from HS2 Ltd.

[Ms Ghani]

Let me turn to the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield and others about ancient woodland. Of course, ancient woodland is irreplaceable, and although we cannot fully compensate for all impacts, we have committed to use best practice measures, such as enhancing links between woodland, reusing ancient woodland soils and creating new mixed deciduous woodland. More than 75 hectares of new woodland will be planted along the phase 2a scheme to partially compensate for the loss of 10.5 hectares of ancient woodland. It is unfortunate, but we are doing our very best to compensate for the woodland that is being taken.

I am unable to respond to many other Members' comments, and I will endeavour to write to them all, but I want quickly to move on to the question of engagement. Many Members mentioned that HS2 Ltd has fallen short of expectations as to how it should communicate with Members as well as their constituents. I expect HS2 Ltd to reach extremely high standards in all its engagement activities, and I say to the House that I am sorry if in any of these cases the level of engagement has fallen short. I encourage any Members with particular concerns to meet me to discuss them. I will listen, and I will endeavour to hold HS2 Ltd to account. As a project, we will continue to learn and improve.

There have been a number of conversations about the cost of the project. To clarify, the 2015 spending review reconfirmed the Government's commitment to HS2 and set a long-term funding envelope of £55.7 billion. The Government are determined, and are on course, to deliver HS2 within this. HS2 is a major investment but a necessary one. For every £1 of investment, it will deliver more than £2 of benefits. That is more than £92 billion of benefits to this country before we even talk about the 100,000 jobs, 70% of which are outside London.

I fear that I have run out of time, so I must come to a close. We have made the case for HS2 and we now need to get on and build it. This country invented the railways, and we should be proud of our Victorian pioneers, but we cannot continue to rely on the network that they built. Around the world, our global competitors are already investing heavily in high-speed rail. We are now catching up, and I do not want us to be part of a generation that sits back while others move forward. I was touched by what my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin) said: when trains were first offered from Birmingham to London, people said that canals were adequate. Let us not be that generation.

Let us make no mistake: this country can deliver major infrastructure projects, and we should have confidence that we can deliver HS2. We have already delivered the 2012 Olympics and Crossrail—two examples of what we can achieve when we are ambitious, believe in our ability as a nation to get big infrastructure projects done, and commit to investing in our country and in our future. This Government have a vision for a stronger, fairer country within an economy that works for everyone. Infrastructure is at the heart of our industrial strategy and that for the north—for a modern country with a modern transport infrastructure to match. HS2 will play a vital role in this. I therefore commend this Bill, my first Bill, to the House.

6.58 pm

Michael Fabricant: As I intend to vote against Second Reading, for all the reasons I have given, and as that has the same effect, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 295, Noes 12.

Division No. 109]**[6.59 pm****AYES**

Afolami, Bim	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Afriyie, Adam	Docherty, Leo
Aldous, Peter	Dodds, rh Nigel
Allan, Lucy	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Allen, Heidi	Donelan, Michelle
Amess, Sir David	Double, Steve
Andrew, Stuart	Dowden, Oliver
Argar, Edward	Doyle-Price, Jackie
Atkins, Victoria	Drax, Richard
Bacon, Mr Richard	Duguid, David
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi	Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Baker, Mr Steve	Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Baldwin, Harriett	Ellis, Michael
Barclay, Stephen	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Bebb, Guto	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Benyon, rh Richard	Elphicke, Charlie
Beresford, Sir Paul	Eustice, George
Berry, Jake	Evans, Mr Nigel
Blackman, Bob	Evennett, rh David
Blunt, Crispin	Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Boles, Nick	Farron, Tim
Bone, Mr Peter	Fernandes, Suella
Bowie, Andrew	Field, rh Mark
Bradley, Ben	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Bradley, rh Karen	Ford, Vicky
Brereton, Jack	Foster, Kevin
Brine, Steve	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Buckland, Robert	Frazer, Lucy
Burghart, Alex	Freeman, George
Burns, Conor	Freer, Mike
Burt, rh Alistair	Fysh, Mr Marcus
Cairns, rh Alun	Garnier, Mark
Cartledge, James	Gauke, rh Mr David
Caulfield, Maria	Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Chalk, Alex	Gibb, rh Nick
Chishtii, Rehman	Girvan, Paul
Chope, Sir Christopher	Glen, John
Churchill, Jo	Goldsmith, Zac
Clark, Colin	Goodwill, Mr Robert
Clark, rh Greg	Gove, rh Michael
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Graham, Luke
Clarke, Mr Simon	Graham, Richard
Cleverly, James	Grant, Bill
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Grayling, rh Chris
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Green, Chris
Collins, Damian	Green, rh Damian
Costa, Alberto	Greening, rh Justine
Courts, Robert	Griffiths, Andrew
Cox, Mr Geoffrey	Grogan, John
Crabb, rh Stephen	Gyimah, Mr Sam
Creagh, Mary	Hair, Kirstene
Crouch, Tracey	Halfon, rh Robert
Davies, Chris	Hall, Luke
Davies, David T. C.	Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Davies, Glyn	Hammond, Stephen
Davis, rh Mr David	Hancock, rh Matt
Dinenage, Caroline	Hands, rh Greg

Hanson, rh David
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hermon, Lady
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 Maynard, Paul
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria

Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Powell, Lucy
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory

Stone, Jamie
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh

Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Kelly Tolhurst and
 Mims Davies

NOES

Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Cash, Sir William
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Fabricant, Michael
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Hollobone, Mr Philip

Holloway, Adam
 Lucas, Caroline
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Williams, Hywel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Ben Lake and
 Jeremy Lefroy

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

HIGH SPEED RAIL (WEST MIDLANDS - CREWE) BILL (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(1) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of the Act, and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—(*Chris Heaton-Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Orders Nos. 15 and 41A),

That at this day's sitting the Motion in the name of Andrea Leadsom relating to Business of the House may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour, and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) will not apply.—(*Chris Heaton-Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

Ordered,

That in respect of the Motions in the name of Secretary Chris Grayling relating to

(1) the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill; and

(2) Positions for which additional salaries are payable for the purposes of section 4A(2) of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings not later than one and a half hours after the

commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order (notwithstanding, in respect of item (2) above, the provisions of paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 16); such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Chris Heaton-Harris.*)

HIGH SPEED RAIL (WEST MIDLANDS - CREWE) BILL (COMMITTAL)

Ordered,

1. That the Bill be committed to a Select Committee of five members, all of whom are to be nominated by the Selection Committee.

2. That in determining the composition of the Select Committee the Selection Committee shall nominate three members from the Government and two from the Opposition.

3. That there shall stand referred to the Select Committee—

(a) any petition against the Bill submitted to the Private Bill Office between 30 January 2018 and 26 February 2018, and

(b) any petition which has been submitted to the Private Bill Office and in which the petitioners complain of any amendment as proposed in the filled-up Bill or of any matter which has arisen during the progress of the Bill before the Select Committee,

(and references in this sub-paragraph to the submission of a petition are to its submission electronically, by post or in person).

4. That, notwithstanding the practice of the House that appearances on petitions against an opposed private bill be required to be entered at the first meeting of the Select Committee on the bill, in the case of any such petitions as are mentioned in paragraph 3(a) above on which appearances are not entered at that meeting, the Select Committee shall appoint a later day or days on which it will require appearances on those petitions to be entered.

5. That any petitioners whose petitions stand referred to the Select Committee shall, subject to the rules and orders of the House, be entitled to be heard upon their petition by themselves, their counsel, representatives or parliamentary agents provided that the petition is prepared in conformity with the rules and orders of the House; and the member in charge of the Bill shall be entitled to be heard through counsel or agents in favour of the Bill against any such petition.

6. That in applying the rules of the House in relation to parliamentary agents, any reference to a petitioner in person shall be treated as including a reference to a duly authorised member or officer of an organisation, group or body.

7. That the Select Committee have power to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place and to report from day to day the minutes of evidence taken before it.

8. That the Select Committee have power to make special reports from time to time.

9. That three be the quorum of the Select Committee.—(*Chris Heaton-Harris.*)

HIGH SPEED RAIL (WEST MIDLANDS - CREWE) BILL (INSTRUCTION)

Ordered,

That it be an Instruction to the Select Committee to which the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill is committed to deal with the Bill as follows:

1. The Committee shall treat the principle of the Bill, as determined by the House on the Bill's Second Reading, as comprising—

(a) the provision of a high speed railway between a junction with Phase One of High Speed 2 near Fradley Wood, in Staffordshire, and a junction with the West Coast Mainline near Crewe in Cheshire,

(b) in relation to the railway set out on the plans deposited in July 2017 in connection with the Bill in the office of the Clerk of the Parliaments and the Private Bill Office of the House of Commons, its broad route alignment, and

(c) the fact that there are to be no new stations on, or additional spurs from, the railway mentioned in sub-paragraph (b);

and those matters shall accordingly not be at issue during proceedings of the Committee.

2.- (1) The Committee shall have power to consider any amendments proposed by the member in charge of the Bill which, if the Bill were a private bill, could not be made except upon petition for additional provision.

(2) Sub-paragraph (1) applies only so far as the amendments proposed by the member in charge of the Bill fall within the principle of the Bill as provided for by paragraph 1 above.

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—(*Chris Heaton-Harris.*)

HIGH SPEED RAIL (WEST MIDLANDS - CREWE) BILL (CARRY-OVER)

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to proceedings on the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill:

Suspension at end of current Session

1. Further proceedings on the Bill shall be suspended from the day on which this Session of Parliament ends ("the current Session") until the next Session of Parliament ("the next Session").

2. If a Bill is presented in the next Session in the same terms as those in which the Bill stood when proceedings on it were suspended in the current Session—

(a) the Bill so presented shall be ordered to be printed and shall be deemed to have been read the first and second time;

(b) the Standing Orders and practice of the House applicable to the Bill, so far as complied with or dispensed with in the current Session, shall be deemed to have been complied with or (as the case may be) dispensed with in the next Session; and

(c) the Bill shall be dealt with in accordance with—

(i) paragraph 3, if proceedings in Select Committee were not completed when proceedings on the Bill were suspended,

(ii) paragraph 4, if proceedings in Public Bill Committee were begun but not completed when proceedings on the Bill were suspended,

(iii) paragraph 5, if the Bill was waiting to be considered when proceedings on it were suspended,

(iv) paragraph 6, if the Bill was waiting for proceedings in legislative grand committee when proceedings on it were suspended,

(v) paragraph 7, if the Bill was waiting for third reading when proceedings on it were suspended, or

(vi) paragraph 8, if the Bill has been read the third time and sent to the House of Lords.

3. If this paragraph applies—

(a) the Bill shall stand committed to a Select Committee of such Members as were members of the Committee when proceedings on the Bill were suspended in the current Session;

(b) any instruction of the House to the Committee in the current Session shall be an instruction to the Committee on the Bill in the next Session;

(c) all petitions submitted in the current Session which stand referred to the Committee and which have not been withdrawn, and any petition submitted between the day on which the current Session ends and the day on which proceedings on the Bill are resumed in the next Session in accordance with this Order, shall stand referred to the Committee in the next Session;

- (d) any minutes of evidence taken and any papers laid before the Committee in the current Session shall stand referred to the Committee in the next Session;
- (e) only those petitions mentioned in sub-paragraph (c), and any petition which may be submitted to the Private Bill Office and in which the petitioners complain of any proposed additional provision or of any matter which has arisen during the progress of the Bill before the Committee in the next Session, shall stand referred to the Committee;
- (f) any petitioners whose petitions stand referred to the Committee in the next Session shall, subject to the rules and orders of the House, be entitled to be heard upon their petition by themselves, their counsel, representatives or parliamentary agents provided that the petition is prepared and signed in conformity with the rules and orders of the House; and the Member in charge of the Bill shall be entitled to be heard through counsel or agents in favour of the Bill against any such petition;
- (g) in applying the rules of the House in relation to parliamentary agents, any reference to a petitioner in person shall be treated as including a reference to a duly authorised member or officer of an organisation, group or body;
- (h) the Committee shall have power to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from day to day minutes of evidence taken before it;
- (i) the Committee shall have power to make special reports from time to time;
- (j) three shall be the quorum of the Committee;
- (k) any person registered in the current Session as a parliamentary agent entitled to practise as such in opposing Bills only who, at the time when proceedings on the Bill were suspended in the current Session, was employed in opposing the Bill shall be deemed to have been registered as such a parliamentary agent in the next Session.

4. If this paragraph applies, the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and to have been re-committed to a Public Bill Committee.

5. If this paragraph applies—

- (a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and from the Public Bill Committee, and
- (b) the Bill shall be set down as an order of the day for consideration.

6. If this paragraph applies—

- (a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and from the Public Bill Committee and to have been considered, and
- (b) the Bill shall be set down as an order of the day for further consideration.

7. If this paragraph applies—

- (a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and from the Public Bill Committee, to have been considered and to have completed any proceedings in legislative grand committee, and
- (b) the Bill shall be set down as an order of the day for third reading.

8. If this paragraph applies, the Bill shall be deemed to have passed through all its stages in this House.

Other

9. In paragraph 1 above the reference to further proceedings does not include proceedings under Standing Order 224A(8) (deposit of supplementary environmental information).

10. In paragraph 3 above references to the submission of a petition are to its submission electronically, by post or in person.

That the above Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—(*Chris Heaton-Harris.*)

HIGH SPEED RAIL (WEST MIDLANDS - CREWE) BILL: SELECT COMMITTEE (ADDITIONAL SALARIES)

Ordered,

That the Order of the House of 19 March 2013 (Positions for which additional salaries are payable for the purposes of section 4A(2) of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009) be amended, in paragraph (1)(a), by inserting, in the appropriate place, “the Select Committee on the High Speed Rail (West Midlands–Crewe) Bill”.—(*Chris Heaton-Harris.*)

Business Without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CAPITAL GAINS TAX

That the draft Double Taxation Relief and International Tax Enforcement (Colombia) Order 2017, which was laid before this House on 14 September 2017, be approved.—(*Chris Heaton-Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

That the draft Double Taxation Relief and International Tax Enforcement (Lesotho) Order 2017, which was laid before this House on 14 September 2017, be approved.—(*Chris Heaton-Harris.*)

The Deputy Speaker’s opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 31 January (Standing Order No. 41A).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):
With the leave of the House, we will take motions 11 to 14 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

RATING AND VALUATION

That the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (Non-Domestic Rating Multipliers) (England) Order 2017, which was laid before this House on 20 December 2017, be approved.

BETTING, GAMBLING AND LOTTERIES

That the draft Gambling Act 2005 (Amendment of Schedule 6) Order, which was laid before this House on 14 December 2017, be approved.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

That the draft Community Infrastructure Levy (Amendment) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 13 December 2017, be approved.

IMMIGRATION

That the draft Transfer of Responsibility for Relevant Children (Extension to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) Regulations 2017, which were laid before this House on 7 December 2017, be approved.—(*Chris Heaton-Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Universal Credit Programme

7.17 pm

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The roll-out of universal credit continues to be a matter of concern in my constituency. Some of my constituents have been temporarily unable to pay their bills because of the long

[Helen Goodman]

waiting period between one benefit and another, and the bailiffs were sent around. There is clear evidence of discrimination against women in the way in which the system works. People who have made national insurance contributions and lose their jobs do not get unemployment benefit as they used to on the basis of six months' contributions if their husbands are in work. I am very grateful to Samantha Townsend, who has collected some 1,100 signatures.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Bishop Auckland, Shildon, Spennymoor and Teesdale,

Declares that the Universal Credit programme is pushing people into poverty, debt and homelessness.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department for Work and Pensions to pause and fix Universal Credit before its rollout in Bishop Auckland, Shildon, Spennymoor and Teesdale.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002096]

Lorry Parking

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

7.19 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): A few weeks ago, in the early hours of the morning, a car carrying four men crashed into a parked lorry on the edge of the A2 just south of Faversham. Three of the men were killed; the other was seriously injured. We might never know exactly what happened, and I am absolutely not blaming the lorry driver, but that stretch of the A2 is a well-known spot for what we call lorry fly-parking. Fly-parking is when lorries park in lay-bys or on slip roads, hard shoulders, pavements or verges, often at the edge of busy roads such as the A2, the A20 and the A249 in my constituency. Sometimes they also park up quiet country lanes or in industrial estates and housing estates. In general, these are places where lorries should not be parked for more than the few minutes that might be needed for a delivery or an unexpected stop. Sometimes they park legally, and sometimes illegally. Sometimes they park perfectly safely, albeit inconveniently, but at other times, unfortunately, they park dangerously.

This was not the first fatality in my constituency involving a parked lorry. A 74-year-old woman died after crashing into a lorry parked on the hard shoulder at junction 7 of the M20 a couple of years ago. Whatever the cause of the latest crash, this horrific accident should focus our minds on the problem, focus our attention on the need for more lorry parking spaces, and focus our energies on ending lorry fly-parking. Lorry fly-parking is dangerous. There is a danger to other motorists from lorries lined up, bumper to bumper, in lay-bys, sometimes jutting precariously out into the road. There is a danger to the police officers who risk their lives walking along the hard shoulder at night with hundreds of cars speeding by as they move alongside illegally parked trucks. There is also a danger to the lorry drivers themselves when they are in charge of a heavy goods vehicle but have not had a proper rest. A busy roadside with traffic thundering past is hardly a good place to get a proper night's sleep.

The haulage industry is, rightly, tightly regulated. Drivers must record their hours on a tachograph and take breaks every four and a half hours. When the time comes to stop, they have to stop, but the roadside is not only a bad place to sleep, but a pretty bad place to stop off in general for a driver, as it has no security, no facilities, no showers and not even toilets. That is hardly helpful for an industry that would like to attract more women. From the point of view of most of my constituents—those who are not lorry drivers—they see extra litter and pretty disgusting other stuff on the roadside, and anyone who needs to pull into a lay-by on a main road can forget it, because they are already full.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for allowing me to intervene. Northern Ireland is heavily reliant on cargo being freighted by ship and then by lorry, so this issue concerns us greatly. We must ensure that there are safe and secure areas for lorry drivers to park, not only to enable them to stay within their hours under EU legislation, but to keep them and those who come into contact with them safe. Does she

agree that we should look into providing parking facilities so that those living in residential areas do not have to listen to idling lorries and so that those who drive the lorries can be safe?

Helen Whately: I completely agree that this is about making things better for residents and ensuring that lorry drivers have the facilities that they need. I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for bringing a Northern Ireland perspective to the debate.

Lorry parking is not a new problem, but it is growing worse and it is time to fix it. So what is the answer? Everyone we speak to, including the Road Haulage Association, the Freight Transport Association, Highways England, local councillors and our constituents, will give the same common-sense answer: we must build more lorry parks. That seems deceptively simple. We know that there is demand for more truck stops. For instance, Kent County Council's surveys show that we have around 900 lorries a night parking inappropriately. Lorry parks in Kent are turning lorries away. Ashford lorry park turned away 252 trucks in a single night last year, so the demand is clearly there. Kent County Council has been taking action by identifying possible locations for new truck stops and talking to lorry park operators to gauge their interest. Indeed, the Ashford lorry park just yesterday submitted a planning application to expand from 390 to 600 places. Those extra places will be helpful, but the number still falls far short of the 900 extra places needed in Kent. As freight volumes continue to grow with the growing economy, one can predict that that shortfall will only increase.

However, that prompts a question: given that commercial operators run service stations and lorry parks in the UK, why have more truck stops not stepped up to serve the demand? What can we do to ensure that the shortfall in parking places is met, and quickly? What conversations has the Minister had with lorry park operators about what is stopping them expanding? What investigations has he made to determine how we can encourage planning applications for truck stops that can make their way successfully and speedily through the planning system? I recognise that fast-forwarding planning for lorry parks is difficult, given the experience in Kent with the Operation Stack holding area, but when we get that vital lorry holding area, will the Government ensure that it can also be used for overnight lorry parking? I want lorry parking to be included in all major road improvements—specifically the lower Thames crossing—not just in Kent, but across the country.

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con): Just as in Faversham and Mid Kent, my constituency experiences a lot of lorry traffic and much of its economy is based on logistics. The Department for Transport focuses heavily on rail—often for good reason—but with the majority of haulage and freight travelling by road, does my hon. Friend agree that the Department needs to consider both rail and road provision? When looking at road provision, the Department needs to consider not just the infrastructure of the roads themselves, but lorry parking and good-quality facilities as a priority.

Helen Whately: I thank my hon. Friend for making the point that investing in road infrastructure, as we are doing in this country, goes hand in hand with planning for where lorries will park and the facilities that drivers

will need. No major road investment should be planned without facilities for the motorists and lorry drivers who will use the roads.

As we provide more parking places, we must ensure that drivers use them, and I welcome the signals the Government have been sending about effective enforcement. For example, they have supported the enforcement pilot that is currently under way in Ashford, where lorries are being clamped the first time they park illegally. The pilot has successfully reduced reoffending and the message is getting through, because only one lorry has been clamped twice and all fines have been paid. My hon. Friend the Minister has kindly contributed to that success by allowing the local authority to increase the fines that it can charge, meaning that the council is no longer left out of pocket when lorries are clamped, and I thank him for that. If the clamping pilot continues to get results, I hope that it can be rolled out across Kent and then throughout the country. Eventually, we should have a complete ban on lorries parking for long breaks outside truck stops. However, as drivers have told me many times, it is only reasonable to enforce a ban on lorry fly-parking if there are enough legitimate places for lorries to park.

As I have said, Kent is disproportionately affected by lorry fly-parking because most of the UK's road freight travels along the M20 and then across the channel or, alternatively, down the M2 and A2 and then down to the channel crossings in Kent. The Port of Dover handles 10,000 HGVs a day. Although we feel the problem so particularly in Kent, it is a national one, and I know from colleagues that there are lorries lining up on many trunk roads across the country. Perhaps at some point in the future we will have self-driving lorries, which I assume will not need to stop to sleep, but that is not going to happen for some years—probably some decades—so we must do something about the issue in the meantime. My hon. Friend the Minister gets that, as did his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), and I thank them for the hard work that they have put in so far.

To conclude, may I just say to the Minister that if we are to achieve the vision of a dynamic country that is fit for the future, we need the right infrastructure to keep the economy moving? The current situation is unacceptable for lorry drivers, for other motorists, and for residents who live in the places that have become improvised truck stops. It is also dangerous. We need more lorry parks, better facilities for drivers and effective enforcement. In that way, we can end lorry fly-parking and make our roads safer.

7.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) on securing this debate about lorry parking, a subject we know from previous debates, including the one last October, is of great importance to Members who represent parts of the country and communities adversely affected by lorry fly-parking. She has been a vigorous and doughty campaigner on this issue. As I recently heard at a roundtable of road freight stakeholders— I hasten to reassure her that that was one of many regular meetings I have with the industry and its stakeholders—it is just as much a concern for trade bodies and driver unions.

[*Jesse Norman*]

My Department is, as one would expect, considering the issue not merely in relation to Kent, although that is of central importance, for reasons I will outline, but on a national basis. But it does have particular salience in Kent and we should be clear about that. The Dover strait ports handle a considerable majority of the entire country's international road freight, thus creating a particular challenge in relation to HGV traffic in that county. Road freight plays an indispensable role in keeping our economy moving, and we must not lose sight of that fact, but we must also be mindful of the adverse effects it can have on communities, which my hon. Friend has well delineated, and do our best to mitigate them.

I understand that fly-parking can blight localities such as lay-bys, which are not intended for overnight parking and do not generally have even the most basic facilities. I want my hon. Friend to know that colleagues across the Department share that view. In addition to the environmental consequences of fly-parking, she has drawn attention to the potential road safety risks it can pose. Of course, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the particular causes of the tragic incident she referred to, but, speaking generically, I am grateful to her for highlighting, through it, the potentially devastating consequences of unsafe parking. We must be quite clear: dangerous parking is never acceptable. As is set out in the Highway Code, it is an offence to park in a dangerous position, and such behaviour is rightly the subject of active enforcement by the police. As she has noted, there are provisions in the drivers' hours rules to enable drivers to depart from the standard limits in order to reach a safe stopping place, so these requirements are no excuse for unsafe parking. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that there is a shortage of overnight lorry parking in Kent and more widely. As my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) noted, facilities to enable HGV drivers to take a proper break, in a safe and secure environment and with access to welfare amenities, should be seen as a key part of our national infrastructure.

However, the situation, although complex, is far from hopeless. A number of initiatives are under way which should help to make a real difference and to address the current supply and demand mismatch. I am encouraged by plans in the private sector to bring additional parking provision to the market. In particular, as my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent mentioned, the plans by Ashford International Truck Stop to double in size are highly encouraging. Other market-led developments, for example in relation to the online booking of parking spaces, should help to maximise the efficient use of existing sites. But government clearly can play a role in facilitating greater provision. Kent County Council is, with the support of Highways England, identifying where additional parking provision is most needed, and that council is working closely with private sector providers to identify what funding options exist to bring those sites into being.

As Kent Members will be well aware, we have been obliged to rethink our previous plans for a lorry park in east Kent for use as part of Operation Stack. However, we remain committed to developing a permanent solution to the issue of lorry parking in the county. I can confirm

that the initial public consultation on this, which Highways England expects to launch in the spring, will also seek views on the use of the lorry park for "business-as-usual" overnight parking, precisely as my hon. Friend has suggested.

Nationally, we are looking carefully at the evidence as to gaps between demand and supply throughout the country and the potential role that the Government could play in facilitating development at specific sites. The different measures I have described will not lead overnight to more lorry parking, but they demonstrate that central and local government and private providers are seeking to pull together in the same direction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent asked what is currently preventing further expansion by operators. She touched on many of the relevant factors in her speech. Ministers and officials have discussed the shortage of lorry parking spaces with a number of providers and potential providers, with a view to understanding what is preventing expansion and how policy measures might make a difference.

As my hon. Friend suggested, planning is a major concern. Motorway service areas are also an important part of the picture, as they provide around half the 15,000 lorry parking spaces throughout the country. The Department for Transport circular that covers planning and roadside facilities on the strategic road network was changed in 2013 to help to enable applications to be considered more efficiently. Nevertheless, developers still take a significant financial risk that, at the planning stage, proposals will be turned down or suffer lengthy delays, even when those developers can be rationally certain that there is significant demand.

Some providers are keen to bring forward innovative business models—for example, by combining truck parks with other services, such as refuelling and services for general motorists. Such models can pose some challenges for planning decisions, including in respect of the need to ensure that different business models are treated fairly in the planning system and in relation to providers' obligations to pay for the necessary highway access.

Planning permission can, then, be one of the key obstacles to development. In this context, we are examining how best to ensure that the strategic importance of adequate lorry parking is given due weight in planning decisions. However, we should acknowledge that some of the planning challenges reflect the legitimate concerns of local residents and other stakeholders, as one would expect, and each application must be considered on its merits.

This is not just a question of planning risk; it goes to the nature of the business itself. Truck parks are often low-margin businesses, and they require significant space. In that context, the commercial viability of potential truck parks can be limited by the preference of some drivers to park for free by the roadside. Enforcement against inappropriate parking must go alongside the provision of truck parks. It is an important part of the overall solution. By cracking down on the ability to park up for free in inappropriate locations, we should help to provide the market with confidence that demand for proper parking facilities will be there.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend has been so supportive of the enforcement measures that are being piloted on a stretch of the A20, including our "clamp first time"

approach. Since I last addressed the House on this subject, that trial has got under way, and we are closely monitoring the results. As my hon. Friend has noticed, I recently authorised Ashford Borough Council to use a higher clamping-release fee, to ensure that the trial remains financially viable.

Early indications are that the trial is going well. In the first few weeks of the 18-month trial, there was no identified displacement into residential areas or other industrial estates in Ashford. The initial signs are that there is a reduction in the level of illegal parking and we are hopeful that over time it will further decrease to a significant extent. I am aware that other councils would be keen to implement similar measures; that could well be a long-term outcome if the trial proves successful, and I know that my hon. Friend gave that suggestion her support in her speech.

It is important to draw well-supported conclusions from the pilot before considering any wider roll-out that may have national implications. However, the local willingness to enforce this robustly should make it clear to potential developers that public authorities can play a part in ensuring that market demand is there if additional provision is forthcoming on the supply side.

Across the country, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency has recently begun to issue £300 fixed penalties to drivers caught taking their 45-hour weekly rest in inappropriate locations such as lay-bys. Almost all of those caught so far have been non-GB drivers. Records of such offending will feed into cross-border intelligence sharing about problematic operators at the corporate level.

Before wrapping up, I should take this opportunity to make it clear that we have not lost sight of the importance of the driver welfare dimension to lorry

parking. As my hon. Friend highlights, this is all the more pertinent in the context of the industry's efforts to attract young people and women into driving. Although it should be noted that there are a wide range of jobs in the industry, many of those do not entail overnight stays. In that context, we have reviewed the health and safety regulations in relation to facilities for visiting drivers at distribution centres. I am pleased to say that, as a consequence, the Health and Safety Executive has clarified that drivers must have access to welfare facilities, including toilets, in the premises they visit as part of their work. My Department is working with stakeholders to draw up a statement of rights as to facilities to help to improve the standard of facilities available to drivers at distribution centres.

In addition to the quality of driver facilities at distribution centres, there are of course issues relating to the quantity of on-site parking at some of these developments. It is important, too, to note that local planning authorities should challenge developers to ensure that there is sufficient on-site parking to avoid the displacement of waiting lorries to the surrounding area.

We know that the quality of facilities could be better at some overnight lorry parks, including some motorway service areas—of that there can be no doubt. In this context, I am encouraged by market initiatives to increase the transparency around the facilities available, which should help to drive up standards over time.

Let us be clear that the Government are considering the issue of lorry parking with the importance that it deserves. We will continue to seek out opportunities to facilitate more and better quality provision alongside our industry and local government partners.

Question put and agreed to.

7.41 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 30 January 2018

[MR ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

Marriage in Government Policy

9.30 am

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered marriage and Government policy.

I am pleased to have secured this debate and grateful for the opportunity to speak to this important subject. I am also pleased to see a good number of Members here; I hope that is a sign of support for the promotion of the importance of marriage in Government policy. I welcome the Minister and wish him well in his new role.

In a week's time, we will celebrate the 21st national Marriage Week. It will be 20 years ago this summer that I married my wife Tamsin Thomas. She tells the tale that when she met me, she was Christmas shopping and I was standing on a street corner with a bottle of methylated spirits. That is true, but it does not exactly explain the situation.

I would be wrong if I said that we had been happily married for 20 years—that it had been idyllic and that there had been no challenges. There have been considerable challenges; when she moved into my home, I found her moving the cutlery in the cutlery drawer frustrating enough. But I recognise that over those 20 years I have had a wife who has raised my children and been a tremendous support to me. I have been no help at all: I spent years working on the marriage and then left her to come to this place. I give credit to my wife and all the wives and husbands of Members across the House who are so supportive in the work that we do. I recognise the challenge of having strong and healthy marriages and couple relationships in which we raise our children.

It is now seven years since a Government Minister took the opportunity to set out the Government's approach to promoting marriage in a speech during Marriage Week. When we last debated this issue in 2017, the Minister's predecessor but one tried to reassure Members that

“the Department intends to continue to work very hard to ensure that marriage gets the support it needs to continue being a strong bedrock for the families and the children for whom we want to secure the best possible outcomes in the future.”—[*Official Report*, 1 February 2017; Vol. 620, c. 389WH.]

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman will come to this in his speech, but my constituents raise with me on repeated occasions at my Friday surgeries the difficulties that the Home Office places on their marriages. They cannot see their spouses because they live abroad and cannot get into the country. Does he agree that by not allowing people to live out their marriages, the Home Office is undermining people's relationships?

Derek Thomas: I intend to demonstrate that the Government need to look clearly, across Government policy and Departments, at their role in promoting and protecting marriages and families. I will not be particularly interested in the issue that the hon. Lady mentioned in her intervention, but I am sure that there will be an opportunity to tackle that subject as we go on.

The Minister said that the Department intended to continue to work very hard to support marriage, but some weeks later it omitted the word altogether in its plans to support the poorest families in our country. Many Members will join me in making what I think is a simple request: for the Minister to ensure that no serious policy document is published by his Department without some reference to improving the stability of families through marriage. I hope the Minister might make that commitment today.

Research shows that unmarried parents are six times more likely to break up before their first child's fifth birthday. By the time a British teenager is studying for their GCSEs, they are three times more likely to live with both their birth parents if those parents are married. Three in five children born to unmarried parents experience family breakdown before they reach their teenage years. In fact, by the time children take their GCSEs, nearly all parents—93%—who stay together are married. Put simply, family stability is found in marriage. Why do we continue to ignore that? We know that family breakdown causes poverty.

More alarming still is the gap in marriage between those families living in poverty and their middle-class neighbours. Marriage is disappearing from our poorest communities as it is disappearing from Government policy. Almost 90% of middle earners get married, compared with only a quarter of couples on low incomes. If we had that sort of gap between rich and poor in health, education or probably any other policy area, there would be immediate outcry followed by determined action. On that basis, and remembering the maxim “what gets measured gets done”, I suggest that the Minister does something within his power. Will he ask his Department to look into the marriage gap, publish official figures for rates of marriage by family income, and make that a departmental metric for measuring stability in families?

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I warmly welcome the Minister to his place; we all look forward to his response. Was my hon. Friend as struck as I was by the Centre for Social Justice and the Family Stability Network's research showing that nearly 80% of young people aged 14 to 17 aspire to a lasting relationship and find that as important to them as a long-term career?

Derek Thomas: I welcome that comment. It is encouraging to know that there is still a commitment by the public, including among young people, and a natural, in-built desire to have a long and lasting stable relationship.

In recent years, the Government's evidence on what causes poverty now and in the future has identified family instability as a root cause. Children in families that break apart are two and a half times as likely to experience long-term poverty and have almost double the risk of living in relative poverty than couple families.

[*Derek Thomas*]

I know the Government would wish to tell a positive story about their efforts to encourage work as the best route out of poverty. Despite significant progress, lone parents still have double the unemployment and more than three times the underemployment than couple families. Last year, the Department for Work and Pensions published data that showed that the children of parents who have separated are eight times more likely to live in a workless family than those whose parents have stayed together.

None of what I have said is ever meant to stigmatise lone parents, who face some of the most serious challenges, but it should make the Minister, his Department and Government across the board consider how we can reduce those figures by supporting families to stay together. Those statistics alone should alarm us. The break-up of families more than doubles the chances of experiencing poverty—two and half times the poverty risk and eight times the risk of worklessness. Not all couples are married, but we should reflect on where stability is found because the statistics are compelling.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) mentioned that the Government have no reason to shy away from this subject. There is public support for marriage. There is some good news to be found in public attitudes and there is new evidence that the Government should not be afraid to talk about marriage. Last year, the Centre for Social Justice published opinion research that showed that almost half the public feel that marriage has become less important over the last few decades and agree that that is a bad thing, including 47% of adults in social grades C2, D and E, where breakdown is most acute. When people were prompted to consider the role of Government in supporting marriage, more than seven out of 10 agreed that marriage is important and that Government should support married couples, including more than two thirds of adults in social grades C2, D and E. We should all remember that the public support a Government talking about marriage.

I was privileged to be able to put my name to the strengthening families manifesto launched last year. The manifesto sets out some entirely sensible recommendations designed to strengthen the family unit and address many of the difficulties that I have briefly touched on. Among many sensible suggestions, the manifesto calls on Government to appoint a Cabinet-level Minister to ensure that family policies are prioritised and co-ordinated. It simply asks that in each Department there is a senior Minister responsible for delivering policies to strengthen families and for carrying out family impact assessments—something the Conservative Government had previously committed to.

Since arriving in this place, I have often heard that the Government aspire to Britain's being a world leader on a whole raft of subjects that include innovation and research. The sad truth is that we seem to be a world leader on family breakdown, with half of all young people no longer living with both parents by the time they sit their GCSEs. There are obvious reasons why the Government would want to address this very important issue.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I am sympathetic to many of his points, but he raises a broader point about cohabiting couples and the

benefits of a solid family base for supporting children and young people. What additional measures does he suggest should be put in place to support people who do not want to get married to live together and raise a family?

Derek Thomas: I believe that measures to support marriage, whether through taxation or by supporting and encouraging people who are considering marrying or moving in together, would actually support all people who are living together in families like those my hon. Friend describes.

I do not believe that promoting marriage or putting in place measures to support married couples would discriminate against any other type of family unit; it would help to strengthen them and give them access to support. I recognise—I hinted at this earlier—that moving into a family home together is a challenge for people and that unexpected difficulties often arise, so it is right that we should do what we can to help.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): My hon. Friend is right that promoting and supporting marriage is not about saying that every other choice is bad, but it is worth recognising that marriage and cohabitation are fundamentally different relationships. Too often they are elided together as though there is just a marginal difference. There is not: there are fundamental reasons why people choose to cohabit, which are hugely due to their level of commitment. A good example of that is that when a child is born to a married couple, the likelihood of that couple breaking up falls dramatically, but when a child is born to a cohabiting couple, the likelihood of that couple breaking up accelerates dramatically. That shows there is a fundamental difference between the two, so it is important to look at them separately.

Derek Thomas: As I said, by the time they do their GCSEs, 93% of teenagers whose parents are still together have married parents, so I support what my right hon. Friend says.

There are obvious reasons why the Government should want to address this important issue. We all want our children and young people to have the very best life chances, we want our communities and schools to thrive, and we want our working age population to enjoy fulfilled lives. As the Prime Minister said, we want a country that works for everyone. That said, no Government can solve such a complex and sensitive problem single-handedly, so the Government urgently need to provide a lead and play their part alongside local partners—councils, charities and businesses—to prioritise strengthening families, which are the bedrock of a healthy society.

In conclusion, will the Minister's Department renew its commitment in this area? If it does, we will need to consider policies to support marriage, and I am aware of many colleagues—many of whom are in the Chamber—and policy organisations, such as the Centre for Social Justice, who would help in that endeavour. I invite the Minister to convene a ministerial working group on marriage in the coming weeks, to coincide with the 21st national Marriage Week, to thrash out a way forward and some sensible policy recommendations.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way during his concluding remarks. It is really important for us, especially as Conservatives, to think about how we can support individuals. Marriage can be good, but a lot of marriages fail.

We need to be careful that Government policy does not hold up a paradigm of perfection for what marriage could be when, for many people, it does not necessarily work out. Of course we want stability, but as Conservatives we should support individuals to lead strong and fulfilled lives. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that Government policy should focus on supporting individuals rather than on enforcing a paradigm.

Derek Thomas: I would, of course, expect any Government—particularly a Conservative Government—to support individuals to have fulfilled lives, but no one enters a marriage expecting it to fall apart. The Government have a role in supporting people and giving them the best possible chance to make marriage work, for the various reasons I have outlined.

I would welcome action from the Minister, whom I welcome again to his new role. I hope that marriage is a happy and rewarding subject for him and is at the forefront of his mind as he begins his work at the Department.

9.44 am

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I apologise in advance that I will not be able to stay for the whole debate; I am a member of the Select Committee on Health, which is sitting at the moment, and I need to attend that, too.

We need to tread gently in this area. Marriage is often an issue of great cultural controversy, but it does not need to be. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) said, we represent every single one of our constituents, whatever their family situation, but that does not mean that we should not strongly support healthy, respectful and mutually encouraging marriages. We can do both those things without creating unnecessary cultural controversy.

Of course I recognise that some marriages need to end. My parents sadly divorced, and—my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) said something similar—my wife would say that I have often been very much less than a perfect husband. However, I am strongly pro-marriage as a public institution, for three reasons. First, we know that it reduces poverty. I came into the House to reduce poverty. I spoke about it in my maiden speech; for me, it is at the heart of what the Conservative party is about.

Secondly, marriage increases wellbeing across an enormous range of indicators—perhaps a wider range than we realise. On any measure—overall physical and mental health, income, savings, employment, educational success, general life contentment and happiness, sexual satisfaction, and even recovery from serious disease and healthy diet and exercise—married people rate markedly and consistently better. We should want the best possible wellbeing for all our constituents.

Thirdly, I believe that sustainable public finances are the only future for this country, and strong families and marriages are essential to helping the Government live

within their means. Given his portfolio in the Department for Work and Pensions, the Minister will be well aware of that.

There are lots of reasons to be positive about marriage. We sometimes approach the subject slightly gloomily, as if it is all going irreversibly downhill and there is nothing we can do about it, but I am grateful to the Marriage Foundation and Paul Coleridge for giving us reasons to be cheerful at the start of 2018. It is a fact that most marriages—around 62%, according to the Marriage Foundation—still last for life. Most parents who marry before having children stay together, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) said. Most marriages are happy, and the divorce rate is at its lowest since 1973. The trend away from marriage has stopped; its popularity is stabilising. Marriage has remained consistently strong among certain income groups. Finally, this is a royal wedding year. Will and Kate's wedding in 2011 was followed by the biggest increase in marriage since the war—weddings increased by 23% in the first quarter of 2012 and by 11% in the second quarter—so we might well see something similar after May.

I am concerned by the social divide in marriage. The better-off have always married in large numbers, and they continue to do so, but in our poorest communities, which have the most challenging circumstances, the marriage rate is plummeting. It is my strong contention that a respectful, healthy, mutually enabling marriage is a bulwark against poverty and all the difficulties that life throws at us from time to time.

I have four policy requests of the Minister. First, will he ensure that registrars, who conduct about 70% of weddings, signpost people to good-quality marriage preparation in their area? That is not difficult to do, and we are not talking about forcing people to do anything. However, there is generally good feedback from people who do marriage preparation, and they often want to follow it up with marriage MOTs later on to keep the marriage strong, which is also a sensible idea. Can we therefore please do something to spread good-quality marriage preparation, followed by marriage enrichment later on?

Secondly, can we do something in antenatal education for all families? At that time, mums and dads turn up in huge numbers before a child is born, so let us do something to strengthen relationships then.

Thirdly, the Government are about to launch guidance on relationships and sex education. We need to talk about marriage there, while recognising that families come in many different shapes. It is crucial that marriage is not absent from that document, and those of us on the Government Benches will expect to see it.

Finally, I reiterate the point made eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives. We need to measure this issue. We value what we measure, and we measure what we value. We need to get marriage back in the statistics. We need to know what is happening, to track it and to ensure there is an upward trend.

9.50 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) on securing the debate. I was happy to go to the Backbench Business Committee and support him in his request, and I am

[*Jim Shannon*]

happy to see the culmination of that request. I am well known as a supporter of marriage, especially in Government policy. I have been happily married for 30-plus years—believe it or not, 30-odd years ago I had thick, curly black hair. Then, I needed a brush; now I just need a chamois.

The fact of the matter is that I have supported married life over a long period, I am totally committed to it and I want to see Government policy on it. Since I came to the House in 2010, I and the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who is in her place—she will not mind me saying this, because it is true—have shared in many issues of common concern, and this is one of them. In the past, she has worked consciously in the Conservative party, as I have done in the Democratic Unionist party, to try to formulate Government policy. By working together across parties—not just in the confidence and supply agreement that we have now, but long before that—we have had some success with the marriage allowance. We were instrumental in making that Government policy. I want to put that on the record early on.

I and my party worked extremely hard to bring in marriage tax allowance transfers as a recognition of the stabilising effect that marriage provides to our community. The public policy benefits of marriage are significant. The hon. Member for St Ives outlined some of them, and I will add these facts and figures: three quarters of breakdowns of families with children under five come from the separation of non-married parents; children are 60% more likely to have contact with separated fathers if the parents were married; the prevalence of mental health issues among children of cohabiting parents is more than 75% greater than among children of married parents; and children from broken homes are nine times more likely to become young offenders—they account for 70% of all young offenders.

Those are some key figures. However, I want to be clear: in no way whatsoever am I attempting to say that the only unit that works is the married family unit. I see this in my office every week, and just now my staff will be dealing with many people who are single parents. I see hundreds of wonderful women who singlehandedly run their homes, and their children are well adjusted and thriving. I increasingly see single men taking on the two-parent role and doing a great job. As the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) said, society is changing, and we have got to look at that. The intervention from the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) reaffirmed that. We must adjust our focus and way of thinking to how things are today.

I understand as much as the next person that marriage is hard and relationships are hard. Sometimes, no matter how much one person may try, it simply will not work. In our relationship, my wife has been understanding. The hon. Member for St Ives referred to time away, and most of my life has been away from home. My wife reared the children and now has the role of rearing the grandchildren as well. Simply, people have to try hard, otherwise it will not work.

I have also seen too many women widowed in the troubles. I relate very much to that, back home in Northern Ireland, where women have to be both mother

and father to their child in the midst of tremendous grief and ensure that their child has not simply a house to live in, but a home to grow in. The role of those tasked with the responsibility of looking after children is so important. I make no judgment on anyone's ability to provide a great home for their child being intrinsically linked with marriage, but statistics show why I believe that marriage is key and why it should be key in any Government policy. I wish the Minister well in his new role.

One massive issue to recognise is that the commitment of marriage is a driver for stability, quite apart from wealth. Crucially, even the poorest 20% of married couples are more stable than all but the richest 20% of cohabiting couples. In that context, it is entirely appropriate that our tax system now recognises marriage. That is something we pushed for and the Government recognised in the previous Parliament. It is good to have that.

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Gentleman is making a good point about income and marriage. The Government seem to recognise that in the tax system, but not in the immigration system. I have a constituent who had tried to bring his wife here since 2007. Gladly, she has now arrived, but he was short by £7 over the whole year in his salary and the Government refused to operate any discretion to allow her to come from Iran.

Jim Shannon: I agree; I have faced many similar cases in my constituency office. I look to the Immigration Minister and her Department to be fair and allow for some flexibility in the process. To be just a few pounds short is frustrating. We have a system to work within, but we make our cases on behalf of our constituents and their wives and spouses in other parts of Europe, the United States, Africa and even further afield in the far east. The difficulties are around financial contributions, so we need a flexible Government and flexible policy. That is not this Minister's responsibility, but it is another's.

As I have said before, the case for change is compounded by the fact that the Government spend more money on supporting marriage through the much more generous married couples allowance than they do through the new marriage allowance. The married couples allowance applies to married couples in which one or both spouses were born before 6 April 1935, while the new marriage allowance applies to one-earner married couples on basic income tax. While £245 million was spent on the married couples allowance, just £210 million was spent on the marriage allowance during 2015-16. The former can reduce a tax bill by between £326 and £844.50 a year, but the latter does so by only up to £230 a year. That is a help, but it does not fulfil the aim. It is important to have those facts and figures on the record in *Hansard* so that we can see where the differences are and where we need change. I hope that others agree.

It is absolutely right that we recognise the public policy benefits of marriage for adult wellbeing at all ages. However, given the special benefits in relation to child development, it seems strange that we should afford the marriages of couples in their 80s and 90s, whose children left home long ago, greater recognition than those in which the public policy benefits could reach both adults and children.

We need a system that addresses families and children rather than those who are long past that stage. In that context, the Government should introduce a fully

transferable allowance and pay for it by reducing its scope to married couples with young children. That would do away with the problem of low take-up by ensuring that the allowance is really meaningful for those who are eligible. At the very least, the marriage allowance for those with pre-school children should be increased so that no marriage of a couple in their 80s or 90s is recognised more—and not, indeed, by £844.50—than that of a couple with young children. Rather than just spending the same sum on a reduced pool of married couples, we need some change in the system.

I briefly referred in the Chamber, during the Budget debate, to the ComRes polling from last November; this is for those who follow ComRes and perhaps fill in their forms whenever they come. The poll demonstrated that increasing the marriage allowance is much more popular, with 58% support, than bringing in yet further increases in the personal allowance, which got 21% support. If we are looking for something that is more acceptable to the general public—we need to be conscious and cognisant of that—here is a simple system.

The cost of the further projected increases in the personal allowance to £12,500 is £4 billion, the majority of which will go, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies has demonstrated, to those in the top half of the income distribution. By contrast, any increase in the marriage allowance would disproportionately benefit those in the bottom half of the income distribution.

If we take away housing benefit from couples who get married, and reduce working tax credit for families who marry and move in together, we make it less appealing for people to make that final commitment. We have outlined the social benefits of marriage, and the Government should feed something into that and make it more attractive for people who love each other and are in a committed relationship to marry. That is what my heart as well as my voice says, and what would benefit families and communities throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I ask the Minister seriously to consider the issue of the marriage allowance and how to achieve what we set out to do in putting that in place. Many in the House, including many of those present for the debate, think the same.

10 am

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I welcome the Minister to his place. I have worked with him over a long time, and having run the Department I have a fair idea of the challenges that lie ahead of him. I am going to add to them. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) on obtaining the debate, particularly this week, of all weeks.

Under the previous Prime Minister I was nominated to construct the family test against which everything was going to be measured. When I finally left—of my own volition, by the way—at no stage had I managed to get agreement from any of the key players about what it would consist of. While there was a principle, which was that the Prime Minister wanted a test that all decisions would be set against, the reality was that the Treasury in particular was not keen on any of it. I urge the Minister to press for a definition of the family test, by which all the effects of policy decisions could be looked at to see whether they would damage the family or make things more difficult. That would make logical sense.

I want to be brief, as I just want to make a start on a couple of issues, beginning by asking what the debate is not about. The trouble is that we all tiptoe around and get amazingly worried about the word. We think: “If I mention marriage, does that automatically mean worrying about whether marriages break up or other people do not choose to get married, and so on?” I know of nothing else in the purview of government where such a fear reigns in quite that way. We do not talk about business policy on the basis that some businesses will fail. We do not immediately say, “We must not talk about business or try to set policy to help businesses survive.” We do those things, because it is logical. Of course, in society as in economic life there will always be things that do not work out, but that does not mean people should set their life around what does not work out. If we all did that, frankly we would look a lot like North Korea. The point is we do not do it, so let us now make policy around what works and what is clear.

Marriage, frankly—this is not an arrogant statement—is probably the most fundamental institution that society has ever managed to construct to make society better, give children a better chance and improve the incomes and wellbeing of those within the process, as has been said. That is not to say that when, sadly, a marriage breaks up we should not do our level best to help people, and try to find them a better way and support them. That is critical. However, it means there is a need to recognise a couple of features. I am chairman of the Centre for Social Justice, which has been making this argument for some time, and we did a poll. What we found was the thing that always most intrigues me: when young people between about 18 and 28 were asked without reference to marriage what one thing they aspired to more than anything else, more than 70% aspired to be married, with stable families and a happy life. They did not aspire to be brilliantly successful at business; that was not their No. 1 aspiration. They did not aspire to have a fast car or a smart house. Their aspiration was for a social arrangement that would deliver them a happy outcome for the rest of their lives.

In any other area of life we would worry about such aspirations never being met by the reality. What, then, given that young people start with that aspiration, are we doing to make it less likely that they will achieve it? If that happened with respect to any other process, in school or in society, and we said “That is not a problem,” then of course we would be causing damage, but in this case we walk away from the issue. My arguments about policies on marriage are not to do with favouring marriage. I do not think it needs to be favoured in any way. People’s basic instinct and sense of direction will take them towards the thing that benefits them and their families most. I am certain that that is the nature of the situation. The question we really need to ask is what we do that stops people who have that aspiration getting to where they aspire to be.

I have a couple of points to make about that, beginning with the OECD’s view of what it costs for two people to live together, in comparison to the cost of living for one person. It makes a base calculation and comes up with a figure. It is not the same as two people together—the calculation includes how savings can be made within a couple. We understand and accept that. The UK, peculiarly—this emanates from the Treasury and every other Department—somehow takes the view that we

[Mr Iain Duncan Smith]

need to go further. Financial policy here makes it more difficult than it is in almost any other country for a couple—particularly if they are married—to stay together. The cost of getting married is higher here than in any other country, because taxation is set against doing it.

I have been told by a number of my colleagues, “No one gets married for money.” Only someone from a reasonably well-off middle-class background will endlessly take that view. People in a low-income family where every pound really matters will calculate how best to manage their affairs. If one situation makes them better off, there is enormous pressure to decide on that as their direction of travel. I should love us to look carefully at why the UK persists in making it financially more difficult for people to come together to marry, and to stay together. Those are really big issues, and the figures are there.

Alison Thewliss: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, because universal credit is set up so that there will be a single recipient in a household, many women are subject to financial control, which makes it far more difficult for those who face domestic violence to leave a relationship, because they cannot afford to?

Mr Duncan Smith: Not really. I do not accept that at all. Universal credit operates by looking at the household, which makes it more likely that couples are supported to stay together. The hon. Lady knows that the vast majority of married people—and, by the way, even cohabiting people—have joint accounts. The figure is way over 80%, and I think it is close to 90%. For those in an exceptional position, it is clear that the money will follow the person with the duty of care. Those rules are written into universal credit, so I simply do not agree with the hon. Lady. I think that universal credit will help enormously to get rid of what I and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) referred to as the couple penalty.

The cost of weddings is another issue that we need to consider. There is an idea that people cannot get married now unless they have a fantastic celebrity wedding. The average cost of a wedding is now more than £20,000, whereas what people actually need is a marriage licence. There should be pre-wedding education to tell people: “You do not need to make such a big fuss about it. What you want to do is get married.” One big reason for so many marriages breaking up—probably more than anything else—is debt. If people start married life in debt because of making such a big issue of it, that puts enormous pressure on couples.

Andrew Selous: A pastor in my constituency told me something that struck me, which was that up to the early 1980s many couples who married were happy to live in rented accommodation, perhaps with other people’s crockery and cutlery. They did not need everything to be perfect, but later on that changed and people felt they needed all new white goods, and so on. That may have been a disincentive to marriage. Does my right hon. Friend recognise that picture?

Mr Duncan Smith: I think that with the whole *Hello!* culture around the idea that people have to have a perfect fairy-tale wedding, no one is preparing them for the fact that once they are married, they will make

compromises and face huge difficulties and stresses, and it is about how they cope with those. That would be far better than telling them some fantastic fairy tale: “Nothing will ever be a problem, and you’ll live happily ever after.” No relationship I have ever seen has ever been like that. The question is how to manage it, and preparing people properly for that is an enormously important feature of what we do.

The other area I will talk about is counselling. Earlier on, when I was in Government, we drove through more money to help support marriage guidance and counselling. The one thing we know, and some of them will say this, is that with the proper counselling and support probably close to half the families that are heading for break-up can change, re-stabilise and stay together. That is a critical point. We are now investing £30 million in that, yet the price of the after-effects of break-up is numbered at closer to £50 billion.

Even though I have argued for more money to go in, and I thank the Government for putting more money in, it seems like a pretty mealy-mouthed concept that we invest so little money, when that money really reaps a dividend in stabilising families and helping them stay together. If it were anything else in life, we would consider it a major benefit that that amount of money returned such a phenomenal cost saving. That cost of £50 billion would fall quite dramatically. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) mentioned the stability on divorce; one of the reasons for that is that we started investing in marriage guidance and counselling. Imagine what we could do if we spent even more money on getting people immediately into counselling. That would have a huge effect, and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to view that straight away.

The last point is marriage prep. I stand with all those who say that the key thing is to educate people to understand what it really means to start out on arguably the most important agreement they will ever make. People get terribly fussed about being members of things like golf clubs, where there are all sorts of peculiar and stupid rules around what they can and cannot wear, and everyone is very strict about it. If we mention that there are things people can and cannot do in marriage, however, everyone immediately says, “This is not something we need to lecture people about. We should not talk about it.” The answer is that the most important thing we will ever do is to form that relationship and ultimately, if we are lucky, to bring up children, and we want to make it as stable as possible.

If any Government sit there and worry about what people will say when they say they support marriage, because some will break up and there will be problems, we will never get anywhere. We now need to make the case for stability and strength, and help those who are unable to make that process.

10.12 am

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the powerful contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), which highlights the gravity of the issue.

I will begin by thanking the several Ministers who have recently stated in this place their desire to see policies developed that support and strengthen family

life. They have done so in response to the publication in September of “A Manifesto to Strengthen Families”, which my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) referred to. I congratulate him on securing this timely debate in the run-up to Marriage Week this year. The manifesto contained 18 policies, which are the fruit of many years’ work; many colleagues here today have spent several years speaking and working on the issue. After its publication in September, it garnered the support of more than 60 Back-Bench Conservative MPs.

The new Minister, whom I welcome to his place, need not worry if he has not seen the manifesto, because I will give him a copy at the end of the debate. After its publication, a number of Ministers spoke in support of it. Both the Leader of the House and the Health Secretary stated their interest in how the policies in that paper might feed into Government policy. The Prime Minister told the House in October that the Government are

“looking into what more we can do to ensure that we see those stable families”.—[*Official Report*, 18 October 2017; Vol. 629, c. 846.]

She recognised the wide range of benefits that committed family relationships can bring, as we have heard today, such as improving wellbeing, reducing poverty and reducing Government spending.

On the wider beneficial aspects of marriage, the former Education Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening), said in this House that it was “exceptionally important” to include marriage in relationships education because:

“At the heart of this is the fact that we are trying to help young people to understand how commitments and relationships are very much at the core of a balanced life that enables people to be successful more generally.”—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2017; Vol. 630, c. 1189.]

As I have said, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives on securing the debate. It is so timely, because marriage has a key role in helping people to promote the stable relationships that support life chances for them and their children, their children’s educational attainment and future employment, boosting mental health and reducing the risk of addiction in later life. It can help combat loneliness in old age, help reduce the pressure on GP visits due to depression and reduce absenteeism at work. It can positively influence so many areas of life and, of course, beneficially influence the public purse.

I want to put it on record, as I always do in these debates, that there are difficult cases in which it is better for a child not to be in the same home as one of their parents. I always say that there are many single parents who work valiantly, and successfully, to ensure that their children flourish and have a positive future to look forward to, but we have to remember that the statistics speak for themselves. The Marriage Foundation, as we have heard, has recorded that 76% of married couples are still together when their child has their GCSE exams, but only 31% of unmarried couples are still together.

I am particularly concerned about the statistics showing that only 24% of those in lower income groups marry, compared with 87% of those in higher income groups. Marriage is such an important issue that we cannot afford to ignore it in public policy. I believe that, because family breakdown affects the poorest most, it is a social

justice issue. In fact, it is one of those burning injustices that the Prime Minister spoke of so movingly on the steps of Downing Street when she took office. We need to address it, because if we do not, we will not only fail a generation of children who aspire to marriage, as we have heard, but let down the poorest of those children. That is why it is such an important issue of social justice.

Children from low-income households with an active father are 25% more likely to escape the poverty they grow up in. I will look at a number of policies, touching on some of those in “A Manifesto to Strengthen Families”. Research from the Social Trends Institute into families with children under 12 showed that Britain has the highest level of family instability in the entire developed world. We languish at the bottom of that table and successive surveys have shown that children in this country are among the unhappiest.

I have several points to make about policy, as I say. Will the Minister restate the Government’s commitment to the family impact assessment or family test, which was introduced by the last Prime Minister, David Cameron, to ensure that the Government never have a blind spot in this area? I recently tabled a number of parliamentary questions, asking what every Department of State is doing to ensure that this is appropriately applied. Will the Minister look at those responses, because they are extremely disappointing? The family test is not being applied in the comprehensive way that I believe the former Prime Minister intended.

New research from the Marriage Foundation confirms that family breakdown, which ultimately affects nearly half of all teenagers, is a clear cause of many children’s and teenagers’ emotional and behavioural problems. That should not really be news to us, but I encourage the Government to properly address family breakdown as part of its comprehensive review of mental health strategy. We need to ensure that we are not just helping the young people—the children themselves.

Dr Poulter: My hon. Friend is making a very good speech, and I agree with many of the points that she has made. I would caution about statistics and the difference between causation and association. She is pointing out an association between mental health and some of the points that she is raising, but actually young people’s mental health is far more complex than that and there are many confounding factors that may call into question that association. I caution that marriage should not be put at the centre of mental health policy for young children.

Fiona Bruce: I disagree. I am a patron of a mental health charity that specialises in counselling young people in my constituency called Visyon. It now counsels children as young as four with mental health problems. It is overloaded—inundated—with counselling requests. Not long ago, I asked the chief executive officer, “How many of the children and young people you help to counsel have problems as a result of dysfunctional family relationships at home?”, and he looked at me and said, “Fiona, virtually all of them.” That is why it is so important, when we are counselling young people, that wherever possible we look at how we can also support their parents in their relationship. It is also why I am such a supporter of the “Emotionally healthy

[Fiona Bruce]

schools” programme, which is being pioneered by Middlewich High School in my constituency. When children in that school have problems, the headteacher, wherever possible, will ask the parents to come into the school, will meet them and will help them to ensure that the children’s home relationships are as healthy as possible to ensure that they have the best chance of flourishing, both educationally and in the future. We need more counsellors to be trained, to ensure that they are not just counselling young people but, wherever possible, working with their families to combat the epidemic of mental health problems in this country among young people.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): I agree with my hon. Friend, but the same argument about causation and association is applied directly to marriage itself. The argument is made that were all the cohabiting couples to marry, the statistics for break-up would not change. How do we refute that argument?

Fiona Bruce: Let us have a look at that, because my right hon. Friend, as always, raises a very pertinent point. From the outside, couples living together look the same whether they are cohabiting or married. Two people might be in love; they live together; they have a baby. What is the difference? I believe that the difference is commitment and, indeed, public commitment. The public promise made during the marriage ceremony sends a powerful message to the parties and to their friends and family round about, which can engender support from those friends and family when rocky patches occur. The message is, “We are committing ourselves to each other through thick and thin,” and that, after all, is the determination when people marry. A dialogue often precedes it that does not happen when people cohabit.

When people cohabit, there has often been what is called sliding rather than deciding to have a relationship; it happens without that preceding dialogue and mutual understanding of what it entails. That is why I so support the proposal that there be more pre-marriage counselling. In fact, I would go further and say that we should promote—this has been suggested by a number of groups and organisations—high-quality marriage preparation. That should be available to anyone who goes into a registry office and wants to get married. And we should waive marriage registration fees for couples who take part in an accredited marriage preparation course.

All that is what makes the difference between cohabitation and marriage. I am talking about giving young people the extra ability to work out whether they really want to be together and to stay together. There are statistics—yes, they are from the United States—showing that many couples going through marriage preparation courses decide not to marry, and that is a success in itself. They have made that decision in a contemplative and considered way.

Our problem today is actually not divorce but the trend away from marriage, although I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who is no longer in his place, say that the reduction in the number of people

marrying has stalled. That is very helpful, but we need to combat the widespread assumption that cohabitation is living together as if married, because unless couples decide and do not slide, unless moving in together is part of a clear plan for the future, it is not. Unless they have discussed their approaches towards having children, finances and working when a family comes along, it is not the same.

Before closing, I will touch on one or two other policies, mentioned in the “Manifesto to Strengthen Families”, which I hope the Minister will consider. First, as we have heard, the Government have to ensure that the concepts of commitment, respect and safety are at the heart of the newly developed curriculum for relationships and sex education from an early age. That should include talking about marriage. I realise that that will need to be done exceptionally sensitively, but the Government need to make good on the comments of the former Secretary of State for Education that it is exceptionally important that marriage and its benefits be emphasised if we really care about the life chances and wellbeing of the children who will be the next generation of adults. We must not be embarrassed to mention that sensitively in schools. The next generation will not thank us for failing to teach them what a committed relationship means. If we do not do so, they will pay the price, and as I have said, the poorest will pay the highest price of all.

Secondly, I reiterate the importance of the Government continuing to look at removing the financial disincentives for those on low incomes to marry. This is in the manifesto. We want the Government to enable those who are on universal credit and entitled to the marriage allowance to receive the tax break automatically as part of their claim, and to ensure that it does not taper away. Will the Government also look at increasing the marriage tax allowance to a more significant level, which I believe would in turn boost uptake? In all the areas to which I have referred, it is possible for the Government to make small but impactful, positive changes to support marriage and family stability and therefore life chances.

This should not be a party political matter; it is too important. I welcome the contributions that we have heard today and particularly that from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), of the Democratic Unionist party, but I want to place this point on the record. I did not do so in last year’s debate in the run-up to Marriage Week, but I will do so now. As I believe was also the case last year, there is not one Labour Member in the Chamber today, other than the requisite Opposition spokesman, and this issue, which is about a burning injustice, deserves better than that.

10.28 am

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate my hon. Friend, and fellow Cornishman, the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) on securing this very important debate. I wholeheartedly agree with virtually everything that has been said by hon. Members who have contributed; I shall just add a few points of my own.

As we have heard, virtually every indicator demonstrates clearly that marriage is a good thing. It is good for the people who are married and for the children who are

raised in a family that is based on a married couple, and it has very significant benefits for wider society and our economy. By virtually every measure—whether we are talking about physical health, mental health, educational outcomes or economic measures—marriage is a good and positive thing, and that seems to be clear to everyone. So I am sometimes more than slightly baffled about why the Government often appear so shy about saying that. The Government are not shy about saying that other things are good for us. They often tell us that we should all take more exercise. They are not shy about telling us that we should eat a healthy diet, and they often tell us how much alcohol is safe to drink. They are even taking measures these days to reduce the amount of sugar that we have.

It seems strange that, on something so fundamentally important that has such huge benefits, the Government are so shy to speak up—to say what a great thing marriage is for everyone concerned. If there is one message that I would like to put to the Government via the Minister, who I am delighted to see in his place today, it is that they should not be bashful in saying what a great thing marriage is.

As other hon. Members have said, we all accept that not everyone chooses to be married and that marriage is not always a positive thing for some people. We absolutely accept and respect that, but it should not mean that we shy away from saying what a positive thing marriage is. It does feel at times as though marriage has become the M-word in Government policy that is missing. I add my voice to those who have called on the Minister to play his part in his new role and ensure that marriage and the benefits of it are highlighted in Government policy, statements and documents, so that there is an unequivocal message from Government that we believe marriage is good.

The Government should take confidence from the fact that there is clear data showing that the popularity of marriage is increasing. Some 80% of under 18-year-olds surveyed said that they desired to be married and saw it as an important part of their life, on a par with having a successful career. The Government should be confident in speaking up for marriage. It is popular, and because of that we should also ensure that marriage and its benefits are promoted to young people through our education policy. Just as we give them career advice and help them in choosing their careers, right at that young age we should get the benefits of marriage across to them and help them to understand that.

I am aware that there is not much time left, but I want to make one further point: it is about civil partnerships, which have not really been covered by any other contributions. I am aware that a private Member's Bill calling for civil partnerships to be extended to all people will come before the House shortly. When I saw that that private Member's Bill was coming, I seriously considered how we should address this issue. It is clear to me that civil partnerships were a stepping stone towards same-sex marriage. We are where we are on that, but it seems to me that the current position, where there is one option for formalising a couple's relationship that is open to some but not to everyone, is unsustainable.

One way of addressing the situation would be to extend civil partnerships to all. I have come to a different view. I actually think that civil partnerships are now unnecessary. Marriage is open to all, including same-sex

couples, and we should give a clear message that we believe marriage is the best option. We should not confuse the matter by seeking to provide an alternative. We simply do not need the distraction of finding new ways of doing what has been around for thousands of years.

Luke Graham: My hon. Friend is making some very positive points about marriage. Given that there is now a record number—about 33.9%—of single people in the United Kingdom, should we not be encouraging any form of partnership, including heterosexual civil partnerships, to encourage people to go into stable relationships with each other? That seems to be what gives the greatest benefit to the individuals and any children involved. When it comes to Government policy we should be providing equality in law for everyone who wants to engage in meaningful relationships. As Conservatives, we would hopefully help to promote that rather than promoting one choice over another.

Steve Double: Some people will make that argument, and I absolutely respect it. Having considered the matter, however, I have come to a different view: that providing a competitor to marriage would dilute and undermine the positive place that marriage has in our society. That is my concern: that extending civil partnerships to heterosexual couples would provide competition for marriage. There should be a clear, positive, single message that marriage is a good thing to encourage in our society. That is my position, having thought about it. I respect my hon. Friend's view, but it is not the view that I have come to. Civil partnerships are now unnecessary in our country. Stopping them and putting the focus on marriage would be the right step to take.

I have been married for 32 years this year. Lots of people say that I do not look old enough to have been married that long, but hopefully I am a demonstration that marriage is a good thing. I am very grateful to the very long-suffering Mrs Double, who has done more than her fair share to make sure that our marriage has stuck together and been successful over that time.

Like all of us who have been married, I know that, like anything in life worth having, it is sometimes through hard work, blood, sweat and tears that marriages are successful. I believe that it is important that the Government do all they can to help, support and encourage married couples to make a success of their marriages, that we remove all the barriers and disincentives in Government policy to marriage and to couples staying together, and that we give a very clear message and are not at all bashful in saying what a good and positive thing marriage is for everyone involved.

10.36 am

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) on securing this debate and on his efforts to ensure that Marriage Week is celebrated in Parliament.

Marriage is a changing institution, and within our lifetimes it has changed dramatically. In fact, when the institution of marriage was originally created, the average life expectancy was 30 years. If we look at the statistics for marriage rates, we see that the number of people getting married each year is falling. At the same time, the age at which people are getting married is increasing:

[Angela Crawley]

people of my generation are marrying on average 10 years later than their parents. On top of that, marriage rates are on the increase among over-65s, having increased by half between 2009 and 2014, which also says a lot about people living longer. So in my opinion, while marriage trends are changing and adapting to people's wishes and needs, the institution of marriage does not appear to be under threat.

However, I am somewhat astounded, if no less grateful to the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), that equal marriage was finally mentioned one hour into the debate, although much of his attention focused on civil partnerships. I find it astounding that the Government did not take this opportunity to recognise all forms of marriage, and instead focused on nuclear and "2.4" families. I am sure that the Minister will address that in his response, but I just expected more from the Floor of the House.

While I welcome recent changes that allow same-sex couples across Scotland, England and Wales to marry, it is a great disappointment that that is still not possible in Northern Ireland. I hope that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) shares that concern. This is a great freedom for many couples who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, and as we approach LGBT History Month it has never been more important for the Government to put on record their support for same-sex marriage, recognising that everyone should be equal in the law and under the protections therein.

Giving same-sex couples the right to marry allows them to validate their relationship in a way that was previously denied. It is a move forward, closer to a more equal society, and allows those people to choose whether to get married, just like their peers. For many others, it is just as relevant not to marry. We have talked about cohabitation and suggested that it is not on an equal par with marriage, but I suspect that many families would disagree. I do not think that it is this House's place to determine the sanctity of anyone's relationship, whether they are cohabiting, married or otherwise. It is a choice, and we should simply enable that choice to be made by all individuals equally.

On many occasions, long-term cohabiting couples have just as successful relationships. So while I recognise the comments of the hon. Member for St Ives and the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on the statistics—which, yes, are alarming—I would echo the sentiments of the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), who cautioned us about the correlation of statistics in relation to marriage and mental health. The simple fact is that there are many successful families and they come in many shapes and forms, and marriage is not the sole indicator. While the hon. Member for St Ives outlined those statistics and suggested that children are more successful where there is marriage, I would caution that it is neither our role nor responsibility to lecture those who do not choose to marry.

As the term "marriage equality" suggests, the sanctity of marriage should be available to all, but we should also respect those who choose not to marry.

Dr Poulter: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Angela Crawley: No, I will continue.

Finally, many people's marriages and relationships end. When they do, it is Government's responsibility to create policy to support and protect those people, not to penalise them, especially not vulnerable parents with children to raise. If tackling child poverty is this Government's aim, using this debate to lecture others on the sanctity of marriage is not the best use of time, especially when there are other aspects of Government policy that do not support families as they should.

I therefore take this opportunity to focus once more on Government policy, which is, of course, part of the subject of this debate, and to call on the Government to address the charges for the Child Maintenance Service. Where a relationship breaks down, many parents do not choose to live separately or rely on the Child Maintenance Service, so it is unfair and unacceptable to penalise parents or levy charges on one or both parents trying to support their children despite the breakdown of a marriage or relationship. Many parents rely on the Child Maintenance Service. The levy imposed is unfair and penalises children, who need the service most.

Marriage is and always should be a choice available to everyone. I hope that the House will recognise that.

10.41 am

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) on securing this debate, and I welcome his inclusion of the importance of protecting families and his focus on providing stability for children. However, I take exception to his claim that family instability is the root cause of poverty, when we know that this Government's cuts to social security are creating problems for families.

Social security support for low-income families has been cut severely. Most working-age benefits, including child benefit, have been frozen until 2020, and universal credit has been shown to be failing those on low incomes, causing debt and rent arrears. When universal credit was introduced in 2011, the coalition claimed that it would lift 350,000 children out of poverty. By 2013, that estimate had been reduced to 150,000, and by 2016 the Government refused to offer any re-evaluation at all. Can the Minister tell us how many children he believes universal credit will lift out of poverty?

Child Poverty Action Group published an analysis last November estimating that cuts to universal credit would push 1 million more children into poverty by 2020, along with an extra 900,000 adults. When we consider the situation for disabled children, we see that four in 10 are living in poverty, yet the basic level of support for disabled children in universal credit is less than half that available in tax credits.

We have had some interesting contributions; it has been good to hear people talk about how much they have enjoyed their own marriages. I welcome the call from the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) to tread gently, as marriage is often an issue of cultural sensitivity, and the comments of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who spoke of the hundreds of wonderful women he has met who are bringing up families alone. It is important to recognise that many people choose to bring up children on their own, and some people find themselves in that situation due to relationship breakdown or bereavement.

Since 2010, successive Governments have sought to reduce the role of the state wherever possible, especially in social security, yet when it comes to whether or not two people should marry—surely the most private of decisions—the coalition Government sought to influence behaviour in relation to that decision by introducing the marriage allowance in April 2015. Details of how the new transferable allowance would work, given in a note published alongside the 2014 Budget, stated:

“Couples where both partners are basic-rate taxpayers will in almost all cases see no gain or loss...Couples will benefit as a unit, but the majority (84 per cent) of individual gainers will be male.”

One must question the introduction of an allowance that the Government knew would disproportionately benefit men; I would be interested to hear the Minister's rationale for it.

Take-up of the marriage allowance has been poor. Up to October, 2.4 million couples had claimed it, out of an estimated 4 million who were eligible. According to Government figures, the cost in 2015-16 is expected to be £385 million when backdated claims are ultimately included, and £425 million in 2016-17. It prompts the question whether that is really the best use of taxpayers' money at a time when child poverty is soaring and the Government are cutting support for disabled people under universal credit and the employment and support allowance work-related activity group.

On pension equality, the question is whether some marriages are more equal than others in the Government's eyes. The Government have spent a great deal of time and, no doubt, a sizable sum of taxpayers' money opposing pension equality for same-sex couples. When the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 was debated in Parliament, the Opposition called on the Government to close a loophole in the law meaning that married same-sex couples and civil partners were treated differently when it comes to pension entitlement in the event of one partner's death.

In July, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of equality in a landmark case brought by John Walker, a gay man who found that after 20 years of service to his company, it would provide £1,000 a year in pension to his surviving husband were he to die, whereas if he were married to a woman, she would receive £47,500 a year. Indeed, were he to divorce his male partner and then marry a woman, she would still receive the larger amount. When do the Government intend to respond to the Supreme Court ruling? Will the Minister ensure that the ruling will not be affected by the UK leaving the EU, as it was based in EU law, and will he assure us that the Government will end the disparities in public sector pension schemes?

The Government's claim that they want to support marriage is also at odds with how cuts in social security since 2010 have put additional pressure on families and parents. Families on low incomes have faced long waits for initial payments of universal credit; figures last week from the Department for Work and Pensions show that one fifth of claimants are still not being paid in full on time, and more than one in 10 are not even receiving partial payment on time. Then there are the cuts to work allowances on universal credit, and the new, lower household benefit cap introduced in November 2016. At the same time, food prices in December were more than 4% higher than the year before. Families on low incomes tend to spend a higher proportion of their wages on basic items such as food and rent.

The Government have recently announced that they intend to create a new cliff edge for eligibility for free school meals, so that families with household earnings of more than £7,400 a year will no longer qualify. The Resolution Foundation has estimated that allowing all children whose parents claim universal credit to receive free school meals would cost £600 million a year. The chief executive of the Financial Conduct Authority warned in the autumn of the scale of the problem of household debt, and a recent study by the Institute for Fiscal Studies showed that one in four of Britain's poorest households are falling behind with debt payments or spending more than a quarter of their monthly income on repayments.

Relate has highlighted how debt problems can easily lead to conflict and relationship breakdown, whether or not partners are married. That can have a serious impact on children, as research suggests that conflict, rather than family structure, has a negative impact on children's development. The household benefit cap is forcing families to move away from sources of support such as family and friends. People on a low income may not be able to afford to travel back to see them frequently, either. More than 500 Sure Start centres have closed since 2010. They are another important support for more vulnerable parents in particular. If the Government value family, marriage and stability, why are they closing them? Again, I am keen to hear the Minister's rationale.

Since last April, parents have been required to start looking for work as soon as their youngest child reaches the age of three, rather than five as was previously the case. A new report published by Save the Children last week found that many mothers would like to return to work or increase their hours, but find childcare simply unaffordable and Government help with the costs complex and difficult to access. Under tax credits, childcare costs are paid in advance, whereas under universal credit they will have to be paid up front and then claimed back, which is always likely to be problematic for parents on low incomes.

Of course, parents in many families are not married, and there are many lone-parent families. Government must recognise and value all family types. The alternative is to risk stigmatising families to no good purpose. Lone-parent families are particularly affected by access to childcare, and have been hit hard by cuts to social security since 2010. An independent study by the Equality and Human Rights Commission of the long-term impact of tax and welfare changes between 2010 and 2017 found that lone parents were set to lose an average of about 15% of their net income. That is almost £1 in every £6.

Lone-parent families make up one in four families with children, and have done for more than a decade. They are part of the mainstream of UK family life, and social policy needs to take that into account. Where a separated or divorced couple shares care of the children, the parent who is not the main carer cannot claim for an extra room for those children under the rules of the bedroom tax, for example. That can cause extreme difficulty for a family who must cope with the break-up of a relationship, and can cause parents, often fathers, to struggle to spend quality time with their children. A Labour Government would scrap the bedroom tax altogether. Will the Minister reconsider the rules of the bedroom tax as they currently affect separated couples to ensure that children do not suffer?

[Margaret Greenwood]

Where relationships unfortunately break down, changes to the child maintenance system have clearly not succeeded in supporting care for children or enabling parents to reach agreements themselves.

In 2012, the Government introduced a new system for child maintenance that aimed to nudge couples to reach agreement without the need for Government intervention. However, it does that by charging both parents—including the parent with care of the child or children, known as the “receiving parent”—if they fail to reach agreement independently.

The Department published a survey in December 2016 that found that around a third of receiving parents who paid the Child Maintenance Service application fee reported that it was difficult to afford. Of parents who did not have a maintenance arrangement at three months, 29% said that the £20 application fee was a factor. Of receiving parents with a direct payment arrangement, 42% cited a desire to avoid collect-and-pay charges as a reason for choosing direct pay and half said that the charges were a factor in their decision.

Will the Government take action to widen access—

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): Order. I ask the hon. Lady to wind up, so that the Minister has a chance to respond.

Margaret Greenwood: I will.

In conclusion, a stable, loving family is undoubtedly what we would want for all children, but there are many types of family in the 21st century. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) once said:

“Families come in all shapes and sizes. We don’t favour one way of family life over another. We want to support and back up all families...Government dictating family structures doesn’t work.”

She is right. This is a question of respect.

The Government should commit to stable families by putting an end to austerity, by giving our schools, police and health services the funding they need, by banning zero-hours contracts, by ensuring that refuges are available for people fleeing domestic violence and by ensuring that the social security system is there for people in their time of need.

10.51 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Kit Malthouse): It is a pleasure to begin my Front-Bench career under your beady eye, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) on securing this debate and pay tribute to the work that he has done over the years on this issue, which is deeply important to him. I also thank hon. Members for a sensitive and thoughtful debate.

The Government are committed to supporting families, and it is right to draw attention to an issue that affects a wide range of Departments as well as mine. This debate was called in connection with Marriage Week, which takes place between 5 and 14 February. That provides a good opportunity to celebrate the commitment and connectedness that a stable relationship brings to a family.

The Government’s view is that families are fundamental in shaping individuals and that they have an overwhelmingly positive effect on wider society. Growing up in families where parents are collaborative and communicate well gives children the environment they need to develop into happy and successful adults. The vital institution of marriage is a strong symbol of wider society’s desire to celebrate commitment between partners.

The institution of marriage can be the basis of a successful family life and many people make this important commitment every year. Marriage can lay the foundations for parenthood and is emblematic of the love and security that parents need to raise a child. The Government will continue to champion and encourage stable families that provide nurturing environments for children. That is why we are focused on helping families and children, to enhance the educational and employment opportunities available to the young and to reinforce the benefits that parental collaboration will undoubtedly have.

Although the Government support the positive impact that the stability of marriage can bring to family life, this debate is also an opportunity to celebrate the fact that relationships that provide the foundation for a stable and supportive family life across the United Kingdom come in different shapes and sizes. The Government recognise that a supportive family can take many different forms. Marriage plays an important role in our society, but we are committed to supporting different, and equally important, types of families, too.

Sir Desmond Swayne: How many different forms? Is a family any collection of people who happen to share a fridge?

Kit Malthouse: No, but it is clear that the key issue for a family unit is long-term commitment to each other, whether that is a religious, legal or emotional commitment.

It is an unfortunate fact of life that marriages, like other relationships, can and do break down, but the Government have been clear that even when a family has separated, both parents still have a positive role to play in the lives of their children. Evidence shows that parental collaboration has a direct and positive impact on children’s outcomes. They tend to have better health and emotional wellbeing and higher academic attainment if they grow up with parents who have a good relationship and manage conflict well. That is why we are committed to supporting healthy relationships between parents, whether married or cohabiting, together or separated, in the best interests of children.

We have already made good progress. Between April 2015 and March 2017, we invested £17.5 million in relationship support services, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) pointed out. More than 48,000 couples have participated in counselling and more than 17,000 practitioners have been trained to help families in difficulty. We could not have achieved that without our delivery partners in the Relationship Alliance—part of a broad range of stakeholders who contribute valuable insight and expertise.

In the light of the strength of the evidence about the damaging impact of parental conflict on children, my Department is working with local areas to implement a new reducing parental conflict programme, which will increase access to face-to-face, evidence-based interventions

to reduce parental conflict. As announced in “Improving lives: Helping Workless Families”, our new programme will focus on vulnerable families, including those who are workless, because they are three times more likely to experience relationship distress.

Given the time remaining, I will turn to the four broad themes raised by hon. Members. First, several hon. Members mentioned the suspicion that there was an element of cultural cringe at the mere mention of marriage. I reassure them that that will not be the case from my point of view. The Department is working hard to embed the family test across Government, as my right hon. Friend mentioned, and to offer advice to other Departments that are instituting it. It has been developed with our partners in the Relationship Alliance, and we will continue to push that forward.

On the relationships and sex education consultation that is coming out later this year, I understand that that will or should mention the importance of commitment, with a specific mention of marriage as an element of that.

Secondly, the Government’s support for stability in relationships will be an enormous departmental focus for us, not least because of the connection between relationship instability and worklessness. In last year’s Budget, we announced that we would spend an extra £39 million on that programme over the next few years. I welcome hon. Members’ contributions to its development. We are also developing a quality of relationship tracker—a relationship distress indicator—against which we will hopefully be able to measure performance.

Thirdly, my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives and others mentioned a ministerial working group. I would be more than happy to address that with ministerial colleagues. I think the Cabinet Office is the most effective

Department for looking across Government at where we can put something together. I will write to my opposite number there to look at that.

Finally, several hon. Members raised the issue of financial support for marriage and whether it is enough, whether it is targeted properly and whether it should be exclusive to marriage or for commitment more widely. Although it would be dangerous to stray into Treasury matters at this early stage of my career, I am happy to write to Treasury Ministers to point out that although uptake of the marriage allowance has been successful to some extent—something like 2.6 million families now take part—hon. Members present feel that more could be done.

My door will always be open to hon. Members who are behind the strengthening families manifesto. Before becoming a Minister, I had a useful meeting with the all-party group about our crossover of interests around children’s interests, on which we are all focused.

In the preparation for my marriage, I was given a piece of advice. The chap who was preparing us said, “Kit, you have to remember that the day you get married is the day that courtship really starts.” That lesson has stuck with me for the rest of my life.

10.59 am

Derek Thomas: I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this issue. I thank all hon. Members who have taken part, and I thank the Minister for his open and positive response. I look forward to further discussions in the near future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Marriage and Government policy.

NHS Negligence Cases

11 am

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered NHS negligence cases.

As always, Mr Rosindell, it is a pleasure to see you in the Chair. I know that it is highly unusual for a member of the shadow Cabinet to speak from the Back Benches, so I am grateful to the Opposition Whips and to Mr Speaker for allowing me to do so as a final opportunity to seek some form of closure for my constituent in this very serious matter. I am especially grateful to Mr Speaker for granting this debate.

Sadly, I have to publicly outline how my constituent, Mr Hawkins, has been let down by public authorities. The law and NHS rules have been abused to avoid giving him the justice that is rightfully his. His attempts to seek that justice, along with some semblance of honesty and humility, have already passed the decade mark, so I shall be grateful for the Minister's reply after I set out the case.

Mr Hawkins was admitted to Tameside General Hospital on 28 June 2006 to undergo surgery to repair a ruptured left Achilles tendon. Rupturing an Achilles tendon can tear it partially or completely, making walking difficult and the ankle feel weak. The surgery was listed for theatre in the afternoon under the care of an orthopaedic consultant surgeon, Mr Ebizie, but then postponed to the evening. My constituent believes that the most simple and sensible solution would have been to postpone it until the next day, allowing him to remain under the care of the same surgeon. He believes that that did not happen, however, because it would have meant the hospital missing its five-day Government target for a patient to receive treatment or surgery after attending accident and emergency. Records indicate that the surgery was instead carried out by Dr Manikanti, assisted by Mr Kumar. Mr Hawkins states that the change of surgeon was made without his knowledge or consent. Subsequently, both clinicians have left the hospital and the country, and the names and titles of those who carried out the surgery have been disputed.

Mr Hawkins states that the surgeon made a critical clinical error. He believes that the surgeon misunderstood the positioning of the two diagonal sutures forming part of the modified Kessler suture. They were brought to the surface and closed, which permanently fixed the repaired Achilles tendon to the rear of his leg. On 7 July 2006, nine days after the surgery, the plaster cast was removed, revealing an open wound between the two sutures. Steri-strips were applied in an attempt to close the wound, but the duty consultant wrote in his records that the wound had healed very well after surgery. Mr Hawkins states that despite being aware of the error, the hospital failed to correct it by releasing the repaired tendon from the rear of his leg as soon as was medically possible. This allowed serious adhesion and tethering to form as the sutures disintegrated.

On 12 January 2007, Mr Hawkins was discharged from the care of Tameside Hospital. Throughout the previous months, the repaired Achilles tendon had been continually swollen because of the aggravation of the fixation. Mr Hawkins raised concerns, which were ignored. Weekly and monthly appointments at the hospital were

required thereafter. Mr Hawkins believes that he was discharged by Tameside Hospital before he was clinically prepared and regardless of his condition. He feels that that was done to conform to Government targets.

Mr Hawkins immediately made a complaint through the hospital trust's internal complaints procedures. He believes that on receipt of his letter of complaint, the trust should have called him in for an examination and a scan. It should have admitted that a serious problem had occurred and carried out a further operation to release the Achilles tendon from the rear of his leg. In Mr Hawkins's mind, the matter would then have been resolved. However, the trust decided to take a different route: it instantly instructed Hempsons solicitors.

Although, obviously, Mr Hawkins is concerned about the clinical errors that have caused him lasting damage, he is rather more appalled by the actions of a variety of organisations afterwards. He believes that those actions were deliberately designed to cover up the fact that a clinical mistake had been made, caused primarily by the replacement of a consultant surgeon with a junior doctor.

In 2008, Mr Hawkins instructed a solicitor, who requested disclosure of all full medical records. The trust passed his request on to Hempsons. However, in the immediate period after his request he received only a very selective number of his own medical files from Hempsons. Mr Hawkins's solicitor failed to ensure that all full medical evidence was disclosed within statutory time limits and failed to apply for a court controlled disclosure, while knowing that the records he had listed were missing. Mr Hawkins's solicitor instructed a clinical litigation medical expert, who produced a case-closing report that failed the objectivity test and was therefore invalid. The trust and Hempsons initially failed to disclose relevant medical records, doing so only after continued and considerable pressure from Mr Hawkins.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is a strong advocate for his constituent and makes a compelling case about the difficulties that his constituent has faced. Does he agree that the case flags up a wider problem? He mentioned solicitors being involved at a very early stage in the process. The current system for dealing with medical negligence in hospitals pushes defensive medicine and defensive approaches from hospitals. That fundamentally needs to change, because it is not good for doctors and it is not good for patients. Does he think that no-fault compensation may be a good way forward?

Andrew Gwynne: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. As Mr Hawkins himself acknowledges, if the hospital trust had taken his complaint down a different route by accepting that it had made a clinical error and deciding to put it right, I would not be standing in Westminster Hall today raising his case.

Mr Hawkins continued with his complaint. In 2013, the trust eventually conceded and his remaining medical records were fully disclosed. On analysis of the records, it was plain to see that there were omissions and that pre-action protocol time limits had been exceeded. In response, Hempsons sought the opinion of a medical litigation expert. A report was produced, but it was based on the selected medical records that I mentioned

earlier, as well as on the falsified information. Mr Hawkins believes that that report would fail any objectivity test and is therefore invalid.

Mr Hawkins had involved the Information Commissioner's Office on two occasions: in 2009 and in 2013. In both instances, it judged that the Data Protection Act 1998 had been breached by the trust's failure to disclose relevant medical records on several occasions. After much time and effort from Mr Hawkins, on 11 December 2013 the new management team at the trust finally admitted to maladministration and awarded remuneration for it. In a move that Mr Hawkins believes was an attempt to close his complaint and prevent the case from going back to the Information Commissioner, or to the court for disclosure, the new management team disclosed that it would no longer discuss actions taken by the old management team. Mr Hawkins also believes that the Limitation Act 1980 was breached from 2008 and that rules 31 and 35 of the Civil Procedure Rules 1998 were breached in compiling medical reports, because the medical experts failed in their duty to the court to be objective.

The delays in disclosure of information meant that Mr Hawkins's complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman was ruled out of time. My constituent believes that that makes a mockery of the trust's failure to disclose his medical records within statutory time limits, which he believes the ombudsman ignored while upholding the strict time criteria regarding his making a complaint to the ombudsman.

Mr Hawkins appealed the decision on several occasions when the evidence was retrieved through the Information Commissioner. However, he was unsuccessful in overturning their original view that a letter from the trust indicated that the complaint was closed in 2007, which he utterly refutes. Hempsons later apologised and admitted that that letter did not clearly state that the local complaints procedure was closed. However, the ombudsman still refused to investigate the complaint and, in doing so, Mr Hawkins feels that the ombudsman has assisted the trust to conceal the cause and effects of a clinical error.

In 2013, Mr Hawkins wrote to the NHS Litigation Authority, as the trust was not reporting clinical mistakes. Initially, the NHS Litigation Authority would not get involved and requested my involvement, as Mr Hawkins's Member of Parliament, which I duly offered. Two replies were received that indicated that the NHS Litigation Authority was involved in the case, despite previous assertions and written evidence that it was not involved. Mr Hawkins was notified in writing that the trust, on receipt of his letter of complaint, had instructed Hempsons in January 2007, with the NHS Litigation Authority directly instructing Hempsons and the trust from November 2007 to February 2009.

Hempsons was aware of a breach of the Limitation Act 1980 and the Data Protection Act 1998 when it disclosed to Mr Hawkins his missing medical records in October 2009. This means that the trust and Hempsons had illegally avoided disclosing all full medical records within statutory time limits and successfully passed the three-year limit for litigation. Mr Hawkins believes that indicates that the NHS Litigation Authority was aware that rules had been broken, yet failed to take retrospective action based on the strength of the evidence that he had disclosed to it in 2013.

The actions taken by the trust, assisted by Hempsons and the NHS Litigation Authority from January 2007 to December 2013, clearly indicate that the trust was covering up a clinical incident and its cause. With so much time having passed since my constituent first exited the operating theatre in the summer of 2006, I hope that today the Minister of State will be able to afford Mr Hawkins guidance and support in this matter, and finally bring to some closure what has been a dreadful episode for my constituent.

11.13 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Stephen Barclay): As always, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell.

I begin by commending the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) for securing this debate. Although he opened it by saying that it is perhaps unusual for a member of the shadow Cabinet to secure a debate such as this one, it is absolutely right that he is doing so on behalf of his constituent and bringing these matters before the House. I am very sorry to hear about Mr Hawkins's experiences, which have clearly caused him distress.

As you are well aware, Mr Rosindell, the NHS complaints process operates independently of Government, to prevent political bias in the handling of individual complaints. However, a number of points arise from the hon. Gentleman's remarks, in respect of his contention that Mr Hawkins was let down by a number of individuals and organisations within the NHS. Specifically, it is alleged by Mr Hawkins that the hospital failed him by prioritising then Government targets, which delayed his operation; that the clinician failed him through clinical error; that the duty surgeon failed him by falsely reporting that his wound had healed; that the hospital failed him by not correcting the alleged mistake and by instructing lawyers; that Hempsons solicitors failed to disclose full records; that his own solicitors failed him by not obtaining his records; that his own clinical medical expert failed him; that the hospital failed him, regarding his report; that the ombudsman failed him; and that the NHS Litigation Authority failed him.

Although the Department of Health does not comment on individual cases, and it is not for me to adjudicate whether all of those claims by Mr Hawkins are valid, it is worth noting that a very wide range of both individuals and organisations are alleged by Mr Hawkins either to have conspired against him or, indeed, to have failed him in this matter.

It is also worth placing on the record that NHS Resolution, which was formerly the NHS Litigation Authority, informs me that in January 2016 it first became aware of an independent medical report commissioned by Thompsons, Mr Hawkins's own solicitors, which had not been previously disclosed to NHS Resolution in the course of Mr Hawkins making his claim. That medical report concluded that there was nothing to suggest that the operation in question had been performed anything but competently. Although I very much recognise that the hon. Gentleman's constituent is of a different view, and he is perfectly entitled to be of a different view, it is worth placing on the record that his own medical expert, who reviewed this case, did not feel that the operation had been performed in the way that Mr Hawkins has claimed.

[Stephen Barclay]

I note that Mr Hawkins referred this matter to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, which is independent of both the NHS and Government, but the ombudsman ruled that the claim was out of time. Ombudsman decisions are final and there is no automatic right for them to be reviewed. However, the law provides for the ombudsman to consider whether to review a decision if it was demonstrated that the ombudsman made their decision based on inaccurate facts, or that there was new and relevant information that was not previously available, or that they had overlooked or misunderstood parts of the complaint or relevant information.

If a complainant believes that there has been maladministration in the handling of their complaint, they can apply to the courts for a judicial review. However, that must be done within three months of the conclusion of the complaints process.

Andrew Gwynne: The Minister hits the nail on the head there, and it is where the system has let Mr Hawkins down; Mr Hawkins will have been listening very attentively to the case that I set out. Mr Hawkins was denied that ability to apply for a judicial review because of the way that the hospital itself had delayed the process by not informing him that the case had been formally closed, so that by the time he was advised that the case was closed, the time limit by which he was able to take a legal route had passed.

Stephen Barclay: I very much recognise the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. Obviously, I do not want to get drawn into the specifics of this individual case, for the reasons that I have already set out, but within this case and within the claim made by Mr Hawkins a number of factors have been outlined, and I recognise that the hon. Gentleman's point is one limb of the claim that Mr Hawkins has made.

What brings the various issues together is a question that I think applies to all of us, from all parties in the House: in the future, how do we collectively avoid cases such as Mr Hawkins's case, and how do we improve the complaints process? That is an area where the Government have been particularly active, not least following "Hard Truths", the report into Mid Staffordshire and the issues that arose there. The Department of Health has established the complaints improvement board to take forward a series of projects to improve the complaints process. So I hope that—irrespective of the specifics that we are discussing today—as part of the "closure" that the hon. Gentleman referred to, the improvements in the complaints process in the future will be a source of some comfort to Mr Hawkins.

As part of that process, the complaints improvement partnership was established by the Department and system partners, including NHS England, NHS Improvement, the Care Quality Commission, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, and NHS Resolution. That partnership is currently examining options for delivering a more effective complaints management system, and better use of all forms of feedback to improve NHS services. That includes expanding the role of the "freedom to speak up" guardians, to give them powers to initiate whistleblower complaints processes where possible. My

predecessor, the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), particularly championed that when he was a Minister, and he did a huge amount to progress it.

The complaints improvement partnership also engages with non-executive directors to explore options for them to have responsibility for monitoring the progress of complaints and serious incidents within trusts, and with Healthwatch England, to empower local healthwatch organisations. As constituency Members, I think we all work with and see the value of that body. Working with the ombudsman, the partnership also promotes best practice in the handling of complaints by providing information, advice and training. In addition, NHS Resolution has recently launched a service to increase the use of mediation in the NHS, to resolve issues at an earlier stage without the need for protracted litigation. My hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) has previously championed reducing the impact of lawyers when disputes arise.

It is important that patients receive the safest care possible from the NHS and that when things go wrong clinicians are open and honest, and able to learn from their mistakes. It is equally important that patients and their families are listened to and their concerns taken seriously and addressed.

Andrew Gwynne: That brings us back to the point made by the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter). When Mr Hawkins complained that his Achilles tendon had adhered to the back of his foot again, it surely would have been better for Tameside General Hospital's old management—the hospital has come a long way since it was in special measures—to investigate and put it right at that point, rather than immediately going down the legal route.

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the events took place more than 11 years ago and that it is, therefore, not for me to comment on what the trust knew at that time or their actions accordingly. I think we all, across the House, recognise that resolving issues without recourse to litigation is preferable, where possible, to lawyers being involved at an early stage—and I say that as a former lawyer. That is why the Government seek to improve how complaints are handled, including improving the regulation. The Care Quality Commission now rigorously inspects all trusts and primary and adult care providers, and a duty of candour—a new protection for whistleblowers—encourages staff to speak up for safety and hence fosters greater transparency. There is also the development of a culture of learning, through patient safety collaboratives and the national Sign up to Safety campaign, and last April the healthcare safety investigation branch became a fully operational and independent branch of NHS Improvement, to investigate serious incidents in the NHS with a strong focus on system-wide learning.

Dr Poulter: I do not wish to distract from the main purpose of the debate, but my hon. Friend makes an important point about a culture of openness and transparency in dealing with complaints. How does he feel that the recent High Court judgment about a doctor being struck off by the General Medical Council might play into doctors' and other healthcare professionals' willingness to engage with such a culture? Might it be

inhibitory, in that they would be concerned about the impact on their future careers of being open and willing to own up to mistakes?

Stephen Barclay: As a former Minister, my hon. Friend knows that there are conventions regarding Ministers of the Crown commenting on court judgments. The Secretary of State has already made clear his position on that matter, and this debate on a specific constituency issue is not the forum for moving beyond that scope.

It is important for us all that we improve the handling of complaints. In a system as large as the NHS, we all recognise that, with the best will in the world, things will go wrong and mistakes will be made. The latest Care Quality Commission annual “State of Care” report, published in October 2017, recognises that the vast majority of patients get good care and that many parts of the NHS have improved thanks to the hard work of the staff. The key issue that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish has rightly brought before us today is how we learn from things going wrong and how, when a patient thinks something has gone wrong, the issues are aired and resolved.

I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate, notwithstanding his elevated position in the shadow Cabinet, and for ensuring that his constituent’s issues have been aired before the House. The Government are committed to building a learning culture within the NHS that listens to patients and relatives and learns from mistakes, so that patients do not suffer avoidable harm. The Secretary of State deserves great credit for his championing of patient safety as a specific issue within his portfolio. We are also working to improve the complaints handling system so that it is more responsive and joined-up between organisations. I hope that the improvements that are in place will help Mr Hawkins to get some closure on the matters we have debated today.

11.25 am

Andrew Gwynne: I thank the Minister for his kind words and his outlining of how things are changing to give patients better systems through which confidently to seek redress when things go badly wrong. Unfortunately, though, that does not fix the problem for my constituent, Mr Hawkins. He is not looking for a solution. He has exhausted every avenue, as the Minister has set out, and has been badly let down and failed at every stage by a variety of public and private bodies.

My aim today was to set out Mr Hawkins’s case so that Ministers could learn from it in taking forward improvements to the NHS complaints procedures, to ensure that hospital trusts do not play the system to avoid being held properly to account by the ombudsman and other statutory bodies such as the Information Commissioner. My aim was also for Mr Hawkins to feel that the world knew what had happened to him, and to receive assurances that the Government are fully aware of and understand the pain, hurt and concern caused to him for more than a decade, and are intent on putting that right.

Question put and agreed to.

11.27 am

Sitting suspended.

Criminal Justice System: Adults with Autism

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the treatment of adults with autism by the criminal justice system.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I am pleased to have secured this debate on a crucial topic that affects the lives of many adults with autism and the families who support them. The debate is about adults with autism and what happens when they come into contact with the criminal justice system.

It is understandable that a lot of focus in this place and elsewhere is given to children with autism—that is right given the need for educational and other support for them, their parents and their families—but autism does not cease to be an issue when someone turns 18 and becomes an adult. Many of the services that might be available for children with autism fall away when they become adults. Parents get older and it is often more difficult for them to cope. Adults with autism face a complex world outside of full-time education where the behaviours and traits associated with autism are often poorly understood, misinterpreted or even sometimes mistaken for criminality. I will say some more about that in due course.

First, I acknowledge the work of the all-party parliamentary group on autism, which has been supported by the National Autistic Society and many other campaigners. That work has resulted in recent positive developments in the criminal justice system for adults with autism. I congratulate the APPG on successfully securing the support of the former prisons Minister, the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous). He wrote to all prisons in England and Wales encouraging them to undertake autism accreditation. Pleasingly, one prison has already been accredited. According to the APPG website, seven more are undergoing that process, but, with well over 100 prisons in England and Wales, there is a long way to go in making further progress.

Recent cases featured in the press, such as that of a young man called Marcus Potter, show that the use of the prison system can exacerbate the condition of those with autism, rather than act in the public interest. The system can cause deep distress and problems. In this case, a young man with an autism diagnosis from the age of three got into trouble for his compulsive filming of the local police. The judge decided to release him from prison, opting for a care plan and probation instead. The judge concluded:

“The worst place for you is where you are”.

There is a lot of work to be done in relation to adults with autism and prisons. There may be Members who want to say something about that in this debate.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Just on that point, I have the privilege of chairing the Westminster Commission on Autism. I do not know whether my hon. Friend saw its recent report on the barriers to healthcare. All these institutions, whether they are in criminal justice, health or whatever, have to

[Mr Barry Sheerman]

give special consideration to people on the autism spectrum. Those environments can be very hostile because of the nature of that challenge.

Kevin Brennan: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work he is doing on that commission and the work he has done around health. One of the complexities with such a debate on autism relates to the Department that should be answering. I do not think I am giving away any state secrets by saying that I received a phone call from the Government asking, “Which Department do you think should reply to your debate?” I do not blame the Government for that—having been a Minister, I understand how Government works—but one of the key problems is the difficulty in ensuring that services are joined up across the Department of Health and Social Care, the Ministry of Justice, the Attorney General’s Office, the Home Office, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education. All those things play into each other. Even though today’s debate is specifically about the criminal justice system, it is inevitable that other issues play into it.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman think it might be worth the Government considering, with Cabinet Office oversight, the creation of something like the covenant and veterans board? That would ensure that every Department had someone absolutely focused on the issue. Autism affects every Department and how we make reforms. Such a board could drive the agenda much more comprehensively through the system.

Kevin Brennan: I think that is an excellent suggestion. In my experience in government, to get Departments working together and to make progress we have to bring Ministers together, not just officials. Those Ministers have to understand and be passionately committed to making the change. It is possible to make significant change simply by ensuring that Ministers are brought together. When I was a Minister, I attempted a joint project with another Minister, and the only way we could get it done was by ensuring that we met regularly. We told our officials, “You will do this, even though it is not currently in the Department’s culture. We are both telling you to do it, and you will work together to do it.” The hon. Lady’s suggestion is excellent, and I hope that the Minister will take it on board. Even if he cannot commit to doing it this afternoon, I hope he will commit to taking it away and discussing it with his colleagues.

Mr Sheerman: Is it not the case that all the institutions have to provide training on people on the autism spectrum? I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman heard reference in the debate last week to Alex Henry. He is an autistic young man. A boy who was with him stabbed someone, and Alex Henry is now in prison for 19 years. He was an easily led young man on the autism spectrum. People on the autism spectrum tend to be quite easily led and are very impressionable. The criminal justice system should be sensitive to the needs of autistic people.

Kevin Brennan: I agree with my hon. Friend. I will come on to talk a little about ensuring that joined-up understanding. The criminal justice system needs to be

able to identify and understand the vulnerabilities of people with autism when they come into contact with the criminal justice system.

I was talking about a young man who had been sent to prison. I pointed out that there is a lot of work to be done on adults with autism and prisons. I will not talk further about that today—other Members may want to speak about it—because I want to focus on the earlier stages of the criminal justice system and in particular issues relating to safeguarding and arrest. People with autism can often exhibit specific behaviours that others categorise as unusual, such as stimming, which is a repetitive physical movement that helps reinstate a sense of calm. It is a particular trait of people with autism, and it is rarely understood by others. Indeed, most people I speak to have never even heard of stimming and do not know what it is.

Behaviours that are seen to be unusual can sometimes be misinterpreted as antisocial or, even worse, criminal. Indeed, it has been suggested that those who are the highest functioning on the autism spectrum can often bear the brunt of such misinterpretations as their condition is not otherwise obviously visible. They are not always extended the benefit of the doubt. I hope the Minister will outline his views and what is being done to try to prevent people with autism from being mistakenly criminalised by that misinterpretation of that particular trait. What steps are being taken to ensure that the behaviour of those on the autistic spectrum is not misinterpreted by police and the judiciary?

When adults on the autistic spectrum come under suspicion of criminal behaviour, safeguarding becomes crucial. I want to refer to the case of a constituent of mine, who wishes to remain anonymous for obvious reasons. The safeguards in the criminal justice system did not protect him as they should have under current policy and practice. Owing to his understandable desire not to be named publicly, I will not go too far into the detailed circumstances that led to the arrest of my constituent on two different occasions. I know that Ministers are aware of the details of the case through previous meetings and correspondence. Suffice it to say that his stimming was misinterpreted while travelling in crowded conditions on public transport, and that is what led to his arrest.

My constituent declared his autism before he was arrested, which should have triggered a different pathway from a normal arrest, but he was not diverted or safeguarded at the point of contact as he should have been. On the first occasion, no appropriate adult was called, his parents were not contacted as they should have been, and he was not assessed as fit for interview. A caution was issued against him, which was later quashed due to those lapses in procedure. Unfortunately, he was arrested again three years later, and his vulnerability and protected characteristics were not properly recognised by the police or the health professional who assessed him. In other words, the reasonable adjustments that are required by law were not made during detention or subsequently, and that case was dropped without charge.

In January 2009, Lord Bradley, who is of course a former Member of this House and pays very close attention to these kinds of proceedings, published his review of people with mental health problems or learning disabilities in the criminal justice system. His report set out a policy of liaison and diversion for people with

these kinds of issues away from police custody, for assessment by clinicians prior to arrest and custody. I want to be perfectly clear that diversion does not mean not having to answer the allegations; it means that behaviours associated with autism are properly contextualised, that both the accused and the evidence are properly protected, and that an appropriate adult is present. Lord Bradley specified in his report:

“Studies into the use of Appropriate Adults have concluded that provision of the Appropriate Adult is very inconsistent. Firstly, the needs of a defendant have to be identified, which are often missed. Even when a need for an Appropriate Adult is identified there is currently a shortage of individuals who can perform the role effectively.”

My contention is that if Lord Bradley’s recommendations had been properly followed when my constituent was arrested in 2011 and 2014, the trauma that he and his family suffered could have been avoided. My constituents are not the only ones who have had such misunderstandings with the police. The National Autistic Society has said: “our charity still hears regularly from autistic people and families who say that responding police did not understand autism and did not respond appropriately. This causes unnecessary distress to the individual and to police attending.”

Mr Sheerman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kevin Brennan: I will in one second. In driving home my point—before my hon. Friend helps me to do so—I want to ask the Minister to go back and look at Lord Bradley’s proposals and ensure that they are being fully implemented across the system. I will now, with great pleasure, give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr Sheerman: My hon. Friend is making such a good speech, which has stimulated me to remind him that the court system very often derides professional opinion about the facts of autism. Professor Baron-Cohen of the University of Cambridge is probably the best-known expert on autism in the country. In the recent case of Lauri Love, who is in danger of being sent to the United States where he will almost certainly be in danger of committing suicide, the professor’s evidence was dismissed out of hand. In fact, he was attacked as an expert when he was in court. Does my hon. Friend agree that professionals who know about autism have been disregarded in a number of cases?

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend describes a very distressing phenomenon. Professor Baron-Cohen is one of the world’s experts in this area, and the idea that his evidence would not be taken seriously in an instance such as the one that he describes is obviously highly concerning. I hope that the Minister will consider that, and whether legislation might be required to ensure that the Lord Bradley’s recommendations are followed across the system.

The issues that I am raising today were borne out in a study by the University of Bath, published in 2016. A survey of almost 400 police officers found that only 42% of officers—so a minority of officers—were satisfied with how they had worked with individuals on the autism spectrum. Some 37% of officers had received specific training on how to work with individuals on the autism spectrum, but many found that even that training was not tailored to their specific roles within the police force. In addition, organisation and time constraints were cited as specific barriers, so what assessment has

the Minister made of the effects of the continuing cuts to police budgets on the training that is offered to police officers and staff working with adults on the autistic spectrum, and what will he do following the debate to ensure that safeguarding policies are properly put into action across the board?

The National Autistic Society has a free resource aimed at police officers and staff, which offers a guide to working with people on the autistic spectrum. I hope that the Minister will be able to join me in publicly encouraging police services in Wales to use that resource, which is appropriate for Scotland and Northern Ireland as well, and to seriously consider its guidance.

As I said, the allegations against my constituent resulted in a caution that was quashed and in the second instance they were dropped. However, to his great distress, those erroneous allegations remain on police databases. At the time of his arrest, my constituent was living and working across the border in England, not in Cardiff, but the discovery that the allegations against him were kept on police databases, despite the police having acknowledged that they were inaccurate, caused him very severe psychiatric harm, as was confirmed by two separate psychiatric reports. As a result, my constituent ended up giving up his job, flat and independence to return home and live with his parents in Cardiff. We cannot want to see such an outcome for an adult with autism who has established independence and a productive role in society in the workplace. It shows the life-changing effects that a lack of safeguarding can end up having.

The allegations remain on police records. The chief executive of the relevant NHS trust invited both the police and the Independent Police Complaints Commission to send representatives to two meetings to discuss how they could help to protect my constituent from further psychiatric harm. I am sad to say that they did not attend either meeting. Even though extensive and complex complaints have been made to the relevant agencies, those made to the police and the Independent Police Complaints Commission remain unresolved. My constituent and his family have grave concerns about the governance and compliance with required standards demonstrated in the handling of their complaints.

There is no evidence that the police service involved recognised my constituent’s continuing vulnerability, or put in place plans to respond appropriately and safely in the event of further contact with him. In my view, therefore, they neglected to protect him from future risk of harm. Before the first incident, and subsequently, he was studying for a degree and travelling daily on public transport. Before the second incident, he was working full time, but his experiences and, in particular, the failure to remove or amend the allegations resulted, as was predicted by the senior medical consultants who assessed him, in serious impairment of his health and development, with a significant increase in his anxiety and impact on his functioning. As a result, he lost his employment, moved back home and is no longer able to travel independently on public transport.

In pursuing his case, my constituent and his parents have unearthed many worrying inconsistencies. For example, he was originally told by the police that the case against him was not pursued on public interest grounds, whereas the Solicitor General later confirmed that it had been dropped through a lack of evidence. Those are two very different reasons not to prosecute.

[Kevin Brennan]

Hon. Members will recall the Commons debate on 30 November last year on mental health and suicide in the autism community, in which reference was made to recent research findings that autistic people are nine times more likely to kill themselves than the average population. For people on the autistic spectrum, contact with the criminal justice system can often come at moments of heightened anxiety. As such, it is crucial that all parties are fully informed and trained to find a solution that does not cause undue distress or, in the case of my constituent, severe psychiatric harm.

I urge the Minister to listen to today's debate and the suggestions from hon. Members. I urge him to speak with his colleagues in the Government to find a way to work in a more joined-up fashion in a ministerial-led initiative, to make sure that what happened to my constituent does not happen to him again, or to others, and to ensure that this country has a reputation across the world for the highest standards in dealing with the issues faced by adults with autism.

2.51 pm

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) on bringing this important issue to Parliament's attention. I also take the opportunity to congratulate the UK Government and the National Autistic Society on their work in establishing the first autism-accredited prison in the world at Her Majesty's young offenders institution Feltham, which I understand some hon. Members here today have had the opportunity to visit. I am very proud that the United Kingdom is leading the world on this issue. Facilities such as those at Feltham will be important in rehabilitating offenders, but, more importantly, I hope they will ensure that young people with autism do not have to endure overly distressing sentences that will cause damage to their mental and perhaps even physical health.

I would welcome any moves by the Ministry of Justice and the relevant devolved Governments to increase the number of autism-accredited prisons across the entirety of the United Kingdom. Given that prisoners are more likely than the general population to be autistic, it seems clear to me that we must do all we can to improve autism awareness and support in our prison estate.

Autistic people are more likely to be victims or witnesses of crimes than they are to be perpetrators. I welcome the National Autistic Society's guidelines to help professionals in such situations, and I hope it will continue to support the hard-working men and women in our police force, prisons and courts systems.

Hon. Members may be aware that the Scottish Government have just finished a consultation on refreshing the Scottish strategy for autism, which will look to address issues across many areas of autism and focus, at least in part, on the criminal justice system. A freedom of information request highlighted by the great research team in the House of Commons showed that, in the National Autistic Society's opinion, the way the Scottish criminal system looks after autistic people is far from satisfactory—it said that the Scottish criminal justice system is "failing autistic people". I look forward to

reading the findings of the consultation and I hope the Scottish Government will act to ensure that that failure does not continue.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating Police Scotland and Jackton police training school in my constituency? I had the good fortune to visit that facility on Friday last week to hear that mental health training, including autism awareness, has been rolled out to all officers right across Police Scotland.

John Lamont: The hon. Lady highlights an important point. The discussions I have had with my local police force clearly demonstrate that the police and other emergency workers have a much greater understanding of how to deal with the people with autism whom they come across during their work.

It is estimated that there are 58,000 people living with an autism spectrum condition in Scotland. It is vital that they receive fair and inclusive treatment by the criminal justice system, not only when they are suspected of a crime, but when they have witnessed or been a victim of crime. People with autism have an equal part to play in a fair and just society, and it is our job to ensure that they are treated appropriately.

2.55 pm

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) on securing this important debate.

Adults with autism experience the criminal justice system in a unique way, which is reflective of the unique and complex way they experience the world and the social, physical and psychological symptoms of their condition, which exist on a broad spectrum. Recent studies have shown that we are all somewhere on that spectrum.

Adults with autism and their individual needs are often not immediately identified on their first contact with the criminal justice system. That has significant consequences for autistic people, both as offenders and victims. The Autism Act 2009 was the first condition-specific legislation of its type in England, and I am proud to say that it was brought in under a Labour Government. The coalition Government's 2014 "Think Autism" strategy set out two key priorities relating to criminal justice as identified by those with autism and their carers. Those priorities are, in their own words:

"I want the everyday services that I come into contact with to know how to make reasonable adjustments to include me and accept me as I am. I want the staff who work in them to be aware and accepting of autism"

and

"If I break the law, I want the criminal justice system to think about autism and to know how to work well with other services."

I cannot emphasise enough that adults with autism are much more likely to be victims of crime—seven times more likely—than to be offenders. The National Autistic Society tells of horrific crimes perpetrated against adults with autism, including one autistic man who, aged 21, was harassed, raped and murdered, in part because of his condition. His mother said that "he was vulnerable and became a target because of his condition, but we weren't given any help".

Some 49% of adults with autism in a 2014 survey said they had been abused by someone they thought of as a friend. Autism brings with it an inherent vulnerability to bullying and social exclusion, and we must urgently work to entrench awareness of and respect for it within our society, starting in our schools.

Statistics published by the Office for National Statistics between 2013 and 2016 showed that autistic people were four times more likely to experience disability hate crime than were those with disabilities that affected their stamina, mobility or vision. In other words, there is no empathy for autism. Will the Minister commit to looking at the rise in disability hate crime—it rose 53% between 2015-16 and 2016-17—and exploring how we can tackle this national shame?

Intrinsic to the condition is, generally speaking, a desire to keep to the letter of the law—very much so—but, as in the community as a whole, some adults with autism do commit crime. It is widely accepted that, in the case of autistic people, a significant proportion of crime committed is caused by circumstances that provoke discomfort, fear, or misunderstanding.

The right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb)—the Minister with responsibility for care and support at the time of the “Think Autism” strategy’s publication—said in December last year that we should invest more in keeping people with mental health conditions, learning disabilities and autism out of our prisons altogether. I absolutely agree.

The National Autistic Society also agrees with that assessment, and it stated that

“for many autistic people, prison has meant that the system has already failed”.

This is not always possible, but will the Minister commit to exploring the equivalent of autism accreditation for the criminal justice system in its entirety, from the point of exposure to exit? That means looking at what reasonable adjustments can be made throughout the system from the moment the police are called—including the quick-fire questions at interview—and people’s appearance in court, detention in prison and rehabilitation.

The most prevalent problem appears to be in policing, which is most people’s first point of contact with the criminal justice system. A 2016 study showed that seven out of 10 adults with autism were dissatisfied by their experience with the police and reported discrimination, a lack of clarity and a feeling that their needs were not met. The “Think Autism” strategy tasks the College of Policing with developing autism awareness training for new recruits. I welcome that move, but responding police across the board must be trained so they understand that when they identify someone who may have autism, they must respect that person’s needs.

Wailing sirens, loud noises, being touched and being shouted at are experiences that, combined, lead to sensory overload for most adults with autism. In those circumstances, the behaviour of people with autism, such as stimming, can easily be misinterpreted as aggression. Ensuring that the police are uniformly educated about autism is without doubt the key to preventing excessive distress and unnecessary violence. I urge the Minister to take steps to ensure that all police, no matter their length of service, have the autism understanding that they need.

People with autism may also be seen as unreliable witnesses, because stress may alter their behaviour in the courtroom, and the often literal nature of their responses may not be conducive to effective self-advocacy or to providing an account of events that happened to others. Since 1999, it has been legally possible, at the court’s discretion, to identify people as vulnerable and to adapt proceedings accordingly, but I understand that that is done infrequently and does not reflect the number of vulnerable people who pass through our courts.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on raising that matter. This is not just about prison officers, the court service and the prison service; it is about recognising issues early in the process. If we do that, we can address the issues further down the line, and if people with autism are distressed by what they are going through, we can put their minds at rest.

Ms Rimmer: I accept that point. It should start with policing and go right through the system with the individual.

I welcome the recent progress that has enabled witnesses on the autistic spectrum to request a registered intermediary to help judges and lawyers to phrase their questions more appropriately. Will the Minister consider enforcing the universal implementation of those measures to make our courts more accessible for vulnerable people? Much more can be done to educate legal experts about the complexities of autism to reduce the possibility of miscarriages of justice and to avoid putting autistic witnesses under undue stress.

Social attitudes research shows that some jurors still hold stigmatising beliefs about autistic individuals, which could negatively impact their decisions regarding such people at trial. Given that only 16% of autistic people and their families believe that the wider community understand their disability, it is likely that that is a systemic issue in criminal justice.

I want to focus on the “Think Autism” objective of effective joint working. In the Government’s 2016 progress report on “Think Autism”, only 11% of local authorities gave themselves a green rating for their work on autism with the criminal justice system. That rating was based on the inclusion of people with autism in developing local criminal justice diversion schemes, involvement in the autism partnership board and evidence of joint working. I am deeply concerned about those figures. I understand that the Government are reviewing the strategy next year, and I will be pleased to hear about any progress.

The all-party group on autism hosted a meeting on criminal justice in 2014 with the then prisons Minister, from which the pioneering autism accreditation scheme arose. The first prison to be autism accredited was Her Majesty’s prison and young offenders institution Feltham in 2016. The standards for accreditation apply to prisons’ education, health and mental health services, and they cover autism understanding, training for staff, adjustments to the prison building—such as reducing the stimulation of posters and notices—changes to prison routines and individual risk assessments. They were developed by the National Autistic Society, which is now working with other prisons in the country to help them to achieve accreditation.

[Ms Rimmer]

I was pleased to hear that, as of April 2017, accreditation programme pilots have been trialled in the probation service. That is undoubtedly progress. It will lead not only to the implementation of the practical steps needed to become accredited, but to an accompanying cultural change that will generate a greater awareness of autistic people's needs and improve the perception of autistic people. That will lead to a greater understanding and acceptance of who they are.

In the meantime, adequate autism-specific training must be made available for all prison staff and police. Much more research needs to be carried out in this field. Awareness needs to be raised across the board about the fact that adults with autism experience things differently and, crucially, that those differences are not experienced uniformly.

It is clear that inroads are being made, but the progress is not quick enough for the adults with autism who have been let down by our criminal justice system. I urge the Minister to bring about change. Prison is an inhuman setting, but for adults with autism it is far more severe, and their route to prison often leads to severe distress. We need to bring about a societal change in attitudes, through awareness-raising and a concerted effort by the justice system. I believe that that is the key to generating a lasting improvement in autistic adults' experience of criminal justice.

3.7 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Sir Edward.

I came to the subject of autism rather late in life; I will share with hon. Members the tale of my visit to a remote primary school in Caithness a number of years ago. There was a boy, probably aged about 12, who was deeply engrossed in making an Airfix Halifax bomber. Anxious to impress him, I said, "That bomber's a Halifax. It has Merlin engines"—the subtext was, "Aren't I clever to know that?" The boy looked at me and said, "Yes, it's a Merlin XX with Stanley Hooker superchargers and a brake horsepower of 1,240." As my jaw sagged, the teacher murmured in my ear—you know what I am going to say, Sir Edward—"Asperger's."

Even though I was then in my 40s, that was the first time I had come across the condition. Part of the reason why I am here for this debate is that this is a learning process. I am sure hon. Members will recall the book—published in 2004, I think—called "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time". Medical professionals and experts in autism might say that it is not an accurate depiction of autism, but as a view from the inside of the person, it was very instructive to all of us, and I was glad that it became a big seller.

The debate is about awareness of the issue. I did not know what "stimming" meant until I got into the subject, but I now know. I can remember being irritated by somebody on a bus doing exactly that. When I look back I feel ashamed because I should have understood. The Marcus Potter story was scary, although it turned out right in the end. It shows how close we are sometimes to things going wrong, but the judge did a very good thing.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan), who is no longer in her place, made a good point when she suggested the idea of a link person in Government Departments. It would not cost particularly anything, but it would go a long way to—this is a hackneyed expression—a joined-up approach to sorting things out.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) correctly intervened to point out that Police Scotland are up to speed on this matter. I am not always known for heaping praise on the Scottish Government, but I cannot fault them on this at all. The issue is difficult for some people, but they have not ducked it. I am not saying that the UK Government are ducking it. That is not my intention. I would not try to paint them into such a corner.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is making some pertinent points. Following the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the Northern Ireland Assembly has been taking great strides in implementing an autism strategy, including the production of a guide for criminal justice professionals and the piloting of a registered intermediary scheme. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the good practice—the Minister is listening—that we have in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales could be used for the benefit of all in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? The Minister should look to the Northern Ireland Assembly and its autism strategy as one example of how we could all do things better.

Jamie Stone: I have no problem with that intervention whatever.

On the school that I visited in Caithness, the care lavished on the pupil was inspirational. The teachers looked after him properly in a splendid example of best practice.

I am slipping out of the habit, or no longer getting away with saying, "As a new Member", because I have been here for seven months and it is wearing a bit thin. I realise that. The fact that a Member can go to, listen to and learn things from debates is a great strength of this place. I will leave this debate a wiser person. That is good for me and, in terms of representation of the people, good for constituents. I absolutely applaud the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) for bringing us this debate today. Well done! Well said!

3.13 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) for securing this debate and I thank the Members who have brought to the attention of the House the issues that their constituents with autism face within the criminal justice system.

Autism covers a wide and variable spectrum, so it is important not to over-generalise. The experience of each individual is different within the criminal justice system, and those with autism are no exception. However, it is true that autistic people are more likely to be victims and witnesses of crime than offenders. They experience difficulties with social communication, social interaction and social imagination, and may have sensory difficulties and some co-ordination problems. Their behaviour may present differently and sometimes draw

unnecessary attention, but in general autism is a hidden disability and it may not be immediately obvious to other people that the person has a disability. Dealing with the criminal justice system in any capacity is therefore much harder for a person with autism.

I will sum up some of the contributions made today. The hon. Member for Cardiff West has outdone himself, and I commend him for giving a voice to his constituent's experience and advocating much-needed changes to the criminal justice system. The hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) identified the rise in hate crime, particularly of those who have a disability, and the need to train and support people differently. The hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) identified failures in process across the criminal justice system, both in Scotland and in the UK. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), as always, raised a valuable point about the need to share best practice and to look to the autism strategies in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The early recognition, identification and training of professionals who work in such sectors can only enhance the experience of those who suffer from autism and have to undergo the treatment of the criminal justice system.

As mentioned earlier, the Scottish Government published the Scottish strategy for autism in 2011. It contained 26 recommendations, including four under the overarching theme of developing multi-agency working. A consultation ran from 18 October 2017 to 29 November 2017 to refresh the 2011 strategy, which was much needed. It proposed the inclusion of a provision to consult with bodies, including in the criminal justice system, to improve how people with autism are met within the services. That is something that can be learned across all parts of the UK. I hope the Minister will take that on board.

The pace of change within the criminal justice system, as I am sure the Minister will agree, is not fast enough given the medical understanding and the variability of the understanding of autism. The National Autistic Society goes as far as to say that the criminal justice system is failing those with autism, and it calls for that to be urgently addressed. Many aspects of the criminal justice system are worthy of review. I hope that the treatment of adults with autism will be given the same consideration in this debate.

3.16 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) on securing this important debate.

Let us be clear. Autistic people are discriminated against in society as a whole, but especially in the criminal justice system. They can face discrimination when their autism is not readily apparent, or no help is offered. Where it is apparent, they are often treated differently or suspiciously. Autistic people without a learning disability are nine times more likely to die by suicide than the rest of the population. That figure is considerably high and shows the lack of understanding and awareness of the needs of people with autism.

On occasions when an autistic person comes to the attention of the police and other services, it is normally because their social and communication difficulties are misunderstood or they have not been given appropriate

support. Autistic people can become extremely distressed in situations that they do not understand or when they are surrounded by noise and confusion. In such circumstances, their actions and behaviour can easily be misinterpreted and subsequent actions may escalate a situation.

The criminal justice system needs to reform and adapt in order to meet its fundamental human rights obligations to treat people fairly and equitably. The National Autistic Society developed its autism accreditation scheme for prison settings. Accreditation covers autism understanding training for prison staff such as guards, but is also more widely helping to make the prison environment more autism friendly. Accreditation should be extended to all prisons, all detention centres, all courts and all police stations, as well as to the probation service. The duty must be on the prisons and courts and their individual officers to ensure the fair treatment of those in contact with the criminal justice system. Individual officers could also be accredited. There should be a requirement for at least one key individual in central functions to be accredited: for example, duty sergeants or clerks of the court.

Accreditation recognises good practice, which helps ensure that people on the autistic spectrum get the extra support needed to adjust to life in prison, and extra support while they serve a sentence, or as they prepare for leaving prison. Without that support, autistic people may develop additional needs such as mental health problems or risky behaviour, and rehabilitation will be harder. Greater awareness and support will benefit autistic people as well as prison staff, police officers and managers in that area of work. Expert opinion is clear that autism sufferers need special and sensitive treatment, especially in a stressful criminal justice environment.

Kevin Brennan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the way she is responding to the debate. What she just said has triggered a thought, and I want to quote a comment made by someone in the professional standards department of the police service about the complaint by my constituent. It begins:

"I've read this several times and they just don't get it do they" and notes that my constituents "continue to maintain" that their son

"should have been 'diverted' prior to arrest. What utter rubbish!" If that is the continuing attitude in the police, does my hon. Friend agree that we have a long way to go to get things right?

Carolyn Harris: We certainly do have a long way to go, and what my hon. Friends have said emphasises what we all know: we need to look at autism as a special consideration.

For many autistic people, prison means the system has failed. Work must be done with probation services and police forces to create a specification for autism accreditation in those settings. That will help to prevent autistic adults from entering the criminal justice system in the first place and it will certainly help with rehabilitation. More training and support must be given to initial responders to crime, including those working with witnesses and victims. Initial contact with the police will often come at a time of heightened anxiety, so it is important that the police know how to approach such a situation and how not to allow it to escalate.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that training for police officers in that situation would help them to prevent reoffending or revictimisation? I think that our colleagues in the police share the aim of reducing those things.

Carolyn Harris: It is certainly my experience, from talking to police officers, that they would appreciate training so that they could better understand the condition, and how to deal with autistic offenders. That understanding is vital for the criminal justice system. If we are to regard people with autism in a fair and equal way we must look at how we provide for their needs. I am sure that the Minister has listened to the wise words spoken by many colleagues today, and that he will offer us some hope that the Government will consider the issue and treat it with some urgency.

3.23 pm

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Sir Edward. I offer my sincere congratulations to the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan)—not just on securing the debate but on how he presented the subject. I had the great pleasure of shadowing him when he adorned the last Labour Government as Minister for the Third Sector, and the sincerity and thoughtfulness of his approach to this sensitive subject today is entirely characteristic of him. I also congratulate other hon. Members who contributed to the debate.

I am entirely with the relatively new hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone): I have sat through enough rubbish debates in this place to know a good one. The good debates are the ones we leave having learned something. I shall be frank: the subject on which I am asked to speak today is not one of which I have a deeply rooted, strong understanding. I shall leave the Chamber better informed. A good debate should also be a catalyst for action by Ministers, and further probing. Ministers are trained to try to exude an aura of all-knowingness, which the hon. Member for Cardiff West knows to be a total fallacy.

I shall try to reassure the hon. Gentleman, and other hon. Members who spoke, that there is recognition of one big central point. Since I became an MP in 2005, this country, society and Parliament have made undeniable progress in our understanding and awareness—the central word—of autism, autistic people’s needs, and the consequences of what the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) described as an often hostile environment. Despite that progress, however, the clear message from the debate, through individual anecdotes and voices from all parts of the United Kingdom, is that there is still insufficient awareness and understanding.

My hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) made clear his view that there is still much to be done in Scotland, as there is elsewhere, but we have heard from all parts of the UK in the debate, which creates a powerful message. The fact that there is insufficient awareness and understanding can sometimes lead to unreasonable judgments and decisions, which in turn can lead to trauma. That can mean extremely traumatic experiences for not just the individual involved but their family. The hon. Member for Cardiff West respected the desire for anonymity in

the case he raised, but the debate springs from his experience of trying to serve a constituent, so I begin with the acknowledgement, with which I think everyone agrees, that there is clearly some way to go.

The hon. Gentleman, drawing on his experience as a Minister, clearly understood that there are a number of Ministers who could have represented the Government in the debate. It was his fate to get the Home Office, so inevitably what I shall say will focus primarily on the first point of contact in the criminal justice system. However, I give him and other hon. Members an undertaking that, based on what I have heard, I will speak directly to the new Prisons Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), to test his understanding and his appetite to follow up on specific requests—not least the desire to encourage other prisons to follow the example of the one in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk, and to continue down the path of accreditation.

We need to recognise that autism is believed to affect about 1% of the population, which makes it highly likely that police officers will encounter people with autism in the course of their duties. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the specifics of the case that the hon. Member for Cardiff West raised, but it is quite clear from his account, and the fact that charges were dropped, that mistakes were made in that process, and that the experience has had a profound effect on the individual and the family. I am sure that the House would want to associate itself with the regret expressed for that outcome.

However, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge as a general point that police officers are often called on to make decisions in difficult circumstances. They have a difficult job and often have to act swiftly to protect individuals or the public more generally. He knows that: we all do. They also have a duty to investigate alleged offences, especially where there are alleged victims. Given the nature of autism, brilliantly articulated in the debate, it is also possible that at times the actions of some individuals with the condition may be mistaken for unco-operative or even aggressive behaviour. Again, I do not infer that that was necessarily the case in the specific instance that the hon. Gentleman referred to, but it is clearly a risk, and it happens.

Mr Sheerman: We are all on a learning curve today. Back in the mists of time, I was Roy Hattersley’s deputy as a shadow Police and Prisons Minister, so we all have our learning curve. Does the Minister agree that the real change that has happened recently, for all sorts of reasons, has been a great improvement in the joining up of children’s services, running across all services? As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West said, we have got much better when it comes to children. It is with adults that we seem to have difficulty.

Mr Hurd: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point. We have made considerable progress and the hon. Member for Cardiff West was at pains to point out at the beginning of his remarks that he wanted to focus on adults, because clearly that is where some stubborn and significant problems continue to reside in terms of awareness, understanding, decisions, judgments and treatment. We cannot be complacent. I hope that I can

reassure the House that we will take all possible steps to improve the general understanding and responses appropriate within the criminal justice agencies.

The hon. Member for Cardiff West pressed me on training, and I will speak a little to that. He is no doubt aware that the Government have published a national strategy on autism—I think he referred to the “Think Autism” strategy; that was refreshed in January 2016. It sets out a programme of work across Government sectors to improve preventive action and support to those living with autism, to assist them to lead fulfilling and independent lives wherever possible. It included recommendations for further improvements in the services and support available across the health, education employment and criminal justice sectors.

The hon. Gentleman cited cuts to the police, but the budget of the College of Policing has not been cut, because of our strong commitment to the training and development of police officers. As part of the strategy, the college has committed to developing a new module of the authorised professional practice for the police service. That was included in the revised guidance on mental health and vulnerability, published in October 2016.

The guidance is the primary reference source for police on legal obligations and the appropriate response to incidents involving people with mental ill health, autism, learning disabilities and other vulnerabilities. It provides indicators for police staff about when there may be health or mental health issues underlying apparent behaviour. That can and should lead to better and more appropriate decision making. Guidance is backed by training modules for all staff who may come into contact with vulnerable people. In addition, the National Autistic Society—I join others in congratulating it, the APPG and the Westminster Commission on Autism on their work—has published a national guide for police officers and staff, which has been distributed to all forces. In many areas there is close liaison between police forces and local autism support groups.

I give this undertaking to the hon. Member for Cardiff West. The College of Policing, which is the agency we rely on for the development of police standards and training, is under the new leadership of Mike Cunningham. I undertake to write to Mike following this debate to set out some of the concerns expressed here and to seek reassurance from the college that those are understood and absorbed and that it attributes sufficient weight and importance to this issue.

Thangam Debbonaire: I am pleased to hear the commitment to encourage the national College of Policing about its training. Will the Minister make the clear point to the college and to police officers that we respect what they do and we know how hard their job is? This is not about special pleading for a particular group but about ensuring genuine access to justice, which means that some people will need different treatment to achieve an equal outcome. If people with autism are to be treated equally and fairly in the criminal justice system, that might sometimes—not always—mean different treatment, which has to come from better awareness. Better awareness can only improve police responses and, as I said, I genuinely believe that the police want to reduce unnecessary reoffending and re-victimisation. Will he make that commitment?

Mr Hurd: I agree with the hon. Lady. My experience of talking to police officers—this is the universal theme—is that they want to do the job properly. They do a very difficult job and need the tools to help them in that job.

Our fundamental challenge is the one expressed in this debate: that levels of awareness and understanding are too low. Our responsibility is to help police officers do what is natural to them—to do their job properly and safeguard the vulnerable where they can, but to play their part in executing swift justice as well. Clearly, the process of education, understanding and awareness building has to continue and does not end. I undertake to seek reassurances from the new leadership of the college that they understand that.

The police and other agencies continue to explore innovative solutions to help support those in the community with autism with daily interactions or official contact. In some areas, autism alert cards are available to be carried by those who are autistic. Locally developed systems may include additional information about the person and contact details of family members or other carers. In other areas, similar results are achieved through autism apps held on mobile telephones. Apps can include information such as carer details and the user’s coping mechanisms, as well as useful links to external support sites. So technology can be our friend, but there is no substitute for the training and guidance we talked about.

I will say a word about police detention, because that has been a difficult and emotive subject. If the police encounter a person who appears to be mentally disordered and in immediate need of care and control, it is open to them to exercise powers under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 to take such a person to a place of safety for a mental health assessment. Use of such powers might be appropriate in the case of a person with autism, depending on individual circumstances, and might be preferred over an arrest, again depending on precise circumstances. New legislative provisions, however, provide that police officers should consult a mental health professional before exercising such powers, where that is practicable. That is intended to ensure that the most appropriate decisions are made in each case, in particular where the person may already be in contact with local health or social support services.

If an offence is alleged to have been committed, however, or the person needs to be dealt with through the criminal justice system, notwithstanding any underlying health factors, an arrest may be necessary and appropriate. Under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, codes set out the safeguards that need to be in place for any individual in custody, with particular provisions in respect of the most vulnerable.

Forces are expected to have available easy-read documents using simple language and pictures to show what will happen while those people are in custody. The hon. Member for Cardiff West talked about the need for appropriate adults in situations where such provision might not have been in place. We are clear that an appropriate adult is required to be present in cases involving children or vulnerable adults, including those with autism, during procedures such as being given information on rights, detention reviews, interviews and taking of any evidence. He rightly pressed me about the Government’s response to Lord Bradley’s report—I

[Mr Hurd]

assure the hon. Gentleman that we have taken the report very seriously, and there is a programme of action on the various recommendations.

The hon. Gentleman may be aware that liaison and diversion schemes now operate in police stations and courts across some 80% of England. Work continues on how best to ensure that appropriate adults are available when required. A working group of the PACE strategy board has been developing an approach to improving provision throughout the country. That involved partnership work between police and crime commissioners and local authorities. The work is expected to be completed and published soon.

Mr Sheerman: We are coming to a very sensitive part of the Minister's speech. I am sure he will turn to the international dimension. Has he any update for us on the Lauri Love case? Many of us in Parliament are fighting to save that young man from being taken to the United States, to a hostile environment, where he might well commit suicide.

Mr Hurd: The short answer is no, I am not in a position to give an update to the House on that, but of course I completely understand its sensitivity. An announcement will be made in due course.

I was trying to give reassurance to the hon. Member for Cardiff West, who prompted this debate, about measures taken to ensure greater provision of appropriate adults. I was saying that liaison and diversion schemes operate in police stations and courts in about 80% of England. Such schemes help to assess individual vulnerabilities and any underlying mental health, autism or learning disabilities issues. They can further assist with referring the person to an appropriate health or welfare assessment if necessary, as well as helping to inform the most appropriate charging decision or sentencing outcome.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned that the family in his constituency case were frustrated with the complaints procedure. Let me say something briefly about that. If individuals are unhappy about their treatment by the police, there are avenues of complaint. Individuals may complain directly to the relevant police force, or they can raise a matter with their local police and crime commissioner. Complaints that include serious and sensitive matters such as assault or serious corruption must be referred directly by the police to the Independent Office for Police Conduct. Police and crime commissioners maintain an overview of complaints about the police and they are democratically elected to hold the chief constable to account for the performance of the force, on behalf of the public.

There is a further right to appeal against how a complaint has been handled by the police. Depending on the nature of the complaint, it will be made either to the chief constable or to the Independent Office for Police Conduct, formerly the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

Kevin Brennan: I know that this is not directly the Minister's responsibility at the Home Office, but it seems that there is a gap in the accountability chain in relation to the British Transport police, because it is paid for by the train operating companies and does not

have an elected police and crime commissioner. Will the Minister talk with his ministerial colleagues about whether there are ways in which we can improve the accountability of the British Transport police?

Mr Hurd: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point. I will certainly assume that undertaking and I will communicate back to him the consequences.

The police complaints process is a very sensitive area for the public and for the police. The IOPC is under a new chief executive, Michael Lockwood, whom I will write to after the debate to register some of the concerns expressed so that they are on his radar screen as he assumes leadership of that organisation.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate, which has allowed me to raise my own awareness of some of the underlying difficulties and experiences of our fellow citizens. The treatment that they receive in our public service, whether in the criminal justice system or the health system, is quite unacceptable. That remains a challenge for us as a society and for Governments of all colours. I have tried to reassure colleagues that we have done much in recent years to improve awareness of and understanding about people who have what initially may be invisible vulnerabilities, such as autism, but doubtless much more can be done. The Government have demonstrated their commitment to improving protections for the wellbeing of the potentially vulnerable, including in the criminal justice system.

I made various undertakings in the debate, which I will honour despite whatever advice I receive after the debate. I congratulate everyone who has contributed; debates such as this will ensure that the issue remains high on the agenda. I have seen it rise since I have been in Parliament, but it is only through the persistence of the APPG, Members and various criticisms from the National Autistic Society that this point continues to be pressed, meaning that more Members come out of these debates with increased awareness of the importance of the issue.

3.43 pm

Kevin Brennan: I am grateful to have a brief opportunity to respond. I thank everyone who has participated in the debate. More than one Member pointed out that it has been a learning curve for everyone present; I include myself among them. It is a subject on which we all can learn more and we would benefit from learning more about autism. In particular, I thank all colleagues who contributed with a speech or an intervention.

I hope that as many as possible attend tomorrow's debate brought by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debonnaire) on another aspect of autism, which reinforces the point that I made at the outset: this is a subject that permeates across different parts of Government. That highlights the need for Ministers to do what the Minister has promised—to work with each other and perhaps to consider some of the suggestions made in the debate in a more formal way, in order to tackle the issue of autism across all Government Departments. If he chooses to do that along with his colleagues, he will certainly have my support and I am sure that of my hon. Friends as well.

I thank the Minister for his response. He referred to the brief period when I was radiant with lawful power all those years ago, and when he was my shadow—I am

now a shadow of my former self. During his remarks at the end of the debate, I saw his officials' ears prick up when he said that he was going to carry out what he had promised to do, whatever advice he received. I say to his officials that he is a free-range, organic Minister, rather than a battery-farmed one. He is never satisfied to just read out his brief from his civil servants, but will listen and try to act. Having had praise lavished on him, he now has to fulfil all the things he pledged to do in the debate: to follow up with other Ministers, to ensure that he gets the College of Policing on the case, and to take on board my point about the British Transport police and the IOPC. I am glad that he will engage with the new leadership at the IOPC.

I absolutely concur with the Minister about some of the great work that our police officers do in very difficult circumstances, but there are occasions when, either through lack of training or in some cases through poor practice, things go wrong. We are here to hold them to account while acknowledging the incredible work they do under the most difficult circumstances.

I thank the Minister for the sincerity with which he has responded to the debate and his promises that he will take things further and learn more about all this. Finally, I thank all the people with autism and their families across the country for their tremendous forbearance under very difficult circumstances, and for how they cope with what can be a very difficult situation in their lives. I hope that the debate will genuinely help to move things forward and to make a difference.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the treatment of adults with autism by the criminal justice system.

3.47 pm

Sitting suspended.

Erasmus Plus Programme: Youth and Sport

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kempdown) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered youth activities and sport within the Erasmus Plus programme.

I applied for the debate, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on youth affairs and former vice-president of the European youth forum, for two main reasons. The first is the big issue hanging over us in almost every decision we make in this place at the moment: Brexit. How will we continue to co-operate with EU programmes after departure day? The Minister for Universities has stated that the Government intend to negotiate some sort of continued access with Erasmus Plus and its successor. However, the Government's intentions remain unclear on the youth elements of the programme that are part of Erasmus now but may be separated post-2020 in the next EU multiannual financial framework, which is being negotiated.

I note that it will be much easier to continue co-operation in higher education—most exchanges there are bilateral in nature—than it will be in youth and sport, where exchange and co-operation are primarily based on multilateral partnerships, making the arrangements all the more complicated. I remain concerned that when people talk about Erasmus, they are generally speaking about the university sector. When I tried to secure this debate, I was asked multiple times whether the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport was the correct Department to respond. The Universities Minister has given assurances about the Erasmus programme but not wider assurances about its youth and sport sections, and particularly how our policy on youth and sport will feed into an Erasmus successor programme. That is why I am here.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): As my hon. Friend said, the Erasmus sport programme is not just for universities. One of the Barking Abbey sports academy programmes is a basketball programme. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on basketball, I am proud that 35 basketball apprentices undertook an exchange with the Basketball Federation of Madrid. Sixty-five per cent of Barking Abbey students are from black and minority ethnic communities. Does he agree that the loss of such a programme would be detrimental not just to sport, but to BME communities in the UK?

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Totally. I will talk later about how the youth and sport programmes are far more diverse than some of the university parts of the Erasmus Plus programme. The continued participation of black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and other harder-to-reach or economically deprived communities in parts of those programmes is really important. We need to think about not just our continued participation in the Erasmus programme but, generally, how we will continue to co-operate with our European partners on youth policy and sport policy.

Erasmus has secured a place in people's minds as a university programme—600,000 people from the UK have gone abroad to study in the past 30 years—but

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle]

there are similar numbers in the youth programme. It is vital to highlight the importance of youth and sport in Erasmus Plus. What are the policy views of DCMS about how that programme should look? Additionally, how will our current domestic programmes intertwine and co-operate with a future Erasmus programme? How will the International Citizen Service and National Citizen Service work in harmony with any future European programmes? How will UK Sport's international development through excellence and leadership in sport programme continue to work with the sport section of Erasmus Plus?

The sport part of the programme is a good example. More than 10,000 people have taken part in the youth and sport section alone in the past year, while the IDEALS programme has an average uptake of 46 young people. Those are different programmes, but the scale of Erasmus's youth and sport section outweighs any of our domestic programmes. That is why it is so important that our involvement continues. The current programme runs from 2014 to 2020, so it is in its final half. We await the independent mid-term evaluation report, which was completed in August 2017 and is sitting on desks in the Commission in Brussels. We all want to see what the official report—rather than the drafts—will say.

I have spoken at length to several national agencies and to the evaluation team who wrote the report on EU youth and sport policy. What role is the UK playing to ensure that we lead those discussions? If we are to buy into Erasmus Plus and its successor programmes, we want to ensure that they meet our needs, so we need to roll our sleeves up and get involved in the nitty-gritty of the debate and discussions. If we are to remain in Erasmus, we must ensure that it is in line with our youth policy. That would be much easier to do if we had had the youth strategy that the Government promised before the election. I understand that there will now be a youth chapter in the civil society policy. It is important that we are clear about our policies so that we can influence our European colleagues.

From conversations with colleagues in Ukraine last night, I understand that the Ukrainian authorities tried to opt into only part of the Erasmus programme—interestingly, the youth and sport part, not the university part—but they were rebuffed by the Commission, who said that it is all or nothing; they could not start to take programmes apart. That makes it clear that if we took part, we would be in not just the university section, but the youth and sport section. It is, therefore, even more important that we inform the design of the youth section based on our policies.

What vision do the Minister and the Government have for the content? Erasmus Plus has policy themes based particularly around economic policy, because the current programme was designed in the wake of the economic crash to get young people back into economic activity. Issues of social inclusion and radicalisation have now come to the fore. How will those issues, which I assume the Government will want to tackle, be reflected in a new programme? What are the Government's priorities?

Additionally, in the latest Commission proposal, it looks as though the European Voluntary Service for Europe and neighbouring countries—in a crude way, I guess it is our equivalent of ICS—will be taken out of Erasmus. The EVS has existed for 20 years, so it is not a

new programme, and we have participated in it for all that time. It will be merged into a new European solidarity corps—or, as most of my European colleagues rather unfortunately pronounce it, “corpse”—and how that corps complements NCS and ICS will be really important. Do the Government intend to opt into the new European solidarity corps? We have had reassurances about opting into the Erasmus programme, and the European solidarity corps will be a successor, but it will not be part of Erasmus. Do the Government intend to commit to continuing in all successor components of Erasmus Plus, or will we continue only with the core of Erasmus, with everything else still up for question?

Erasmus is the name of the programme we have at the moment, but it was not always thus. Before 2014, there was a separate youth programme, Youth in Action, and before that the EU Youth Programme. There were Comenius, Grundtvig and Leonardo—I could go on with the other European philosophers. Erasmus was chosen in conversations we had with the Commission. I was not in favour of it at the time; in fact, I argued heavily against it when I was in Brussels.

The idea was that everyone knew Erasmus, so we might as well try to make everything Erasmus. In my view, doing so just waters down the other bits of the programme that are not really known about, but that is the direction that the Commission went in. Now it looks as though the Commission is moving towards separating parts of those programmes back out into a solidarity corps, and it would be interesting to know the position of the UK Government and the Minister. Are we supportive of those plans to split out again? How are we having those discussions in Europe?

The higher education sector has a high success rate in achieving Erasmus funding: 90% plus of Erasmus funding is successful in that sector. In the youth sector, it is around the 30%-plus mark. I sat on the European programming committee in a previous life, and the evaluators often state that the youth programmes are just as well written, but they are written by volunteers. It is the same with the sports programme; we are often talking about voluntary sports clubs rather than big, professional HE institutions. How will our influence be brought to bear on the Commission and the discussions in the Council to ensure that the future programmes, and particularly the solidarity corps, are flexible, light-touch programmes to which voluntary groups and small organisations can apply?

One of the outcomes, as I understand it, of the mid-term evaluation is that smaller organisations have been pushed out by the bigger merger. There are other advantages to merging everything into one, and I do not particularly want to get into them all, but it is important to recognise that smaller organisations, which we want to encourage and foster, are at a disadvantage in an integrated programme. I hope that we will welcome the European Commission's direction.

The only reasons we managed to secure a separate section for youth in the Erasmus programme were the heavy lobbying work from youth organisations, which I helped to co-ordinate, and detailed discussions with Commissioner Vassiliou, who was the commissioner at the time. I wonder whether the Minister has considered, in her discussions with youth organisations, the importance of including the voices of youth and youth organisations in the programme.

Equally, it would be interesting to include the voices of stakeholders such as Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland colleagues. The matter is generally devolved, but we represent the whole UK in the discussions. I am aware that the Belgian authorities take their counterparts with them to Council meetings. The Belgian authorities have no problem with having all their regional Ministers sitting behind them. Are we considering something similar, particularly on these important devolved matters—on sports and youth—to ensure that those voices are included?

I will give some numbers quickly before I finish. I have asked several questions that I hope to hear back on. Erasmus, of course, is a good programme. Some 16,000 higher education students took part last year, and 10,000 youth and sports groups, but only 11% of the money is distributed to youth and sport programmes—1% for sport and 10% for youth. That surely shows the efficiency of the youth and sports programme. The cost per head of a participant in the youth part of the Erasmus programme is €900 or thereabouts. The cost of participating in the Erasmus higher education programme is €2,500 within Europe; if participants take the Erasmus option of going to a neighbouring non-EU country such as Norway or the Russian Federation, it is €5,000 per participant.

There is nothing wrong with investing in students who go into higher education, but the majority of students who take part in the Erasmus higher education programme are from more privileged backgrounds, by the nature of the fact that they have gone to university and then chosen to opt out. As I have mentioned, more than 50% of those on the youth programme come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. It is important that we continue to opt in and have a voice. A stack of case studies is available on the websites of the British Council and the UK national agency about how the programme—particularly EVS—has turned young people's lives around, and I implore hon. Members to look at them.

When I was chair of Woodcraft Folk, a national voluntary youth organisation, I applied for those grants and saw this at first hand. I remember a young person from County Durham who came to the programme with very anti-immigrant views. By the end of it, after doing exchanges and working with other young people from across Europe, his views were totally transformed because he was able to see the value of humanity in all of us. That is what I hope this Government will do, by continuing to engage in the programme and by giving a strong commitment that we will continue not only in Erasmus, but in the solidarity corps and the European Voluntary Service substitute.

4.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): As always, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I will start by thanking the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) for calling this debate on such an important issue. It is the first time I have had the pleasure of being in a debate with him and seeing him in action and, if I may say so, his enthusiasm is infectious. I will take the opportunity to suggest that we continue the conversation beyond this Chamber. He has raised a number of questions that I

fear I will not be able to answer entirely in this debate, but we will certainly write to him afterwards, and it would be helpful to have a continuing conversation within the Department.

I understand that the hon. Gentleman has previously participated, as he suggested in his speech, in Youth Voice and Erasmus activities, and therefore brings personal experience and knowledge to the debate. His story is exactly what the Government's support of the UK Youth Parliament and investment in our youth and sports programme are striving to achieve. We want to encourage young people to take part from an early age and continue making their voices heard and their impact felt throughout their lives. The Erasmus offer is an important part of that process.

Hon. Members may well be aware of Erasmus, possibly through a similar personal experience of the highly popular university year abroad, but the remit of Erasmus, as we have just heard, goes beyond the traditional university language experiences into youth and sport-related opportunities. The Department for Education is the national authority for the whole Erasmus programme, while the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is responsible for policy on wider youth and sport opportunities. It gives me great pleasure to be the Minister responding to the hon. Gentleman's debate today.

Erasmus is a European funding programme for education, youth, training and sport, funded from the EU core budget to the tune of €15 billion over its seven-year duration through to 2020. Organisations delivering Erasmus offer activities in a number of areas. First, it enables individuals to undertake work experience, job shadowing and volunteering. Secondly, the programme allows organisations to form strategic partnerships with EU organisations, and thirdly, it provides opportunities for individuals to influence policy reform through dialogue with EU decision-makers.

The sport element of Erasmus is administered centrally in Brussels and is much smaller than the youth element—it pains me to say that—but it is nevertheless important, with organisations able to bid for projects to improve grassroots sports provision, tackle cross-border threats such as doping and match-fixing, and increase inclusion and promote sport for all, which is the issue that the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) referred to in connection with funding in basketball.

According to the European Commission's impact report, Erasmus youth projects bring measurable benefits for young people, in terms of self-esteem, self-confidence and a sense of purpose. Participants also identify improved access to employment as a result of their experience.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): Scottish universities have benefited greatly from the Erasmus Plus scheme; Edinburgh University sends several hundred students a year, Aberdeen University sends 200 and receives 250 and Robert Gordon University concentrates on technology. The programme is not exclusive to EU countries. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the UK will continue to participate in the programme after Brexit?

Tracey Crouch: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the programme is not exclusive to EU countries. As I will go on to point out, we have made a commitment to Erasmus for up to 2020. However, on the key point of the question raised by the hon. Member for Brighton,

[Tracey Crouch]

Kemptown, which I will answer later, no decisions have yet been taken on post-2020. That is all part of phase 2 of the negotiations.

The UK has a good track record of benefiting from Erasmus funding. From the start of the current programme in 2014 until 2017, there have been successful applicants from 928 youth projects, funded to a total of €41.6 million. Those figures will rise, as they do not include the final round of youth funding for 2017. Roughly 12,000 young people and 4,000 youth workers participate each year, with the latter benefiting from job attachments, training and other professional development activities. In 2016, the UK received grant funding of more than €2 million awarded to 51 organisations for collaborative sport partnerships.

However, Erasmus youth and sport is so much more than those statistics. To bring that to life, I will share some examples of projects funded by the programme. Erasmus funding allowed the UK to participate in structured dialogue activities, which give young people a voice on issues that matter to them, such as combating discrimination and equalising opportunity. The UK already has a powerful track record of Youth Voice activities through the annual Make Your Mark process—the largest ballot of youth views in the UK—and the Youth Parliament, which I think the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown and I both managed to contribute to at the end of last year.

Structured dialogue builds on that theme and encourages young people from across the UK to influence the future direction of EU youth policy through dialogue with EU decision makers. The British Youth Council co-ordinates young ambassadors' roles in the presidency-run EU youth conference and EU youth strategy. Finally, the UK was awarded a grant from the sport fund by the European Commission for the delivery of the European Week of Sport in the UK in 2017. The programme was co-ordinated by the not-for-profit health body, ukactive, and took place in September. More than 5.2 million young people got active, either at one of the official events or after being inspired by the week—especially on its flagship National Fitness Day on 26 September, which I was proud to participate in myself.

Beyond Erasmus, the Government continue to support young people to realise their potential outside school; Members will be familiar with programmes such as the National Citizen Service and our support for the #iwill campaign to encourage young people to build their skills for life and give back to their communities through social action. The Government are also committed to ensuring that all children and young people, particularly those who are currently least active or from under-represented groups, have the best opportunities to engage in sport and physical activity. I have spoken many times on the sports strategy, published in December 2015, which sets out how important it is for children to make sport and physical activity a habit for life.

I will turn to some of the key issues raised by the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown. We have heard questions about the future of UK participation in Erasmus after we exit the European Union. The Government have already stated publicly that the UK is committed to continuing full participation in the Erasmus programme

up until we leave the European Union. We have now agreed a fair financial settlement with the EU, enabling us to move to the next stage of negotiations.

The Prime Minister said in Brussels in December that she was pleased to confirm that, under the agreement made on 8 December, the UK would participate in Erasmus until the end of the programme—up until 2020. She also welcomed the opportunity to provide clarity to young people and the youth and education sectors, and to reaffirm the UK's commitment to the deep and special relationship we want to build with the EU. However, no decisions have yet been made about post-2020 programme participation, since the scope of that programme has not been agreed. Options for that will be discussed as part of phase 2 of the negotiations.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The young people hoping to participate in these programmes are making their plans now and are choosing universities or organisations, depending on how they want to participate. Does the Minister therefore agree that there is some urgency in getting the issue resolved?

Tracey Crouch: I understand that proposals will be published later this year—in May, I think—that will allow us to take the next decisions on that. However, as the programme has yet to be designed, it is difficult to decide what our participation in that will be. We look forward to the Commission publishing its proposals, based on which we can make that decision.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown asked about the European solidarity corps, which is the new European Voluntary Service for young people. It expands the existing EVS to include an occupational element of a job placement or a traineeship. Discussions on the solidarity corps legal base remain ongoing and are expected to conclude later this year. As I am sure he will completely understand, we cannot commit to participating in the scheme until the final version of the regulation has been shared and we have assessed the extent to which it is in line with UK policies. However, we remain supportive of international initiatives for young people—especially those focused on encouraging social action and collaboration between young people from different backgrounds.

I am absolutely delighted to have been given the opportunity to respond to the debate and to reassure the hon. Gentleman about our commitment to wider sporting and social action programmes for young people. We wish to bring the Erasmus programme further to life, and I draw hon. Members' attention to the Shaping Futures exhibition that will run in the House of Commons exhibition space from 26 February to 1 March. The exhibition will share the impact of the Erasmus programme in the UK and stories from individuals whose lives have been changed by their participation. I urge colleagues to take some time to view the exhibition and find out even more about the programme. I thank all the individuals and organisations that have supported young people to take part in Erasmus for their commitment and dedication to the programme.

Question put and agreed to.

4.27 pm

Sitting suspended.

Town and Village Plans

4.30 pm

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered town and village plans.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for being here and for his support in the past few days as we prepared for the debate, and I thank colleagues for turning up in numbers to intervene and contribute.

I am here today to highlight a problem that we are experiencing in my constituency of Mid Norfolk and that I am aware colleagues are also experiencing. The problem is essentially that the promise of the Localism Act 2011—supported, I think, by all Government Members and probably by the whole House—is, on the ground in Mid Norfolk, being failed by what I suggest is an either accidental or deliberate, but none the less clear, exploitation of the well-intended five-year land supply rules; those were meant to ensure that councils could not put out a plan and then ignore it.

The rules are being exploited, through a legal loophole, by big out-of-town volume house builders, which are banking permissions that are clearly there in areas where the councils and communities sensibly want to build, in order to take the opportunity to force through developments in areas where one would not sensibly want to build.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend share my delight and enthusiasm about the recent decision of the High Court to accept the reduction of the five-year housing land supply to a three-year housing land supply, where there is a neighbourhood plan and where sites are allocated?

George Freeman: I absolutely welcome that and will in due course list some of the very good things that the Government have been doing to try to help. I am here today to flag a problem and offer the Minister some suggestions to try to help find a solution.

At its heart, this is about the difference between rural and urban planning; in government, in Parliament, we tend to legislate as if the two are the same. In my patch, Mid Norfolk, we could build many more houses if we were able to get the essence of the localism promise right—build where we want, build how we want, build for local people as well as those moving into the area, and build in a way that supports the grassroots. I am talking about development being seen to be done by and for communities, not to communities by those far away.

There is real frustration in Mid Norfolk; I would be lying if I said that this was not the No. 1 issue in the recent election. In fact, in that election campaign, I promised to come to Parliament, talk to colleagues and Ministers, and see whether we could find a way to deal with it.

If I may, I will briefly set the scene by setting out my very strong support for the Localism Act and for what the Government have been trying to do in promoting a much more bottom-up model of local planning; by signalling where I think the national planning policy framework has helped but is also hindering in relation to the five-year land supply; and by describing some of what is going on in Mid Norfolk at the moment and some ideas about how we might deal with it.

When the Localism Act was introduced, the then coalition Government were stunned by the level of support for it. The Minister, like me, welcomed it strongly, because in essence it says that development is something that should be owned and valued by local communities. Despite the previous Government's well intended desire to get houses built, we took the view that it was a flawed approach to sit in London and allocate numbers by region, by county, by district, and that numbers allocated from London were unlikely to motivate the towns, villages and communities that we wanted to embrace development. Instead, we said, "No, the better way is to ensure that every area has to put together a local plan."

There is no number for Mid Norfolk in some filing cabinet in Whitehall, which I am delighted about. My area and colleagues' areas have to put together their own local plans, taking into account their own population dynamics and economy, and put out a 20-year plan. To prevent councils from simply doing the plan but not actually building, the five-year land supply was introduced to ensure that houses were actually built, in accordance with the plan.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Does he agree that the value of the local plan is that it also has regard to local infrastructure needs, potentially at village level? The current loopholes that are being exploited see developers coming forward with plans for wholesale, 300 or 400-house developments without that infrastructure, which are against the interests of many of our villages in Suffolk and Norfolk.

George Freeman: My hon. Friend makes the very point that I will be making. This is about infrastructure and public services. A proper plan is not just about houses, but about the community, its needs, the public services, the infrastructure, the drainage and so on. Like many colleagues, I welcomed the Localism Act. I could understand when the former Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced the national planning policy framework, with its presumption in favour of sustainable development, to shift the balance, particularly at a time when the housing market was on its knees, and to encourage the building of the necessary houses and the development that we needed. The five-year land supply makes logical sense. We do not want a nimby's charter, which allows councils to plan and then ignore their own plan.

However, what is happening in Mid Norfolk is giving the lie to that promise. For those of us who backed and supported localism, it is beginning to undermine public trust, and not just trust in the local planning system and support for development. It is beginning to foster the very nimbyism that was not there before and, even worse, is beginning to foster, complicate and compound a distrust in political promises. That is damaging to the planning system at a time when we really need proper strategic planning and local support.

If you will indulge me for a moment, Mr Hollobone, I would like to paint a picture of where Mid Norfolk sits. I know that that has worried colleagues since I arrived in the House eight years ago—it has worried quite a lot of my constituents. As it was a new constituency, most of my constituents were for several years asking, "Where is Mid Norfolk?" It sits right in the heart of God's county. People who are used to going to the coast will drive past and around my beautiful patch, and

[George Freeman]

those who drive up the newly dualled A11 to Norwich will leave my patch to port of their journey. People need to be in search of the real, the authentic, the heart, the glinting jewel in the crown to come and find Mid Norfolk; it sits right in the middle, at the heart of our county. It is not a place that someone would need to go to unless they were looking for it.

In Mid Norfolk, we have four magnificent towns: Dereham, Wymondham, Attleborough and Watton. Attleborough and Wymondham are both on the A11, just south of Norwich. Norwich is growing very fast. The Norwich research park is booming. All credit to the Government for their fantastic support through the industrial strategy and the support for small businesses. In many ways, Norwich is becoming a mini Cambridge, which is only 40 miles down the newly dualled A11. Indeed, when the Government have opened up the Ely junction and made half-hourly the rail service, Norwich will become part of a Greater Cambridge cluster. That is why there is such housing demand along that corridor. There are 15,000-odd houses going in at Ely, 5,000 at Brandon, 5,000 at Thetford, 4,000 at Attleborough and 2,000 at Wymondham. It is a corridor of growth.

For that reason, my local council wisely suggested that the bulk of its housing target should be placed on that A11 corridor, where the rail and road links support the cluster of development. Unfortunately, however, the developers, cognisant that they have those permissions and that allocation there, have taken the opportunity of the five-year land supply to begin to do what they would not normally be able to do: dump very substantial, large-scale commuter housing estates on a number of the villages close to Norwich in my constituency, without, as my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) mentioned, the necessary investment in services and infrastructure.

Dereham, which I like to think of as the gateway to the Norwich research triangle—it has not yet gripped that strategic role for itself, but over the next 10 to 20 years it will become that—is now becoming in the morning a traffic jam, almost as visible from space as the Cambridge traffic jam. The developers are now piling into south Dereham, along the main roads. It is the classic model of putting the big housing on the road, where it is easy, without any infrastructure. A string of villages between Dereham and Norwich—Yaxham, Mattishall and Swanton Morley—have all found themselves the subject of aggressive, large-scale, out-of-town developments.

In each case, the villages have been working on putting together their own village plans, taking the powers that we gave them in the Localism Act; the idea was that local neighbourhood plans would be put together and that the local plan adopted by the council would be an amalgamation of those and work around them. In fact, what has happened is that the local communities have put together plans—I want to talk in a moment about the Swanton Morley plan in particular—and then that process of going through a neighbourhood plan has, as we might have predicted, led to a strong conversation locally about the community's needs, such as jobs and services. In every case, that has led to more houses being suggested by the local council than were originally thought of.

Therein lies the beautiful truth at the heart of the Localism Act: if we empower communities to think about their own futures, most will end up planning development where they want it, in the style they want it, for their own vision of their own community. People are not naturally nimbys, but they are resistant to growth being dumped on them by a remote bureaucracy, whether it is in Brussels or London.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am very encouraged by what the hon. Gentleman says. Back home in my constituency, the local Ards and North Down Borough Council has initiated a new idea—the very thing that he refers to—of village regeneration. It is village regenerating with village, with town, with village; it is a domino effect where we all get together. Out of those plans have come some very forward-thinking ideas for economic expansion, house building and how villages can interact with each other. If we do it right with consultation, we get agreement and we are always better off.

George Freeman: Not for the first time the hon. Gentleman makes my point better than I. He is absolutely right that if we get this right, and if we trust people in communities and empower them, which is what the Localism Act was about, we will be surprised by what communities can do. There are wonderful examples of that around the country, including in Northern Ireland. That is why I am optimistic. I know the Minister is keen to stretch every sinew to ensure that we are able to unlock this and get the houses that we want built.

I appreciate that colleagues represent different areas with different circumstances, but if the Minister said to me, “Can you find a way in which we could build the houses that we need in East Anglia?” the answer from my part of the world would be, “Absolutely!” Let us build a really serious new town—a proper new town—and design something that we could be really proud of. We might even have a couple. Given the housing demand in the south-east of England, one might even say that every county could probably find somewhere to build a stunning new town. We could even make it a competition and see who comes up with the most beautiful one. We could build a new town with proper energy-efficient houses and modern transport. We could make our new towns the test beds of the modern-living technologies that we are developing in this country.

I will give a location for a new town in my patch. On the Cambridge-Norwich railway, where RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall sit adjacent, Lakenheath is a tiny town, with a lot of poverty and deprivation, on former peat that has gone to grade 3 clay. It is a town aching for investment. It is on that railway and would not be 25 minutes from Cambridge. We could build the most stunning town there, possibly on the former airfield, and ease a lot of the pressure on our villages.

I am not saying that because I do not want development. In my patch we could build, and I am pushing a project to build, a garden village on the old Beeching railway line from Wymondham to Dereham. I am working with local developers to see whether we might come up with a model where we can plough the profit from the development back in, in conjunction with the railway company, to create a new model development company, with housing and rail linked in the way that it was by the Victorians. The Government are pushing that model forward in East West Rail.

I pay tribute to the work of the Secretary of State for Transport, who is clear that he wants that Oxford to Cambridge east-west railway not to be a traditional model of slow, bureaucratic franchising and competing interests, but a development company that lays the track, builds the houses and captures the value of housing gain to recycle into public transport.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and apologise for interrupting his flow. The Scottish Conservatives would like to see between six and eight new towns built in Scotland. Is not the heart of the issue about bringing people with us? As well as following the ambition of the post-war generation in building new towns, we must learn from their mistakes in design and infrastructure. We must make sure that these new towns fit with their environments, so that the communities surrounding the developments can support them and feel that they have been listened to.

George Freeman: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. We should look at the lessons from those garden towns. Many years ago, I fought the constituency of Stevenage—as colleagues know, it fought back—but Letchworth, the first garden town, is still regarded in that part of the world as a great tribute to proper planning. It is a place of great pride for the people who live in and around it. That is unusual for new developments, so there are real lessons to be learned.

I know the Government are supportive of this model of new town development and of garden village development, but the problem is that it is not happening. Seven years after we passed the Localism Act, when I say “localism” in Mid Norfolk I am greeted with groans and occasionally with jeers—although my constituents are very well-behaved and extremely polite. There was the promise of localism, where we said to people, “You will be empowered. The community will be able to plan. We will support your plans and back you.” But people are seeing their plans ignored.

I want to mention Swanton Morley as a case study. Swanton Morley is the home of the Queen’s Dragoon Guards, and formerly of the Light Dragoons. It has an old RAF base. It is one of my small market towns with a 2,000-odd population, and it has put together a magnificent plan. I want to pay tribute to Roger Atterwill, the chair of the parish council, and Faye, his assistant, who have worked assiduously on the plan over the past two or three years. It is a model of local planning. There were village hall meetings, consultations, surveys—real engagement—and they have produced a real vision for the future of the village.

But unfortunately, on examination, the examiner appointed by the district council struck out all of their sensible, local conditions, such as that there should be an allocation of houses for people who come from the Swanton Morley area and around the percentage of affordable housing, all of which were provided for in the spirit of the Localism Act and in legislation. One cannot help but see that they were struck out because the main planning authority, Breckland Council, has both hands tied behind its back. It is up against the wall with a five-year land supply and it has no leg to stand on: it is terrified of being taken to court by big out-of-town developers.

I want to make it clear that I am not having a go at all developers. There are some magnificent developers in this country and in Norfolk. I would cite Tony Abel, for example. Abel Homes is a really good local business, building high-quality local developments. However, when it comes to the likes of Gladman, which has come into our patch, we never meet the people behind the developments.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I entirely agree with my hon. Friend’s point, which he is making so well. In my constituency, the local builders are immaculately behaved, do a very good job and try very hard. But some of the big builders’ behaviour is frankly atrocious. They game the system, cheat the people who they are meant to be working for and bully the district council. Their behaviour is often absolutely reprehensible.

George Freeman: I am grateful to my venerable and right hon. Friend for putting that so robustly. I would not be here if I did not share that view. We all understand that we need houses built, and we all know that we need developers to do it, but there is a contract. When we provide developers with the powers and the balance of probability on the sustainable development framework, and we say that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, we mean sustainable development. We do not mean that as an excuse for them to dump a housing estate on our villages and towns and then sugar off. They have an obligation, as local builders and local landowners understand.

For that reason, I recently called a rural housing summit with Hastoe Housing Association—I see the Minister nodding—which is a leading, if not the leading, rural housing specialist. All around the country it has put together schemes with the support of local communities. It is doing more than anyone in rural housing to defeat nimbyism, because the quality of its developments is so high. At this rural housing summit we showcased best practice from all round the country: people putting together affordable housing schemes, shared equity schemes, covenanted land, parish councils. There is a wonderful cornucopia of good rural housing models, but we are not seeing it in Norfolk because our councils have both hands tied behind their backs.

When I say to my councillors, “Why aren’t you using the design codes that we gave you? Why aren’t you using the powers that we have given you in these Acts?” the answer comes back, “We are desperate to get our five-year land supply in order. We are terrified of legal challenge. We are trying to keep our council tax down. We are bearing the brunt of very necessary public spending constraints, and frankly every penny we make goes back into the deficit.” Our councils have their hands tied behind their backs, and are therefore unable to implement the spirit of the Localism Act.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Is my hon. Friend not concerned that the whole thrust, which is understandable from the local councillor’s point of view, is towards economic growth, as otherwise they do not get the funding? So they are all being encouraged to go at a speed that perhaps they would do well not to go at.

George Freeman: My right hon. Friend makes the perfect point. He is absolutely right, and that is happening in my patch as well as in his.

[George Freeman]

I am conscious that others want to speak. I want to give them a chance to do so and the Minister a chance to respond. To sum up my opening speech, we all know that we need to build houses, but as with so many problems that is a challenge in London. I have been a Minister pulling the ministerial levers, and I know that there is a big problem to be solved in the corridors of Whitehall.

However, in our constituencies, the problem is smaller, more manageable and easier to deal with. In Mid Norfolk, I see the answer to a problem that is very big in the Minister's in-tray. If we can revisit the spirit of localism, re-empower local communities and re-incentivise councils to retain and harness the benefits of growth and put them into local infrastructure, we will restore faith in the planning system and deliver more growth, not less.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. I must call the Front-Bench speakers at 8 minutes past 5. The guideline limits are five minutes for the Scottish National party, five minutes for Her Majesty's Opposition, 10 minutes for the Minister and then a couple of minutes at the end for our Member in charge to sum up. There are six Members seeking to speak, so I am afraid that in order to get you all in, speeches will be limited to two minutes 45 seconds. If there are any interventions, some of you will not make it.

4.51 pm

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman). I will try to keep to my three minutes or less. I take a particular interest in this issue; I was a parish and town councillor for 28 years. I have taken through village appraisals and village plans, and I almost took through a neighbourhood plan. It is quite an awesome thing to be asked to participate in.

I make no apologies for being a long-standing member of the Campaign to Protect Rural England; I declare that interest. I will largely ask the Minister about points that CPRE has brought to the debate. CPRE wants to critique four issues relating to neighbourhood plans. First, where do they sit in relation to strategic planning, if there is such a thing nowadays? Secondly, there is a lack of resources for taking plans through. Thirdly, there is unnecessary complexity; I personally share that concern. Fourthly, there are issues with conformity and precedents.

The CPRE asks clearly for the Government to at least reconsider the idea of the neighbourhood right to be heard. It is frustrating, when a plan has been developed, for a development to undermine it completely or for the plan to be ignored because the development has gone through without any real ability to influence it. It is important that we consider that.

I have always been a critic of referendums. I know that 89% of referendums have been successful, but I believe in democracy. I was a parish councillor, and as my old friend the late Stephen Wright said to me, that is the first level of democracy. Why should it have referendums foisted upon it? I think that we have all learned the lesson that referendums are not terribly good for our system of democracy, so I am a critic of that idea.

We need to tease out where neighbourhood plans sit and what influence they have. There are some glaring examples of things not working very well. In terms of the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017, we should look again at where the plans are and give them some robustness, so that they mean something when they go into the planning system and so that the people who spent a lot of time getting them through can feel confident that they will be listened to.

4.53 pm

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): First, I say to the Minister that this is not about opposition to housing. In West Sussex as a whole, when I was first elected, the draft south-east plan proposed an amount of housing far below what is now being built under the new system. The objectively assessed need for West Sussex produces 66% more houses than the draft south-east plan, and the new formula will produce nearly double the draft south-east plan. It is placing massive pressure on local infrastructure.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) said so well, neighbourhood plans produce more houses by consent. If we allow neighbourhood plans to be bust, then we undermine the principle of consent, and in the end, fewer houses will be built by consent. That leads us to only one policy—the imposition of housing, which will be massively unpopular.

The Minister must understand that developers are gaming the system. They are ensuring that five-year land supplies are not adequate. Consequently, neighbourhood plans—either in draft form or, worse, when they are made and approved by large referendums—are being broken through. Some of the solution lies in his hands. The Government produced a helpful improvement to the situation last year, but his predecessor refused to entertain call-ins or appeals. When the Minister comes to take any decisions that might be in the balance, he must be mindful of the importance of supporting the neighbourhood planning process.

In the end, the Government face a fundamental choice. They can hold to the Localism Act 2011, a flagship policy that empowered local communities and gave them responsibility, including for decisions about where to locate housing. We are now in a difficult position; public faith in the policy of localism is being gravely undermined by people's feeling that developers are simply overriding neighbourhood plans or that the Government apply rules that are too tight and do not recognise the power of giving local communities the control that they should have.

4.56 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I helped invent neighbourhood plans, and I am the Government's neighbourhood planning champion. It is exciting to see neighbourhood plans, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) said, produce more housing than they were asked to produce. If we look at it in contractual terms, they have gone beyond the contract set up.

What happens when a village decides to produce a neighbourhood plan? First, it needs to see whether the district council has a five-year land supply. This morning, I happened to be with a number of people considering development in the Thames valley. They produced a

map of district councils that do and do not have a five-year housing land supply. It is unfortunate that so many district councils do not. That leaves them open, the moment they put down their name to make a neighbourhood plan, to developers moving in ahead of the plan to take advantage. I have asked in an Adjournment debate that when someone seriously puts their name down to start a neighbourhood plan, no more housing should be built until it has come to fruition, so that it can be taken fully into account.

I agree totally with what colleagues have said about certain firms of developers, such as Gladman, which aggressively game the system, as it has been described. It was partly to overcome that that a Planning Minister two Ministers before this one, Gavin Barwell, decided to reduce the land supply figure from five years, because people did not have a five-year land supply, to three years, for a two-year period from the end of the neighbourhood plan where sites were allocated. That was challenged in the High Court and, as I said in an intervention, the recent decision, in a very detailed judgment, has confirmed it. We are still waiting to see whether it goes to appeal, but the chances are that it will not.

The Government are tightening up the national planning policy framework, and it is about time. All I would say is that the presumption in favour of sustainable development is not itself new; it has been there since the beginning of planning. The only thing that is new is the word “sustainable”.

4.59 pm

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): Neighbourhood planning is a hugely important reform. In my constituency, I have seen the way that it brings people together. We have neighbourhood plans in five parishes: Foxton, Great Glen, Kibworth, Lubenham and North Kilworth. I congratulate all the people who have selflessly given their time to make them happen and who have taken part in those referendums.

To make neighbourhood planning work, we now need a new approach. First, we need much greater legal force for plans shortly before their adoption. It was extremely frustrating for people in Great Glen to do all the work of putting together a neighbourhood plan, only to find that just before it came into force, the developer put a new development on exactly the site that they did not want it to go on.

Secondly, we need far less interference from the planning inspector. I have no problem with planning inspectors casting their eye over neighbourhood plans, but they must not interfere with matters that are, frankly, none of their business.

Thirdly, we need a simpler, clearer and quicker process so that developers cannot get their foot in the door. Often, neighbourhood plans have a lot of things in them that they do not need, but not the one thing that they do need: a simple map of where the community does and does not want development.

In the long term, I would like communities to have much stronger powers. Other hon. Members have already made reference to the virtues of planned and coherent new development over piecemeal bits tacked on to the ends of villages. I agree with that sentiment. I would like neighbourhood plans to be able to call in compulsory purchase powers from their local authority. Too often,

villages such as Great Bowden would like to develop a site that a developer is simply sitting on, so developments have to be tacked on to the village in all directions instead, which people hate.

Neighbourhood planning is incredibly important. People can behave responsibly: they come forward with sites and they back more housing in their community. We must not let this important reform die or be gradually picked apart by rapacious developers such as Gladman.

5.1 pm

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): The Minister is a man on the rise—one can only be amazed at his great trajectory—and he will want to make his mark on the Department before he moves on to higher office. In the nicest and most collegiate way, I suggest that he listens carefully to what hon. Members say. I echo every word uttered by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), who instigated this timely debate.

I urge one note of caution to my hon. Friend, who wants a new town. Just as he said, I wanted Cranbrook to be an exemplar of towns around the world, but soon the developers moved in. I am afraid that the council is now having to move in to put in the town centre because the developers are behaving in a shameful way; they say that not enough people live there to put it in. It is a classic example of big developers gaming the system.

It is not brain surgery. My hon. Friend made the point that if someone builds good housing, which we all need, in the vernacular to enhance local communities, they will be amazed by the silence that follows—by the congratulations that follow in the pub. People want their communities to be enhanced. They want to support the village school, the post office and other local services. They do not want huge blocks of developments.

The big developers have worked out how to make profit down to the square inch, so they do not care if they are not nodding to the local vernacular or if a house looks the same in the north of England, the middle of England and Wales. They just want to make a profit. I hope that the Minister will be as good as the Government's word and tell us how we can encourage local house builders, who often produce a far better product than larger house builders.

I draw the Minister's attention to what other hon. Members have said about neighbourhood plans. Budleigh Salterton and East Budleigh with Bicton have produced wonderful neighbourhood plans, which can be expensive and time-consuming. Lypstone also produced one. The Minister's predecessor received a letter from me in October about a constituent who said that, despite Lypstone identifying the type and design of housing that the community wished to see, it had singularly failed to achieve them in the two years since the plan was made. That letter also singularly failed to be acknowledged, although I prompted the Minister on 15 January. I ask him to look at that.

The neighbourhood plan is a contract with our constituents. We persuaded them that if they were going to be more local, they would have a say. At the moment, they feel that they have wasted their time and they are being ignored.

5.4 pm

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire), I am not in the least bit surprised about the Minister's trajectory. I know that he will be paying careful attention to what is said today. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) on his speech and I agree with every word. Indeed, I agree with all my hon. Friends. I will make four brief points.

First, I endorse what my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) said. Neighbourhood plans will produce more houses by consent than anyone believes is possible, hence the importance of sticking to the system.

Secondly, the integrity of the system is vital. Local people spend hundreds and hundreds of hours of their own free will making a great effort to produce these plans, and it is vital that they are honoured. I am encouraged by the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) that the national planning policy framework needs to be strengthened. I would welcome that.

Thirdly, I say again—it cannot be said too often—that the behaviour of some major developers is appalling. It truces our constituents and our constituencies, our elected councillors and our district councils. It is the kind of behaviour up with which the Government should not put.

Finally, if people are prepared to spend all that time and effort on producing something very important to them, those efforts should be respected in all honour. My right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs and I have difficulties in that regard, but as he said, it is important that those efforts are honoured and that the Government play a straight bat with local communities.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): There are five minutes for the Scottish National party spokesperson and five minutes for the official Opposition spokesperson.

5.6 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to sum up for the Scottish National party in this debate, and I thank the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) for introducing it. From a Scottish perspective, it has been very interesting for me to see how things work slightly differently in England.

The SNP is looking at reforming the planning system in Scotland to pick up on some of the things that do not work as intended. We have ambitions to build 50,000 affordable homes by 2021. We have brought in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which gives local communities a community right to buy so that they can influence what gets built and how land is used in their community. That is important in rural and urban settings.

We have 20 proposals for revamping the planning system in Scotland. Many things that the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk spoke about, such as action by and for communities and putting infrastructure in place, are reflected in those plans. The consultation process on the planning system is called “Places, People and Planning”, and it is all those things—people are at the heart of making places work.

We also have ambitions to align our system of community planning, which has been going for some years, with spatial planning. That reflects what the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) and the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) said about the need for integrity—people's views should be respected as part of the planning process.

There is a real need in Scotland to remove some of the complexity. In 2007, not long after I became a councillor, Glasgow was looking at city plan 2, which was one huge folder with another huge folder of supplementary items. It was very complex, and it was difficult for people to get their heads around it and understand the land use. Almost as soon as it was produced, things had moved on and changed. The 2008 crash then changed many people's views about how land should be used in communities.

In the Scottish system, we think that people should have the opportunity to plan their own place and that people should be involved in planning. The community aspect is important, as is improving public trust. In Scotland, we are approaching that through pre-application consultations. Before a planning application is submitted to a local authority, the developer has to go and speak to the local community, sound people out and figure out whether its proposal will be acceptable. That is very important and has been quite successful in changing some aspects of that process. My council colleague Norman MacLeod was at one of those events in a part of the constituency that we share, where the developers were presenting all these two-bedroom flats in Pollokshields. Councillor MacLeod said, “There are large families in the area, who will want larger family homes.” That had not crossed the developers' minds. Having that negotiation before developments are built is a better way to get them right.

The hon. Member for Mid Norfolk mentioned his ambitions for new towns in his constituency. That is an interesting prospect, but issues arise about how those new towns would be paid for. Would they be paid for by the developer? If the developer decided not to pay, would the local authority end up picking up the tab, as the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) warned? When a new town is planned in Scotland, a new town development corporation has to be set up. These issues have to be thought about carefully before embarking on a new town, and I imagine the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk is thinking about how it can best be done. We also need to get the right mix of private and public input, as well as schools and everything else that a community needs to flourish.

New towns have sometimes failed for lack of proper planning. BBC Scotland has produced an excellent documentary called “The Storm That Saved a City” about the 1968 Glasgow storm. It described the housing situation in the city of Glasgow, including slum clearances. The council planned to demolish absolutely everything and rebuild from the roots. It moved lots of people out to Easterhouse, Drumchapel and other parts of the city, but it did not put in facilities such as shops, pubs and social gathering places. Those communities still feel that they do not have all the facilities they need. We still have not learned the right lessons, because the Commonwealth games village was built in Glasgow without a school, a nursery or a row of shops. We need to learn from new towns. What has made them successful? What has made them thrive?

It would be useful if the Minister said a little about how the Government will legislate on new towns, and what guidance will be provided. When we build a new town, we build it to be a home—not just a set of houses, or somewhere to wake up in the morning and go to bed at night, but a community to live in for the long term.

5.11 pm

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) for securing this incredibly important debate. There is a lot of cross-party agreement on the issue, and I agree with almost everything that hon. Members have said in the debate. My only disagreement with the hon. Gentleman is that I think the issue affects both rural and urban areas.

If we want positive planning in this country, the best place to start is with local neighbourhoods and communities. The reason is obvious: local people know their area best, and they know best how to develop it. They understand not only issues such as local heritage, but infrastructure needs, which are often overlooked in planning but are necessary to make a development successful. I was really pleased that hon. Members raised that today.

I was also extremely pleased that the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk mentioned new towns. I am very keen to hear what the Minister has to say about new towns, because the Government have been a bit tardy, to say the least, in bringing forward new towns or garden cities. I think we probably all agree that garden cities have worked better than new towns, but it would be good to hear an update from the Minister.

There were some weaknesses in the conception of neighbourhood planning. A neighbourhood plan is not a free-standing document; it has to be developed in line with a local plan and strategic objectives. Neighbourhood plans have often been mis-sold to local neighbourhoods, who think that a plan can do something that it cannot. They run into particular problems when no up-to-date local plan is in place. We have all seen neighbourhood plans being developed, voted on and passed in areas where no local plan is in place or there is an issue with the five-year housing supply. Even if the council rejects a development because it is not in line with the local plan, its rejection is often overturned on appeal, using the national planning policy framework and the general presumption in favour of development. If the Minister wishes to give neighbourhood planning more teeth, he needs to look at that.

The Minister also needs to look at resources and at the whole local community effort necessary to developing a neighbourhood plan. I know that the Government have put some resources aside for developing neighbourhood plans, but in my experience such resources are often not enough, particularly in areas of special complexity. Neighbourhood plans are being developed while massive cuts are reducing the ability of planning departments to support parish councils and neighbourhood planning forums to implement them.

We all want neighbourhood plans to be more effective, but there are some issues with them. I was pleased to see, as a sign of cross-party consensus, that “ConservativeHome” has stated that the Government need to look more

closely at neighbourhood planning because there are wrinkles to be ironed out. We all want our communities to be given the tools to plan effectively for their area, but we also want neighbourhood plans to be more effectively integrated into our overall planning system. Perhaps they need to be given greater weight—that seems to be one of the crucial issues that the Government still have to address. I appreciate that the Minister is new to his job, but we have great expectations about what he will deliver.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): If the Minister finishes his remarks no later than 5.28 pm, the Member in charge will have time to sum up.

5.16 pm

The Minister for Housing (Dominic Raab): As ever, Mr Hollobone, it is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) on securing the debate. He spoke forensically about the issue and eloquently about his constituency. He highlighted the importance of neighbourhood planning, which has been giving people real power to shape the development of their communities since its introduction in 2011.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to points raised in the debate and take up the generous offer from my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) to listen carefully to concerns. Hon. Members will know that, given the Department’s role in determining certain planning issues, I cannot comment on the detail of individual plans or planning cases. However, I can talk about the practice, the framework and the parameters that create the principles guiding the relationship between neighbourhood plans, local authorities and central Government strategy. I hope also to address the interesting points made by the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew).

I know that many hon. Members have been directly involved in encouraging and supporting communities in their constituencies to take up neighbourhood planning; I recognise the role that MPs play in the process. I assure all hon. Members that we continue to support the principle of neighbourhood planning and that we are already looking at teething issues and wrinkles to be ironed out. In September, we announced our largest ever support package for neighbourhood planning: a £22.8 million programme that will start in April and provide communities with the help and resources that they need to develop plans up to 2022.

Before I address the important points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk, it is worth reminding ourselves of the wider national context and the big picture on housing. In order to meet demand, we have to deliver 300,000 homes every year by the mid-2020s. We have to provide the homes that Britain needs, but we also have to make them affordable for real people on low and middle incomes. As hon. Members have said, we have to build a lot more of the right homes in the right places. I take that point. There were 217,000 net additions to the housing supply last year. That was the highest level in a decade—an increase of approximately 70% on what was achieved in 2009-10—so there are positive signs, but there is still a long way to go.

[Dominic Raab]

We need to be mindful of how we tailor the vehicle, both in the context of local democratic affairs—points were raised today about carrying communities with us—and with respect to the overarching national demand and our mission to build the homes that the next generation needs.

It is absolutely crucial that local authorities play their role by producing up-to-date local plans and identifying a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. Local plans and a five-year supply of housing sites can provide clarity for communities and for developers who want to do things the right way regarding where new homes should be built. That means that development is planned and is not the result of speculative applications. I have taken on board the points made by my right hon. Friends the Members for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) and for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) about some developers. I emphasise “some” developers; let us not tar all developers with the same brush, because, as I think hon. Members have said, there is good practice, but there is some bad practice as well.

As of today, 26 authorities are still to publish a local plan and 131 local authorities have a local plan that is older than five years. So, the big picture is that overall we are doing quite well, but there are certainly areas and pockets where we need to do better. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has written to 15 authorities, giving them until the end of this month to justify why they do not have a plan in place and why the Government should not intervene. He has put other authorities on notice, explaining that a consistent failure to make sufficient progress in that regard cannot be tolerated indefinitely.

I turn to neighbourhood plans. They are, of course, voluntary. They rely on the enthusiasm and the hard work of local people, and, in the round, local communities. They are a powerful set of tools for communities to say where development—such as homes, shops and offices—should go, what it should look like, and what facilities should be provided. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell), who, as neighbourhood planning champion, has championed the cause of the right kind of local plans.

Neighbourhood plans undergo consultation, independent examination and the community referendum before coming into force as part of the development plan for their area. I take the point that was made by the hon. Member for Stroud about referendums, even though I was probably on a different side from him in our recent, bigger referendum. In this context, however, referendums are important, because they ensure that neighbourhood plans have genuine support and, as a result, some clout and some force. Their status as part of the development plan is very important, because planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Since the introduction of neighbourhood planning by the Localism Act 2011, 2,300 communities have begun the process of shaping the future of their area. I think that about 17 of those are within the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk, and I recognise the local initiative that goes into such local

plans. I also understand the point that he made about encouraging and not stifling that initiative, which is crucial.

Nick Herbert: Does my hon. Friend accept that the undermining of a referendum by failing to observe what the referendum has decided is, in its own way, just as damaging at a local level, in relation to a neighbourhood plan, as it would be at a national level if a decision made in a national referendum was not observed by the authority concerned?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point, and he is tempting me to muddy the waters of this debate in a typically mischievous way. I will accept that if we argue for the principle of democracy through a referendum and say that the result of the referendum needs to be delivered, and we then put in place a system of local referendums—often, people care even more about the issues in such referendums than they do about those in national referendums, because the issues relate to people’s local environment or their quality of life—it is important to make sure that they are respected.

We endeavour to continue to make the neighbourhood planning process stronger and simpler, to ensure that it is attractive to even more communities. This week, for example, we are implementing powers in the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017. Those reforms make it easier for communities to keep their neighbourhood plans up to date as local circumstances change—they will change from time to time—and ensure that neighbourhood planning groups are made aware of local planning applications.

Other important reforms set out in the Act came into force last July. Those reforms require decision takers to respect neighbourhood plans earlier in the process, following a successful referendum. There will be further reforms this July, requiring local authorities to set out their policies on supporting neighbourhood planning groups.

I take this opportunity to welcome another neighbourhood planning success. The 500th successful neighbourhood planning referendum has just taken place; they are clearly catching on, notwithstanding the point that the hon. Member for Stroud made. That is quite an important milestone, which was reached by communities in Leeds, Suffolk and Lincolnshire. Those three communities are very different from each other, to touch on the point that the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods), made. However, they all went to the polls on the same day, and between them they allocated land for employment, homes and local green spaces; those things can come together. Those plans are now the starting point for determining planning decisions.

Our planning policy is clear that where a planning application conflicts with a neighbourhood plan that has been brought into force, planning permission should not normally be granted. However, we recognised in 2016 that, in some cases, neighbourhood plans were being undermined because the local planning authority could not demonstrate a five-year land supply of deliverable housing sites, which is one of the key issues. That meant that even recently adopted neighbourhood planning policies were not being given enough weight in determining planning applications. I know that that is the crux of

the experience of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk, and the point that he wanted to make in this debate.

Communities who had worked hard to put their neighbourhood plan in place were left frustrated as decisions went against the plan, despite their having done everything that was asked of them. As hon. Members have argued, that can only undermine confidence in the referendum process and the localism agenda. Seeking to remedy that, we issued a written ministerial statement in December 2016 to ensure that national planning policy provided additional protection to precisely those communities. The change that was made protects neighbourhood plans that are less than two years old and that allocate sites for housing, as long as the local planning authority has more than three years' supply of deliverable housing sites.

We will take forward that protection in the updated national planning policy framework, which will be published for consultation before Easter—I think there was a question earlier about its publication. I suspect that that will be the beginning of the dialogue and the debate, not the end of them.

The national planning policy framework will be amended to give local authorities the opportunity to have their housing land supply agreed on an annual basis, and fixed for a one-year period. I hope that that gives some reassurance. Through these new policies, alongside the tough action to get local plans in place, we hope to ensure that we get the right homes in the right places. That is the delicate line that we seek to tread here.

I should just say a few words about neighbourhood plan examinations, because of the significant legal weight afforded to neighbourhood plans. The plans need to be carefully examined in a fair and transparent way. If we had longer today, I would go into the matter in more detail. Effectively, the examinations are the check that, once passed, allows the referendum to proceed, which gives real force to the localism agenda in this sector.

I am conscious of the time that I must give my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk to allow him to wind up this debate. I appreciate that important issues have been raised today, whether they are in rural, urban or suburban constituencies, and I understand how deeply felt are the concerns about them. We will continue to protect neighbourhood plans in national policy, and decision takers—whether that is the local authority, the planning inspector or the Secretary of State himself—must respect that national policy.

Sir Nicholas Soames: Will my hon. Friend give way on that point before he sits down?

Dominic Raab: I am conscious that I have only eight seconds left and I really ought to give my hon. Friend

the Member for Mid Norfolk the opportunity to wind up the debate, but I will give way briefly to my right hon. Friend.

Sir Nicholas Soames: Have the Government considered, or are they considering, limiting the amount of time for which builders can hold on to land before building on it?

Dominic Raab: As a new Minister, lots of helpful suggestions come my way. That is something that we will consider, in the context of both the Letwin review and some of the interesting policy submissions that have already been put to me. I undertake to have a look at that point.

5.28 pm

George Freeman: Thank you, Mr Hollobone, for calling me to speak again and for the chance to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon.

I thank colleagues who have come to Westminster Hall to support this debate and the points that I have been making. We find out who our friends are when we put our heads above the parapet, and I could not wish for a better platoon of support. I should also say—both to you, Mr Hollobone, and to the Minister—that several colleagues who support the points that I have been making could not be here today.

I am grateful to the Minister for his typically assiduous, detailed and honourable answers and reassurances. There was some important and good news in there, in that the Government recognise the importance of the issue and in the steps that are being taken. However, having been a Minister myself, I know that officials often think that the issuing of a written ministerial statement or the granting of a new power might solve a problem. One has to remember that on the ground, our councils are up against real pressures, and new powers and written ministerial statements do not always cut through or solve the problem that exists here and now.

It is really important, not only for this issue of building houses but more broadly, that we recognise how free markets work. The Minister is a great advocate of free markets, as am I, but they operate in the context of the incentives and regulations that we set here in Parliament. If we are going to build the housing that we need and an economy that works for everyone, we really have to get this matter right. I ask the Minister—I am sure the answer is yes, as he has indicated so—whether he will agree to meet me, Councillor Gordon Bambridge, who is my local head of planning, and colleagues to discuss how we can take the matter forward.

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Tuesday 30 January 2018

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sporting Future and Anti-Doping

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): I am today publishing the second annual report on the Government's sport strategy "Sporting Future: a New Strategy for an Active Nation", together with the "Tailored Review of UK Anti-Doping".

Second annual report to Parliament on Sporting Future

Sporting Future set out a new Government vision to redefine what success looks like in sport by concentrating on five key outcomes—physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development. It was a bold new strategy for an active nation. It marked the biggest shift in Government policy on sport for more than a decade.

We have continued to build on the significant progress achieved in the first year of the strategy and have continued to embed, and invest in sport and physical activity on the basis of, the five outcomes. On mental wellbeing, for example, we are working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care to explore how elite and professional sport can improve its offer of mental health support. We are also building on Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson's duty of care report to ensure that sport takes its responsibilities to all participants seriously, whether that be elite athletes or those at the grassroots.

Investment in sport and physical activity continues to be focused on the five key outcomes. Funding has been opened up to organisations which can demonstrate how they will consistently deliver some or all of those shared goals, with a strong emphasis on tackling inactivity and engaging underrepresented groups.

We want to make sure absolutely everyone can benefit from the power of sport and I am grateful to all those across Government and the sport and physical activity sector who are working to make the ambition of Sporting Future a reality. The annual report is being deposited in the Library of both Houses and is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sporting-future-second-annual-report>

Report on the "Tailored Review of UK Anti-Doping"

Today I am also publishing the "Tailored Review of UK Anti-Doping".

We want to ensure that the UK remains at the forefront of efforts to stop those who would wish to damage the integrity of sport through doping. This tailored review examines UKAD's efficiency, effectiveness, governance and planning for the future.

The recommendations it makes will ensure that we are in the best place possible to continue efforts to stop drugs cheats and to continue to support athletes to compete on a level playing field.

We must continue to do all we can to support these efforts and I am grateful to all who were involved in, and contributed to, the review. The tailored review is being deposited in the Library of both Houses and is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tailored-review-of-uk-anti-doping>

[HCWS432]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Naylor Review of NHS Property and Estates

The Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Stephen Barclay): My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Lord O'Shaughnessy) has made the following statement:

I am today announcing the publication of the Government response to the Naylor review.

In March 2017, Sir Robert Naylor published his independent review, "NHS Property and Estates: Why the estate matters for patients". It highlighted not just the scale of the challenge we face in ensuring that the NHS has both the buildings and equipment that it needs, but also the scale of the opportunity open to us. It set out how, by taking a more strategic approach, the NHS can generate money to reinvest in new or updated premises and in better patient care. Unused land can be released for much-needed housing, driving regeneration and creating jobs. Using healthcare buildings more efficiently can reduce running costs and deliver more integrated care.

The Government welcome the review and its recommendations, which we will implement in conjunction with national partners and the NHS.

Sir Robert set out the progress needed on three key themes to transform the NHS estate, and we are taking action in response. The themes highlighted by the review are leadership and capability, national planning and funding, and incentivising action locally. We are taking action on each of these themes.

First, we have created a new NHS property board, of which I am the chair. This brings together all the key national players and will act as a single point of leadership for the system on estate matters. We are improving capability at a local level by creating a new national strategic estates planning and advisory service, to help the NHS move from planning to delivery. This team has evolved over the last year as we have brought together all the local strategic estates advisers into a single team to provide expert advice to the NHS.

Second, we are taking steps to improve national planning and funding. Sir Robert gave a clear estimate of the level of funding required to enable the transformation of the estate to meet the vision of the five year forward view. It recommended this could be found through Government capital, private finance and proceeds from the disposal of surplus NHS land.

The Chancellor, in his autumn Budget, announced an additional £10 billion package of capital investment over the course of this Parliament. The Government have committed over £3.9 billion of capital for the NHS. This will support the NHS to increase the proceeds from the sale of surplus land to £3.3 billion. We expect it to be supplemented by private investment, where this provides good value for money. It is likely some of this will come from the types of schemes that already fund primary care facilities. With this £10 billion package of capital investment, we will develop a pipeline of transformational STP projects over the next five years so that the NHS can deliver on the vision of the five year forward view.

The first group of schemes to benefit from this new combined STP funding have already been announced and patients will see the benefits from this investment across a wide range of care settings.

Finally, we are taking action to incentivise local NHS organisations to take a more strategic approach to estates planning and management. I can reassure NHS organisations that they will be able to retain receipts from land sales, so these can be reinvested in the NHS estate, to renew and replace outdated facilities and to address backlog maintenance, in line with local priorities and STP strategies. Where surplus land is developed for housing, NHS staff will be given the right of first refusal on any affordable homes built. We have an ambition that this will allow up to 3,000 NHS workers and their families living in areas where accessing affordable housing can be challenging to own their home.

The Government have delivered their share of the funding needed; the NHS must also play its part. It cannot be right for NHS properties to remain unused and empty when their disposal could generate funds for reinvestment and thus improve facilities and services for patients. As Sir Robert recommended, in order to access capital funding STPs will need to develop robust estates plans with stretching disposal strategies and that reduce running costs and address backlog maintenance. The local NHS needs to act quickly to develop these plans and will be supported by advisors from the local strategic estates planning team.

I would like to again express my gratitude to Sir Robert, his advisory board and review team for their time, expertise and commitment.

The statement is available online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>.

[HCWS433]

HOME DEPARTMENT

EU/Canada Negotiations: Passenger Name Record Data

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): Until the UK leaves the EU it remains a full member, and the Government will continue to consider the application of the UK's right to opt in to, or opt out of, forthcoming EU legislation in the area of justice and home affairs on a case-by-case basis, with a view to maximising our country's security and protecting our civil liberties.

The Government have decided to opt in to a Council decision authorising the opening of negotiations for an agreement between the European Union and Canada for the transfer and use of passenger name record (PNR) data.

This agreement will replace the EU/Canada PNR agreement which expired in 2009. The UK opted-in to negotiations for a new agreement which opened in

2010. When an envisaged agreement was presented to the European Parliament for approval in July 2014, the Parliament referred it to the Court of Justice of the European Union for an opinion on its compliance with the treaties and the charter of fundamental rights. In July 2017, the Court found that the envisaged agreement could not be concluded in its current form and the Council has now decided to reopen negotiations.

The UK, in common with the other EU member states and with an increasing number of third countries, places considerable value on the processing and analysis of PNR data for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime.

PNR data is used by many countries to detect individuals involved in serious crime and terrorism-related activity as well as enabling the protection of vulnerable victims of trafficking.

The Government believe that PNR agreements between the EU and third countries play a vital role in assuring the protection of personal data within PNR data and providing legal certainty for air carriers required to disclose personal data to third countries' authorities. It is for this reason the Government have decided to opt in to the negotiation of an EU/Canada agreement on the transfer and use of PNR data to prevent and combat terrorism and other serious transnational crime.

[HCWS434]

TRANSPORT

Dartford Thurrock River Crossing Charging Scheme

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): The Dartford Thurrock crossing charging scheme account for 2016-17 is published today under section 3(1)(d) of the Trunk Road Charging Schemes (Bridges and Tunnels) (Keeping of Accounts) (England) Regulations 2003. A copy of the accounts will be placed in the Library of the House.

It is also available online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>.

[HCWS431]

Ministerial Correction

Tuesday 30 January 2018

EDUCATION

Skills Devolution (England)

The following is an extract from a speech made by the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills during a Westminster Hall debate on Skills Devolution (England) on 23 January 2018.

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): T-levels are not in place yet. I wish they were, but they are coming down the road soon. They are part of a consultation. We are also changing completely the approach to careers, and—I am skimming through my

notes now—there is the devolution of 25% of the adult education budget. The areas where it is being devolved to have asked for more time, but it will be devolved in 2019-20.

[Official Report, 23 January 2018, Vol. 635, c. 68WH.]

Letter of correction from Anne Milton:

An error has been identified in the speech I made in the Westminster Hall debate on Skills Devolution (England) on 23 January 2018.

The correct response should have been:

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): T-levels are not in place yet. I wish they were, but they are coming down the road soon. They are part of a consultation. We are also changing completely the approach to careers, and—I am skimming through my notes now—there is the devolution of **50% of the adult education budget, of which 25% is being devolved to London**. The areas where it is being devolved to have asked for more time, but it will be devolved in 2019-20.

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**not later than
Tuesday 6 February 2018**

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Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
