

Thursday
7 June 2018

Volume 642
No. 149



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 7 June 2018

House of Commons

Thursday 7 June 2018

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Deposit Return Scheme

1. **Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): Whether he has had discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on introducing a deposit return scheme. [905701]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): The answer is yes.

Jessica Morden: Tomorrow, a team from AB InBev brewery and Keep Wales Tidy will again be out cleaning up the shores of the Severn estuary, which highlights the very urgent action that is needed to protect our environment from the devastating impact of plastic pollution. Will the Secretary of State confirm that he has Treasury backing for a deposit return scheme, and when will we see some action?

Michael Gove: We have already seen formidable action to embrace the opportunities that a deposit return scheme would provide and to ensure that we deal with the environmental damage the hon. Lady mentioned. I should take this opportunity to say that it is not just the Treasury that recognises the importance of acting, but our colleagues in the Scottish and Welsh Governments, with whom we have had collaborative successful discussions as well.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): Is it not true that this project need not cost the Treasury any money whatsoever, and that we should just get on with it?

Michael Gove: No one is keener on getting on with things, and indeed on saving money, than my right hon. Friend, whose own record in government is one of the most distinguished over the past seven years—and, in fact, beyond. He is absolutely right: in delay there lies no plenty.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Keep Wales Tidy does a great job in Blaenau Gwent, too. What steps are the Government taking to address the problem of plastic waste at the manufacturer level?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. We already have our plastics pact, which has been agreed by WRAP—the Waste and Resources Action Programme—a charity that we support. That commitment was made by leading companies across the United Kingdom to ensure that they use less virgin material, and that more of the plastic they use is recycled or recyclable. We are also thinking hard about reform of the producer responsibility note scheme, and we will be saying more about that later.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): When looking at international comparisons of best practice for deposit return schemes, which countries is the Secretary of State looking at most closely?

Michael Gove: No country has a perfect model, but we have looked at examples in Scandinavia. One of the things that those countries have been so successful in achieving is a phenomenal level of return—and, indeed, high levels of recycling. We need to think carefully about the nature of drinking and the pattern of consumption in the United Kingdom to see what exactly would work and go with the grain of consumption habits here.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Beyond incentives such as the deposit scheme, what discussions has my right hon. Friend had with the Chancellor about improving the UK's recycling infrastructure so that we can recycle a wider range of products, such as coffee cups and microwave oven-ready cartons?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has initiated a review of the taxation and treatment of single-use plastics overall. One of the things we want to do is to make sure that the money that producers remit as a result of using particular materials is used to ensure improved recycling across the country. I know that Treasury Ministers—not just my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, but the Exchequer Secretary—are working hard on these matters.

Leaving the EU: Agricultural Sector

2. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What plans he has put in place to support the UK agricultural sector in the event of the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [905703]

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): Whatever the nature of our future economic partnership with the European Union, we will design and implement our own independent agriculture policy based on financial rewards and incentives for the delivery of public goods, and support farmers in reducing their costs and adding value to their produce so that they become more profitable.

Mr Carmichael: I take it from that answer that we do not actually have any plans in place yet, and time is ticking. The Minister knows that something in the region of two thirds of our red meat exports go to the European Union. The lack of certainty about our future customs relationship with the EU is now causing real and substantial concern. When will the Minister remove that uncertainty?

George Eustice: I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. We have already published our consultation on future agriculture policy—we are analysing the 44,000 responses—and we are looking at this closely. On the issue of trade, the UK is also a very important market for the European Union, notably for Irish beef, poultry from the Netherlands and pork from Denmark, so it is also in the EU's interests to have a comprehensive free trade agreement.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Farmers in my constituency are concerned about a lack of focus on food production in agriculture policy post Brexit. Farmers are the biggest guardians of our environment, and they can protect the environment and produce food at the same time. What support will the Minister give farmers to enable them to produce food post Brexit?

George Eustice: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, and a number of farmers have also raised the issue with me. I would simply say that the consultation had sections on safeguarding a profitable future for farming, on fairness in the supply chain, on risk and resilience, and on investment in research and development, so there was lots on food production. I simply say that we want to change the way we farm so that it is more sustainable; not stop farming, or do work on the environment instead of farming.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I asked the Minister back in March whether he had held meetings to discuss the problems that might arise because of the overuse of antibiotics in US farming, if we were to move to trading with the US and accept its standards. He would not confirm whether he had met representatives of the Department of Health and Social Care or the Department for International Trade to ensure that we could rule out imports of meat produced in the US, which has five times the use of antibiotics that we have in this country.

George Eustice: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently met the chief medical officer to talk about the important issue of antibiotics use. We also have the O'Neill report, which set key targets for the UK to reduce its use of antibiotics, and the UK has campaigned globally through various international forums to reduce the use of antibiotics in agriculture.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Would my hon. Friend be surprised to learn that farmers in my constituency, while hoping that there will be a trade deal with the European Union, say that Brexit will provide a marvellous opportunity regardless of whether there is any such deal? In particular, specialist food manufacturers such as cheese manufacturers feel that if we can do free trade deals with countries such as the United States and Canada, that will increase their sales.

George Eustice: My hon. Friend makes an important point. This is an opportunity for us to have a very different approach to agriculture policy and to support producers in this country as we look to the future. It is worth noting that analysis commissioned by the National Farmers Union shows that, even without a trade deal with the EU, most sectors in farming would see a slight firming in farm gate prices.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): One of the most critical issues facing our rural communities is the need to ensure that we have a reliable seasonal workforce to harvest our produce this summer. At the Scottish Affairs Committee, the Immigration Minister said that she would not give anything to Scotland that she would not give to Lincolnshire. In Scotland, that went down like a trailer full of rotten raspberries, and I dare the Minister to repeat it. Will the hon. Gentleman tell Scotland—and indeed Lincolnshire—when he intends to announce a new seasonal workers scheme? What will he say to growers in Scotland and Lincolnshire who now face the prospect of their produce rotting in the fields?

George Eustice: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I spent 10 years working in the soft fruit industry and I understand the issue of labour in some detail. We are having discussions with the Home Office and other parts of Government about the future arrangements for immigration and a seasonal agricultural workers scheme.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): In the responses to “Health and Harmony”, the two areas of greatest concern were the impact of the withdrawal of the basic payments scheme on smaller farmers and tenant farmers, and the transition period. What discussions has the Minister had with the Treasury about extending the transition period, given that that must be the right way to approach this?

George Eustice: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about these issues just a couple of days ago. We made a clear manifesto commitment to protect spending on agriculture until 2022—the end of this Parliament. Thereafter we will have a new funded policy.

Flood Defences

3. **James Frith (Bury North) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the effect of changes in the level of funding for flood defences on the effectiveness of those defences. [905705]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley): The Government are investing £2.6 billion to better protect the country from flooding. This includes a programme of more than 1,500 flood defence schemes, which will better protect 300,000 homes by 2021. The programme will deliver £30 billion of economic benefit for the next 50 years and is projected to reduce overall flood risk to the economy by 5% by 2021.

James Frith: The 2015 Boxing day floods devastated the Redvales and Radcliffe areas of Bury. The Environment Agency has drawn up a £37 million flood defence scheme for the area but, after raising £30 million between the EA, Greater Manchester and Bury Council, there is a £7 million shortfall. That shortfall would be covered if the bid with the Minister were successful. After being unsuccessful in the first round, we are to be considered again for funding from the £40 million pot for deprived areas. Can he update me on the progress of the bid? Successful bids to date have protected fewer than 100 homes, but ours would protect 1,200.

David Rutley: The hon. Gentleman has been a clear champion for his local community in raising these issues with the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey). He can be assured that his bid is being given serious consideration in relation to the £40 million floods fund for growth and regeneration and that decisions will be made by the summer.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Mr Speaker, I am sure that you have seen the devastating pictures of flooding in Birmingham, the wider west midlands and other parts of the country, including 30 to 40 homes in my constituency. Is it not the case that it was the Conservatives who secured universal affordable flood insurance for the victims after inheriting a situation in which the Association of British Insurers had given notice to end the so-called statement of principles in 2008?

David Rutley: My right hon. Friend is of course right, and our thoughts are with the families who have been affected by the floods, particularly the family of Peter Harnwell, who sadly died despite the best efforts of the emergency services when his vehicle was submerged. Thanks to the Government's efforts, the vast majority of households at high flood risk now have access to home insurance through Flood Re, which has active plans in place to engage with all communities after flood events once the immediate emergency has subsided.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): I join the Minister in sending our sincere condolences to the family of the gentleman who sadly died in Walsall following the extreme flash flooding earlier this month. I also pay tribute to the emergency services and others who worked so hard to protect our communities during that period of extreme weather.

Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Frith), in the 2017 autumn Budget, the Government allocated £40 million to boost regeneration in communities at high risk of flooding but, six months on, not a penny has been allocated. Will the Minister tell the House what is causing that delay?

David Rutley: The allocation of flood defence funding is important, as the hon. Lady will appreciate, and it is being properly scrutinised. Conversations are being had and, as I said to the hon. Member for Bury North (James Frith), a decision will be made this summer.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that the creation of 15 hectares of new habitat remains a funded part of the Oxford flood alleviation scheme, which may affect my constituents?

David Rutley: I do not know the detail of that scheme, but I will talk about it in depth with my hon. Friend afterwards to give him the assurances that he needs.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The best form of flood defence is upper catchment management, yet the £45 million provided in York is going towards downstream emergency measures. It was not incorporated in the national strategic review, so what are the Minister's plans to start investing in upland management?

David Rutley: The hon. Lady makes an important point. Looking at natural ways to tackle floods, such as planting trees and wood-based flood defences further upstream, is a priority. We are taking that action further forward with a fund and a plan.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The Minister will recall that the entire Humber estuary, particularly my constituency, was badly affected by a tidal surge in December 2013. There is still concern among residents that insufficient work has been done. Will the Minister meet me and neighbouring MPs to provide an update?

David Rutley: I understand the concerns raised by my hon. Friend, and I am of course more than willing to meet him to discuss them in detail.

Producer Responsibility Systems

4. **Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con):** What steps he is taking to reform producer responsibility systems to incentivise producers to take more responsibility for the environmental effects of their products. [905708]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): We are developing a renewed strategy on resources and waste, which will include reviewing how the producer responsibility scheme works to ensure that we can invest more in recycling.

Mark Pawsey: Does the Secretary of State agree that a reformed packaging recovery note system could provide funds for better recycling and waste collection, particularly for on-the-go packaging; reduce litter; and increase recycling rates? Does he also agree that that is a better option than the "latte levy" scheme, under which there is no assurance that the money will go towards environmental improvements?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend, who knows a great deal about packaging, waste and recycling, makes an important point. If we impose particular costs on producers, we should whenever possible ensure that those costs then go towards environmental enhancement and improving recycling. I am sure that his well-pitched case will be heard with sympathy in the Treasury.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I urge the Secretary of State to be radical here. Not only should he look at how PRNs work and their effectiveness, but he should consider the supply chain of those who make plastics. Professor Steve Evans at the Institute for Manufacturing in Cambridge believes that manufacturing will have to change fundamentally to tackle the problem. Will the Secretary of State speak to him?

Michael Gove: Not for the first time, the hon. Gentleman makes a thoughtful point. It is the case that the PRN scheme needs reform, but he is also right that we will have to think about how we change packaging and the supply chains upon which we have relied in the past. I will take up his kind invitation.

Mr Speaker: The Secretary of State is going have a chat with the prof, and that is very good to learn.

Leaving the EU: Environmental Standards

5. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What plans he has to ensure that environmental standards are maintained after the UK leaves the EU. [905709]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): As the House will know, the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill provides continuity and maintains high environmental and other standards as we leave the European Union. My Department is consulting on environmental principles and governance to ensure that we can have a world-leading body to hold the Government and others to account in order to maintain high environmental standards.

Mr Speaker: I think that the Secretary of State is seeking to group this Question with that of the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands).

Michael Gove: As ever, Mr Speaker, you anticipate my wishes with perfect clarity.

Deidre Brock: The “polluter pays” principle underpins the EU’s approach to protecting the environment. Will the Secretary of State commit to the post-Brexit watchdog having legally enforceable powers to make sure the polluter still pays when it damages our land, air and sea, even if that is the UK Government breaking air pollution rules?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady makes three very good points. First, yes, the polluter pays principle is an important one to maintain. Secondly, we do need enforcement powers. Thirdly, of course, if the UK Government are in breach of air quality rules, it will be the case, as in the past, that they have to be held accountable.

9. [905715] **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Yesterday’s Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee report pointed to a notable lack of detail on post-Brexit agricultural plans. Those concerns are echoed by the National Farmers Union and UK farmers, who are now writing to their MPs asking whether they should be planting crops for next year. UK farmers simply cannot afford to continue watching the Government kick the can down the road, so will the Secretary of State commit today to publishing a detailed and credible strategy by the end of this month?

Michael Gove: We do not believe in kicking cans down the road; we believe that a deposit return scheme is a very effective way of making sure those cans are recycled.

The UK Government have published a consultation paper, “Health and Harmony”, which outlines a post-common agricultural policy future for farmers in England. The Scottish Government have not yet done so. I have the highest regard for Fergus Ewing, the Minister responsible, but, energetic and talented though he is, the one thing he has not done is spell out his vision for the future.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): A planning application has been made in my constituency for a recycling plant that will produce dioxins. There is no such plant in the United Kingdom or, as I understand

it, in the EU. By the time this process goes through, we will probably be out of the EU. Will the Secretary of State give an undertaking to meet me and members of RAID—Residents Against Inappropriate Development—who think the construction of a dioxin plant in my constituency, or anywhere in the UK, is unacceptable?

Michael Gove: I am always happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this issue.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): The Secretary of State will be familiar with the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty and that, in common with other AONBs, it receives a support scheme for landscape protection and enhancement. Obviously, as a member of the European Union, we have to get derogations and permissions because of state aid restrictions. Can the Secretary of State assure me that support will continue after we have left the European Union? Will he give me an undertaking that he will use this added freedom to increase those funds and support for these valuable and precious areas of our countryside?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend makes a good point. The Chilterns are blessed not only as an area of outstanding natural beauty, but with distinguished representatives in this House of all parties and none. One of the things I will seek to do is to work with the new reviewer of designated landscapes, Julian Glover, who is a distinguished writer and thinker, to ensure that the right protection and support are there not only for our existing national parks, but for our AONBs.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): The Secretary of State says that this new watchdog must have enforcement powers, but the watchdog he has proposed is completely toothless. It will be able to issue only advisory notices, not enforcement notices, and has no power to fine the Government. That has rightly been rejected by the other place. We expect an amendment from their lordships to come to this place next week. Will he table an amendment to his toothless watchdog, or should I do so?

Michael Gove: I am always grateful to the hon. Lady for all her suggestions, amendments and thoughts. We are consulting. We are asking the public exactly how many and what type of teeth this watchdog should have, but we are saying that the watchdog should start with enforcement powers, which include advisory notices. It is then open for discussion as to what additional powers the watchdog might have.

It is also the case that Back-Bench Conservative colleagues have tabled amendments, and we are considering those amendments. The hon. Lady makes a good point that the House of Lords made a case in good faith for how the watchdog could be strengthened, and I always listen to the other place with respect.

Mr Speaker: I hope that colleagues now feel enlightened about the teeth situation.

Animal Cruelty

6. **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): When he plans to publish the findings of his consultation on the draft Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Bill; and if he will bring forward legislative proposals on five-year sentences for animal cruelty. [905712]

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): Our proposals to enshrine animal sentience in domestic law and to extend mandatory sentences for cruelty to five years received positive responses, and we plan to publish the findings of those consultations soon.

Andrew Rosindell: I thank the Minister for his reply. Given that five-year sentencing for animal cruelty has gained cross-party support from MPs, the animal sector and the public, will he tell us how soon he will announce the details of when sentences can be given to those guilty of such awful crimes?

George Eustice: I agree with my hon. Friend on the importance of this measure, and for some time I have pressed to have maximum sentences for cruelty extended, particularly for some of the most shocking cases of cruelty. The Government are committed to doing this, we have published how we intend to do it, and as soon as parliamentary time allows we intend to introduce this change.

Fracking

7. **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): What plans his Department has to limit the environmental effect of fracking. [905713]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley): DEFRA and the Environment Agency take the environmental risks associated with oil and gas exploration very seriously. We have a robust regulatory regime, drawn from global best practice and more than 50 years' experience of regulating the onshore oil and gas industry safely in this country. The Environment Agency will issue a permit only if it is satisfied that any risks to people and the environment can be effectively managed.

Mr Cunningham: Given that lots of people are concerned in certain areas where fracking can happen, what is the Minister doing to hold meaningful discussions and involve them in the decision making, so that they feel that their voice has been heard?

David Rutley: As always, the hon. Gentleman asks an insightful question. Our regulatory regime currently lets local residents have their say on two stages in the environmental permitting process: when the application is received by the Environment Agency; and at the draft decision stage, before the permit is finalised. A public consultation takes place once the planning application has been permitted. On 17 May, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government set out that they would be strengthening community engagement further by consulting in due course on the potential to make pre-application consultation a statutory requirement.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Why does the Minister not make a statement on behalf of the Government to stop fracking altogether?

David Rutley: The Government believe, rightly, that shale gas plays an important part in our energy mix and will be an important bridging fuel in the transition to renewable technologies.

Leaving the EU: Fishing Industry

8. **Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): What steps he is taking to support the UK fishing industry as the UK leaves the EU. [905714]

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): Leaving the European Union will provide new opportunities for the UK fishing industry, including in Northern Ireland. On leaving the EU, we will become an independent coastal state controlling access to our own exclusive economic zone, and the fisheries Bill announced in the Queen's Speech last year will introduce the powers necessary to do this.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Minister for that response. For the fishing sector, it is important that fishing our own waters will take place. As he will know, the voisinage agreement continues to be an obstacle to that happening, so will he update us on what is happening in relation to that?

George Eustice: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The voisinage agreement gives Northern Ireland vessels and Irish Republic vessels access to one another's waters, and it predates the existence of the EU. Following a decision by Ireland's Supreme Court, its side of this has been suspended, pending further legislation. We intend to put further pressure on the Irish Government to raise this issue to ensure that they act on the undertaking they have given to re-establish their side of this agreement.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that he has a plan to get the UK fleet through the implementation period, in order to tackle the challenges of ensuring we have enough fish to catch and implementing the discards ban?

George Eustice: Yes, I can confirm that we do. We have been working in regional groups on the discards plan, looking at ways to deal with the problem of choke species. In the past week, I have written to Commissioner Vella with some suggestions on how we can adopt the right approach to deal with choke species, particularly hake in the North sea and haddock in the Celtic sea. I assure my hon. Friend that we are still working on these issues.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Given that unfortunately fishermen's rights have been traded away during the transition period, is not the best way to guarantee that we regain full control of the exclusive economic zone after Brexit to rejoin the European economic area and the European Free Trade Association?

George Eustice: Fishing has not been traded away in the transition agreement. We have made it clear in that agreement that nothing will change for the time-limited period until the end of December 2020, but we will negotiate as an independent coastal state in that year, 2020, for fishing opportunities in 2021.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): The fishing industry is hugely important to Scotland, and many fishermen and boat owners want to know what steps the Government are taking to make sure that non-EEA nationals can access the sea.

George Eustice: I know that the Scottish industry has raised the issue of labour, and its representatives recently met the relevant Home Office Minister. The Migration Advisory Committee is looking into the whole issue of our labour and migration needs after we leave the European Union, and representations have been made to the Home Office on the issue.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Fishing is extremely important to my Moray constituency, so will the Minister join me in welcoming—perhaps for the only time—the Scottish National party report this week that said that Brexit could generate £540 million for the fishing industry and 5,000 jobs?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Government Members are clear that we should leave the European Union and that there are opportunities for our fishing industry. The disaster for the Scottish fishing industry would be if we were not to deliver Brexit and leave the European Union, thereby throwing away those opportunities.

Waste Crime

10. **Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con):** What steps he is taking to tackle waste crime. [905716]

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): We recently strengthened the Environment Agency's powers to tackle problem waste sites and we allocated an extra £30 million for waste enforcement in last year's Budget. We have also consulted on tightening the permitting and exemptions regime to improve the waste sector's performance. Later this year, we will publish a resources and waste strategy that will set out our wider approach.

Mary Robinson: I welcome the new powers given to the Environment Agency. Will my hon. Friend confirm that those new powers will enable it to curb effectively the rise of waste sites, which continue to break the law and blight our communities?

George Eustice: Yes, I can confirm to my hon. Friend that the new powers will enable the Environment Agency to do that. For example, they give the Environment Agency the power to lock gates and physically close down problem sites, and to require all waste to be removed from a site at which there are problems. We are also going to introduce tougher standards for those who hold licences.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): On Monday, I shall join Newcastle volunteers on a litter-pick, but they cannot be expected to deal with the vast tubs of oil waste left by fast food outlets or mattresses left by landlords when their tenants change. What additional powers and resources will the Minister give to local authorities so that my constituents can live in the environment that they deserve?

George Eustice: We have already made it clear that we are going to consult on tightening up the powers to take action against people who give their waste to fly-tippers, so that we can bring them to account more easily. Later this year, our resources and waste strategy will address some of the issues that the hon. Lady mentioned.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): Additional powers are all well and good, but without additional resources, local authorities can do nothing effective because of the restrictions on their budgets. We have a particular problem in Enfield with things such as tyres and with skip companies not following legislation. It is difficult for the council to prosecute when resources are so tight, so what is the Minister going to do?

George Eustice: All such sites are covered by a permitting regime that is run by the Environment Agency. We have put £60 million of extra money into the Environment Agency in recent years, including £30 million in the past year to deal with these sorts of problems.

Topical Questions

T1. [905719] **Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): Tomorrow is World Oceans Day, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will travel to Canada to ensure that, in common with other G7 countries, we do everything we can to make sure that our marine environment is healthy. Much of the Government's groundwork for the conference was undertaken by the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey); I know that everyone in the House will wish her well for a speedy recovery and a return to the Front Bench.

Jeremy Lefroy: May I join my right hon. Friend in sending good wishes to our hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey)? Will he perhaps come to Staffordshire to see the excellent soft fruit, vegetable and salad farming that goes on there and also to discuss the needs for the future, in particular labour needs and needs for addressing the challenges and opportunities that lie before us?

Michael Gove: Absolutely. My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I had the opportunity to visit soft fruit and salad growers in Cambridgeshire and in Norfolk recently and I appreciate the labour concerns that they have. I will take the opportunity to visit Staffordshire as soon as I can.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): The Government's 25-year environment plan sets out commitments to protect our natural environment. Will the Secretary of State outline the steps that he is taking to recognise and protect local wildlife sites, which are currently under threat of development from proposed changes to the national planning policy framework?

Michael Gove: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that question. I have had the opportunity to discuss these issues with the Minister for Housing and Planning, and we want no weakening in any protection for these sites.

Sue Hayman: I am sure the Secretary of State is aware that, if implemented, these proposals could effectively unprotect 42,000 sites in this country. May I ask whether he was consulted by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government before this policy was put forward?

If yes, how did this get into the policy, and if he was not consulted, why not, when the Government have such a strong commitment to the environment?

Michael Gove: Without going into all the conversations that we have had—and we have had a series of them with colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government—the inference that many have drawn from the way in which the consultation has taken place is not one that we considered to be warranted. That is why I provide the reassurance that I have at this Dispatch Box, and I know that colleagues in the MHCLG will do so as well thanks to the hon. Lady's question.

T3. [905722] **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): Small UK independent under-10 metre fishermen have historically been the big losers in the common fisheries policy. My fishermen in Newhaven are disappointed to learn that, post Brexit, fishing policy meetings are being held with big quota holders. Will the Minister commit to including the small independent under-10 metre fishermen in post-Brexit fishing policy discussions?

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): I can reassure my hon. Friend that I regularly meet members of the under-10 metre sector. Their trade body, the New Under Ten Fishermens Association, meets regularly and is actively engaged in discussions about future policy.

T2. [905721] **John Grogan** (Keighley) (Lab): Given the recent report that indicated there is an excess of incineration capacity in the United Kingdom, which is discouraging recycling, is there not a case now for a tax on incineration, or even a moratorium on new incinerators?

Michael Gove: I know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will look with interest at that submission for the forthcoming Budget.

T5. [905725] **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Strange to relate, but heathland grazing is an innovative way to manage some of the most wild and beautiful parts of our natural environment in Dorset. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss the Rural Payments Agency in general and its policy towards heathland grazing in particular?

Michael Gove: I absolutely will. My hon. Friend and I both have heathland in our constituencies and both of us know from personal experience how important grazing can be to the effective management of lowland heathland. It is absolutely the case that the RPA, under Paul Caldwell, is doing a good job, but I am absolutely committed to making sure that we support those who do such valuable work more effectively.

T4. [905723] **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): As an indicator of the future, will the Secretary of State confirm once and for all that Scottish farmers will not see any of the £200 million EU convergence uplift money that Westminster has stolen from them?

Michael Gove: Westminster has not stolen anything from Scotland's farmers. Indeed, it is only thanks to the strength and the unity of the United Kingdom that Scotland's farmers have a firm platform on which to

build. One of the things that I thought was striking at the general election, which we all remember with such fondness occurring only 12 months ago, was that Scottish National party colleagues, many of them talented individuals, lost their seats to Scottish Conservative and Unionist colleagues because rural Scotland knows that its interests are better represented by the party of the Union than by the divisive, grievance-mongering separatists who masquerade as Scotland's voice but who are, in fact, Scotland's gairners.

T6. [905726] **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What about badger culling in low-risk areas?

George Eustice: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising that issue. We have no intention of rolling out badger culling throughout the low-risk area. However, in response to one single incident that we have had in Cumbria of an outbreak that has got into the badger population in a limited way, we have consulted to ensure that we have the option to deal with that following veterinary advice and the advice of our chief scientific adviser.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Secretary of State is using his current role to flirt with radicalism—in particular, taking cheap shots at the payments made to the landed aristocracy. Rather than capping total amounts paid in the future scheme, would it not be more sensible to look at the rate of return and the marginality of the land?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady, who is a former Treasury civil servant, makes a vital point. As a Conservative, when I take shots at the landed aristocracy, they are not cheap. I find that when the landed aristocracy want others to undertake shooting with them, they often ask quite a high price.

Mr Speaker: The Secretary of State obviously speaks with experience of these matters, of which I confess I have none.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): In the past couple of days I have received a veritable flurry of emails from my constituents, who want to ensure that our environmental laws will be strengthened, or at least maintained, after Brexit. What reassurance would the Secretary of State like to give to the people of Chelmsford?

Michael Gove: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point and for her advocacy for this cause. We are listening with respect to the arguments that have been made by her constituents, Members of the other place and the public about the need to maintain and enhance high environmental standards. That is why we will be looking with interest at some of the amendments tabled by Back-Bench colleagues.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Just before the recess, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government made an announcement about proposals for a consultation to create a single shale gas regulator. Can the Secretary

of State assure the House that there will be absolutely no change to the powers of the Environment Agency to protect our environment on fracking sites?

Michael Gove: Yes, I can. The Environment Agency has been very clear about the vital role that it plays in providing assurance that environmental safeguards are always in place when hydraulic fracturing or other forms of hydrocarbon extraction take place.

Mr Speaker: Single sentence questions now.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): What consideration has the Secretary of State given to including hippos and other ivory-bearing species in the Ivory Bill?

Michael Gove: We are looking forward to discussing this in Committee and looking sympathetically on well-made cases.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): The Department's own family food survey found that even when poorer households buy cheaper food, they still spend a higher proportion of their income on it than average households, because of low wages. Does the Secretary of State still stand by his patronising comments that poorer people find "solace" in eating cheap junk food?

Michael Gove: My comments to the all-party parliamentary environment group, which were inspired by a very good question from the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), were explicitly designed to say that we should not patronise or judge people on poorer incomes for the choices they make. I know that the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) is very busy, but had she been there she would have had a better understanding of the context in which those comments were made.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): What are the Government doing to introduce and increase the use of biodegradable packaging?

Michael Gove: We recognise that biodegradable packaging should be an alternative to existing forms of packaging wherever possible. We are considering how we can change the taxation and regulation of packaging in order to facilitate the use of biodegradable materials.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): What is the Secretary of State going to do to stop the ludicrous and unpleasant practice of farmers illegally putting up great big hoardings in their fields, on the side of motorways? Surely one of the things that makes the British landscape different from elsewhere in Europe is that we have legislation to prevent that.

Michael Gove: I share the hon. Gentleman's commitment to ensuring that our green and pleasant land stays beautiful, and I will investigate this matter.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): What reassurances can my right hon. Friend give the all-party parliamentary group on endangered species that the protections in the Ivory Bill will be in place in time for the illegal wildlife trade conference in the autumn?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The conference, which will take place on 10 and 11 October, is critical in bringing together international co-operation to help safeguard endangered species. I hope that, with the leave of the House, we will have legislation on the statute book well before then.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Clewer Initiative

1. **Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what progress the Church of England has made on the Clewer initiative to tackle modern-day slavery. [905689]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman): The Clewer initiative was set up in 2017 as a three-year, fixed-term project with the express aim of securing a world free from slavery. It enables dioceses to develop strategies so that we can better detect instances of modern slavery and provide support and care to victims.

Joan Ryan: I welcome the Church of England's commitment to tackling modern slavery. Can the right hon. Lady confirm whether the exploitation of vulnerable young people and adults in the county lines drugs trade is also a focus of the Clewer initiative? What work is the Church doing with the police, the Government and other parties to tackle this menace?

Dame Caroline Spelman: The Church works very closely with a large number of partners in order to try to stamp out modern-day slavery, including the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association, the National Crime Agency, the National Police Chiefs Council and immigration service officers—all the parties that need to be involved. The exploitation of very young, vulnerable children in trafficking drugs for illegal gangmasters is something that all these agencies need to work together on, and the Church supports that strongly.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will recognise the work that faith communities do in protecting the victims of human trafficking. Will she welcome the role of the Clewer initiative in detecting trafficked people in our communities?

Dame Caroline Spelman: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. In March, the Clewer initiative launched a campaign called Hidden Voices, basically so that all of us open our eyes and our ears to the slavery that is all around us. It provides residential training courses for faith communities and day courses, so that we all become more sensitised to see what is happening around us.

Middle East

2. **John Grogan** (Keighley) (Lab): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what initiatives the Anglican communion is supporting in the diocese of Jerusalem to help promote peace between the Israeli and Palestinian Christian and Muslim communities. [905690]

Dame Caroline Spelman: One of the most important ministries of the episcopal diocese of Jerusalem has been the ministry of dialogue and reconciliation between Christians, Muslims and Jews. Its archbishop recently announced the establishment of the diocesan department for peace, reconciliation and interfaith dialogue. We were very lucky, Mr Speaker, recently to have a visit from the Dean of Jerusalem to the Houses of Parliament to talk about its work.

John Grogan: Is the right hon. Lady worried that the number of Christians in the Palestinian territories is declining? What more can be done to bring together, in particular, young people of different faith communities?

Dame Caroline Spelman: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. The Christian community on the west bank has plummeted as people have left in droves to come to live in Europe or to go to live in America. It is a particular challenge to persuade young people to remain. If they leave for university, it is quite often difficult to get back. So the Church is working very hard on this. There is a scheme whereby children from the region can do exchanges with children in other places. For example, 16 children from the Zebabdeh community did an exchange with Ballinteer Community School in Dublin. This enables them to see beyond their tight and very difficult world but also to feel supported in remaining in their homes, where their roots are.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): On Maundy Thursday this year, I had the privilege of attending a service at St Paul's church in Shefa-Amr, the Anglican church in northern Israel. I commend the work that the Anglican diocese of Jerusalem does throughout the entire diocese, both in Israel and on the west bank. May I urge my right hon. Friend perhaps to visit some of these churches and encourage them as they support their congregations in this wider ministry?

Dame Caroline Spelman: There is no substitute for a first-hand account. I know that my hon. Friend is knowledgeable about the work that the Anglican Church does with all communities in Israel. I hope that, one day, in the not too distant future, I shall get the chance to go to see this for myself, perhaps with some colleagues who have also not had the opportunity to visit the holy land.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Earlier this year, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was shut to visitors because of some pressure that the Israeli authorities were putting on because of land changes. Will the right hon. Lady make sure that, through her dialogue with our Church, she talks to the Israeli authorities to make sure that that church is kept open, because visitors want to visit it?

Dame Caroline Spelman: When the Dean of Jerusalem came to visit parliamentarians in both Houses, he explained in great detail the political background to what is going on. If I share with the House that this gentleman is a Christian Israeli, and actually no less than the son of a carpenter from Nazareth, perhaps Members will see that there was no person better qualified to explain to us, as British parliamentarians, just how complicated the situation is in Jerusalem. I think we have to trust the people who really understand this well to try to work through to peaceful solutions for that part of the world.

Columba Declaration

3. **Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what progress has been made since the Columba declaration on promoting closer ties between the Church of Scotland and the Church of England. [905691]

Dame Caroline Spelman: The Columba declaration was designed to set up a contact group to initiate and promote activities that strengthen the partnership in mission between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland. It was set up and met for the first time in November 2017.

Andrew Bowie: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. In this year, when the Church of Scotland General Assembly has in the Right Rev. Susan Brown elected its fourth female moderator and London has gained its first female bishop, might my right hon. Friend expand on the work that the Churches are doing to attract a wider range of applicants to the ministry?

Dame Caroline Spelman: First, through my hon. Friend, I would like to congratulate the Right Rev. Susan Brown on her appointment. This is now an increasingly strong trend. The Queen has just named the Very Rev. Vivienne Faull as the next Bishop of Bristol, which brings us to a total of 15 female bishops in the Church of England. The ministry department within the Church is also conscious of the need to diversify and encourage more applicants from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. It has set up a mentoring scheme, and if any hon. Members would like to be mentors for applicants from those communities, they would be very welcome.

LGBTQ Community

4. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps the Church of England and Anglican communion are taking to promote a more tolerant attitude towards members of the LGBTQ community; and if she will make a statement. [905692]

Dame Caroline Spelman: It so happens that my hon. Friend's constituency lies in the diocese of Lichfield, which has just issued new guidelines that call for a Church where LGBTQ people feel welcomed and honoured. That letter was sent to all clergy and lay ministers in the diocese, which has 600 churches and covers a population of 2 million people.

Michael Fabricant: My right hon. Friend will understand that the whole question of gay marriage has not exactly endeared the Church of England to gay people. Nevertheless, I am encouraged by what she says. Perhaps she could expand a little more on what is happening in the Lichfield constituency, which extends all the way to the border with Wales.

Dame Caroline Spelman: All four Bishops in that diocese—the Bishops of Lichfield, Wolverhampton, Stafford and Shrewsbury—are signatories to that initiative,

which gives practical expression to what the Archbishop of Canterbury was referring to when he talked about radical Christian inclusion.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): My right hon. Friend knows that same-sex marriages can receive a blessing in some churches, but sadly can be refused in others. What can she do to ensure that that inequality is addressed immediately and that this very important ceremony is offered throughout all our churches in the United Kingdom?

Dame Caroline Spelman: Across the Anglican communion, this is a difficult subject; I acknowledge that. Not all people either in this country or across the wider communion are of one view. The Church is working very hard to try to obtain better understanding. A conversation ensued across the Church of England to try to help people of different points of view to come to a greater understanding of the other person's point of view, and the Bishop of Newcastle is tasked with running a group relating to sexuality in the Church. Blessings, where they occur, are often at the discretion of the diocese, and the Church is nothing if not a devolved institution.

Bell Ringing

5. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps the Church of England is taking to promote bell ringing. [905693]

Dame Caroline Spelman: Mr Speaker, in case you are looking for a new hobby that will build on your already excellent level of fitness and mental alertness, you need look no further than bell ringing. Churches are always looking for new volunteers to whom they can show the ropes.

Mr Speaker: I am most grateful to the right hon. Lady for her advice. I have been to the church in Lillingstone Lovell—to mention just one location in my splendid constituency—where there are some very enthusiastic and capable bell ringers. Maybe other invitations will be forthcoming.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): But there are bats in that belfry.

Mr Speaker: There may be bats in the belfry; I do not know. The hon. Gentleman is chuntering from a sedentary position. Whether he does so with the advantage of knowledge of the matter is a divisible proposition.

Mr Hollobone: In contrast with bell ringers in churches in most other countries in the world, in this country, bell ringers can change the order in which the bells are rung, thus allowing for great creativity and the creation of wonderful different sounds. It is a startling fact that 95% of all the churches in the world where that is possible are located in England. Is not now the time to celebrate this wonderful part of English heritage and unique contribution to church music?

Dame Caroline Spelman: My hon. Friend has done a good job of presenting the significance of bell ringing in our culture and its wider impact across the world. That significance is recognised by the Church of England, and the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers has promoted a campaign called “*Ringing Remembers*”,

the purpose of which is to recruit 1,400 new bell ringers in honour of the 1,400 who lost their lives in world war one. The endeavour will be to ring the bells of churches throughout the land on the centenary of the Armistice this year.

Mr Speaker: I gather, by the way, that bell ringing is quite a strenuous business; it is not to be underestimated by colleagues.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The wonderfully historic Anglican church, St Mark's in Newtownards in the heart of my constituency, has a working belfry. Does the right hon. Lady believe that there is an acceptable level of funding to help with the upkeep of such towers and their bells? If not, will she apply pressure on the Government to ensure that there is?

Dame Caroline Spelman: I had the great privilege of ringing a bell in a Church of Ireland church, and I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on highlighting the significance of bell ringing in his constituency. If hon. Members have in their constituencies churches that are in need of grants or funds for the restoration of bells—time is short before the centenary of the Armistice—the ChurchCare website has grants available to repair and restore bells. Other sources of funding are also available—indeed, a grade 1 listed church in Castle Bromwich secured funding from English Heritage. Grants are available, and Members should assist their churches in securing them so that they may be part of the great occasion of the centenary of the Armistice.

Nigeria: Violence against Christians

6. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps the Church of England and Anglican Communion are taking to tackle violence against Christians in Nigeria. [905694]

Dame Caroline Spelman: My hon. Friend is a trade envoy to Nigeria, and he has a wealth of knowledge about that part of the world. The Archbishop of Canterbury also has a great deal of knowledge about Nigeria, having lived and worked there, and he cares deeply about the persecution of Christians around the world. He has appealed publicly and directly in face-to-face meetings to the Nigerian President, to try to bring the violence against Christians to an end.

John Howell: After the recent terrible massacre of Christians attending church in the middle of Nigeria, the President was summoned to Parliament, service chiefs and security advisers had motions of no confidence passed against them, and Parliament was suspended. Does that not show that the country is taking the problem seriously?

Dame Caroline Spelman: There is no doubt that the problem is being taken to the heart of the Nigerian constitution and its institutions. I remind my hon. Friend that on 22 May we had a debate in Westminster Hall at which many Members raised reports from Christian Solidarity Worldwide about the terrible violence perpetrated against Christians, particularly in the north of Nigeria, but also in the middle belt and as far south as Delta state where the oil is. Let us not forget that there are still

Chibok girls in captivity. The issue may have fallen from the top hit list of interests and press themes, but young girls are still held in captivity; one of them in May spent her 15th birthday in captivity because she would not renounce her faith.

Mr Speaker: I am certain that Christian Solidarity Worldwide, which is a magnificent organisation, will appreciate the tribute that the right hon. Lady has just paid to it, and she will share my conviction that it is fantastically represented by Ben Rogers, among others.

Religious Literacy Training

7. **Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps the Church of England is taking to support the provision of religious literacy training for Government Departments and embassies. [905695]

Dame Caroline Spelman: The Church of England fully supports the provision of religious literacy training across all Government Departments. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office provides religious literacy training through the LSE Faith Centre, following an open competition. It is essential that diplomats abroad and officials here at home understand the histories of different faiths.

Helen Goodman: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for that answer. Religious conflict is obviously worst in the middle east. My understanding is that the training is not compulsory. Will she have a conversation with the Minister with responsibility for the middle east and north Africa about this matter?

Dame Caroline Spelman: Despite the training provided by the LSE Faith Centre receiving excellent reviews, the uptake is disappointing. Perhaps the hon. Lady would like to join me in having a conversation with the Minister for the Middle East, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who is very knowledgeable about the area, to see if we can advance take-up of the course across all Government Departments.

Overseas Orphanages

8. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what guidance the Church of England issues to parish churches on support for orphanages overseas. [905696]

Dame Caroline Spelman: The Church of England works internationally to support vulnerable children in various ways through its diocesan links and through Anglican mission agencies. It regularly assesses the range of support provided to make sure of best practice, especially with regard to vulnerable children.

Mr Sheerman: It is evident that there are many good orphanages in the most troubled parts of the world. There is also evidence, however, that some are used for child trafficking and are not really orphanages. Will the right hon. Lady join me in writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury to ask for a meeting and a commission on this involving all the aid agencies? I am bringing together all my local churches and other faith groups to discuss the issue. We must have an assurance that money raised by churches in this country goes to the right places.

Dame Caroline Spelman: The hon. Gentleman and I have both seen the presentation by the charity Home for Good. It brought to our midst an Australian Senator who is pioneering an amendment to modern-day slavery legislation on orphanage trafficking. She made a very important point that there is a cognitive dissonance. In this country, we would not tend to go first to an orphanage as a solution for the needs of a vulnerable child, yet we often give resources to such provision abroad without actually knowing whether they definitely get to the source and whether the children are well cared for by that source. It is very important that we pursue this topic rigorously and I am willing to support the hon. Gentleman's multi-agency approach.

Affordable Housing

9. **Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what the Church of England's policy is on the development of affordable housing on Church land. [905697]

Dame Caroline Spelman: In England, the Church Commissioners have identified land for development which has the potential to provide an estimated 24,000 new homes, including more than 30% affordable homes, subject to the requirements of the local planning authority.

Meg Hillier: That is a good news. I am sure the right hon. Lady will not be surprised that, in my constituency, which has such a severe housing problem, many of my churches are keen to deliver their Christian mission in part by providing long-term properly affordable homes. St John's Hoxton has hit a real problem. Because it is in a heritage setting, it is grade 2 listed. Paragraphs 144 and 145 of the national planning policy framework, on planning and development, prohibit the church from building, and prohibit the council from giving it permission to build, affordable homes on the site. Is she or the Church having conversations with the planning authorities about how to change the law?

Dame Caroline Spelman: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for advance notice of this case. I have looked at it and I think the difficulty is that a range of local stakeholders, including Historic England and the local planning authority, do not support the proposed scheme. The difficulty relates to constructing houses on green space, which is also at a premium in London. To give her some encouragement, in the adjoining diocese of Southwark, a very similar scheme was passed after a couple of years of to-ing and fro-ing and trying to make it acceptable to all stakeholders. I encourage her to work together with all stakeholders to try to find the optimum solution.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

Division Lobbies

10. **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): To ask the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, representing the House of Commons Commission, how

many accidents or injuries have been reported in the Division Lobbies during a Division in each year since 2008. [905699]

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I am afraid that information has been collated only since 2012, but there have been two incidents involving Members hurting themselves, I think using the steps into the Division Lobbies, one this year and one last year.

David Linden: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that answer. I have only been here for less than a year and in that time I think I have seen three or four incidents, not least with pregnant female colleagues fainting in the Lobby. It seems rather bizarre that we stuff hundreds of people into a locked room for Divisions. Next week, we will have no fewer than 15 Divisions. Will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to look at electronic voting, which would make this place at least look like it is in the 21st century?

Tom Brake: I rather anticipated that that would be the hon. Gentleman's line of inquiry. The first thing I would say is that Members who suffer an injury should report it. On the two incidents I mentioned, action will be taken to improve lighting. That should happen next month. On electronic voting, he will know from the answers I have given in the past that this is perhaps very much a matter for a Backbench Business debate and for the Procedure Committee to consider.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Gay Conversion Therapy

11. **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what recent discussions the Church of England has had with Government Ministers on the General Synod's resolution on gay conversion therapy; and if she will make a statement. [905700]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, because this allows me to update the House on the

similar question that he asked me in January. I did follow my promise to write to the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), who has responsibility for mental health, and arrange a meeting with her, which was constructive—the right hon. Gentleman came with me. She explained that the Department is surveying the extent of gay conversion therapy. I wrote to her again on 23 April requesting a copy of that Government survey, so that we might all benefit from their findings.

Mr Bradshaw: I thank the right hon. Lady very much for what she has done to help on the issue of the intolerable practice of conversion therapy. Can I ask her to go back to the Minister and ask for a timescale? The Minister acknowledged that the problem was bigger than the Government had hitherto recognised and she did promise action. It would be nice to know when we might see that action.

Dame Caroline Spelman: To bring this absolutely up to date, I received a response from the Minister for Women and Equalities on the subject, which stated that the Minister would welcome another meeting with us, so I suggest that we take her up on her kind offer.

Mr Speaker: Very useful, thank you. I think the House owes a considerable debt of gratitude to the Second Church Estates Commissioner, the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), perhaps today, even more than ordinarily, because she has answered 10 of the 11 questions. In the process, she has undergone something of an exercise routine, having had to bounce up and down repeatedly to attend to the queries of right hon. and hon. Members. We are very greatly obliged to her for the quality of her answers and for the spirit in which they have been provided.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Her reward is in heaven.

Mr Speaker: For the benefit of those listening to our proceedings, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) chunters from a sedentary position that the right hon. Lady's reward is in heaven.

Heathrow

10.36 am

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the potential taxpayer liabilities that the Government have entered into in their statement of principles agreement with Heathrow Airport Ltd.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): Let me thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) for raising this issue. She has been absolutely indefatigable on it, and I salute her.

As the Secretary of State set out in his oral statement on Tuesday, we recognise the very strong feelings on this matter of some Members across the House and their constituents. I am aware of the various representations that have been made in the Chamber that Government would be liable for Heathrow's costs should they decide to withdraw support from the scheme. These representations appears to stem from a clause in a non-legally binding agreement between Heathrow and the Department for Transport that has, I am afraid, been taken out of context.

The question was addressed by the Secretary of State for Transport on Tuesday and by the Prime Minister yesterday. Let me repeat in the clearest possible fashion that there is no liability here. The Government have not entered into any agreement that gives Heathrow the right to recover its losses in the event of the scheme not proceeding, and nor would they accept any liability for any of the costs that Heathrow Airport Ltd has incurred or will incur in the future.

For the avoidance of any doubt, I will quote directly from the document in question, which says that

“this Statement of Principles does not give either HAL or the Secretary of State any right to a claim for damages, losses, liabilities, costs and/or expenses or other relief howsoever arising if, for whatever reason, HAL's Scheme does not proceed”.

We are absolutely clear that we would have a responsibility to Parliament when a liability or, indeed, a contingent liability were incurred.

Yesterday, the Government laid before Parliament a written ministerial statement and departmental minute that set out what was a contingent liability for statutory blight, which will start if the proposed airports national policy statement is designated. The liability is contingent because the Government have rightly protected the taxpayer by entering into a binding agreement with Heathrow Airport Ltd whereby the airport assumes the financial liability for successful blight claims, if the scheme proceeds.

With regard to wider scheme costs, the answer is simple: we have not notified Parliament of any liability because there is none.

Justine Greening: I am very grateful to the Minister, for whom I have a lot of respect, for coming to the House today. He mentioned one part of the statement of principles, but he will also know that the immediate clause after that says “notwithstanding...2.1.5”—that is, the paragraph he just read out. In other words, it says that in spite of that, Heathrow Airport Ltd

“reserves its rights (including but not limited to its rights to pursue any and all legal and equitable remedies (including cost recovery) available to it”,

and I set out that yesterday. It has clearly been written by a lawyer. If it does not matter legally, why did Heathrow Airport Ltd include it in the statement of principles? It paves the way for Heathrow to recover costs from the taxpayer when things go wrong. As the Secretary of State himself said on Tuesday, there are circumstances in which the runway could be built but then not used.

My questions are as follows. Why was this term agreed to in the first place? Heathrow is a private company, and should therefore accept the risks. Why was it agreed to exclusively for Heathrow Airport Ltd? Were the Secretary of State and the Department for Transport clearcut with Parliament about the existence of the clause, and if not, why not? Why was it never flagged up in the national policy statement documents that have been seen by the public? What assessment have Ministers made of the existing outstanding liability under the clause, given that it has already been triggered, and will the Minister confirm that my own assessment is correct?

Was the Cabinet Sub-Committee that made the decision to proceed with Heathrow Airport Ltd's proposal made aware of the clause? For transparency purposes, will the Minister publish the papers that the Sub-Committee did look at, so that we can establish the level of detail that was available to it when it reached its conclusion? Why should the Minister have any faith in the prospect that if the Heathrow expansion goes wrong—as I suspect it will—and the company pursues the Government and taxpayers for potentially billions of pounds in costs, it will then honour any public service obligation in relation to routes to regional airports, and why does he think that the Scottish Government should have any confidence that it will ever stick to the memorandum of understanding?

Jesse Norman: My right hon. Friend has asked a vast number of questions. If I do not cover all the points that she raised, I shall be happy to write to her. She mentioned the Cabinet Sub-Committee; I am not a member of the Sub-Committee and have not seen the papers that were presented to it, so I cannot comment on that.

My right hon. Friend asked whether any liabilities had been created, and directed my attention to a specific clause. It is of course a very narrow legal point, but I entirely accept that it is important to focus on it. The Government's position is that no liabilities have been created, and therefore none need to be disclosed; and no contingent liabilities have been created. The statement of principles is a standard document on which the Government took advice both from distinguished leading counsel and from a top-tier firm of solicitors. It simply allows Heathrow Airport Ltd to reserve rights that it would normally have under commercial law, while making clear that the Department has no liabilities in respect of the issues already described.

We, as a Department, are clear about the fact that the statement of principles is not legally binding. It does not create any legitimate expectation. It does not fetter the discretion of the Secretary of State. It does not give Heathrow Airport Ltd the right to claim

“damages, losses, liabilities, costs and/or expenses or other relief”.

Heathrow does, of course, retain some rights of its own, and that is entirely proper.

[*Jesse Norman*]

There might be circumstances in the future under some future Government, possibly of a different political persuasion, that did create a contingent liability, and the Government would then be under an obligation to present that to Parliament in the normal way. Heathrow Airport Ltd might, in the exercise of its legal rights, have the ability to sue them in some respect, but that is not touched on by this question.

The statement of principles with which we are dealing is not, in fact, the only document of its kind. There were two other such documents. In October 2016, the Government entered into an agreement on a statement of principles with Heathrow Airport Ltd, as we have discussed, but versions of the same document were also agreed with the promoters of the other shortlisted schemes, Gatwick Airport Ltd and Heathrow Hub Ltd. Those, of course, fell away when the Government recommended the Heathrow north-west runway as the preferred scheme. This is not a one-off deal or any kind of special arrangement with Heathrow itself.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) on securing the urgent question. This appears to be a devastating revelation, and it is beyond belief that when such a bombshell has landed, the Secretary of State is not here to respond.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said:

“The statement of principles... does not give Heathrow Airport Ltd the right to claim any costs or losses from the Government should its scheme not proceed.”—[*Official Report*, 6 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 304.]

That does not seem to be accurate.

Can the Minister explain why a statement of principles was entered into between the Department and Heathrow Airport Ltd that clearly states, at paragraph 2.1.6, that “HAL reserves its rights (including but not limited to its rights to pursue any and all legal and equitable remedies (including cost recovery) available to it under law) in the event of...an alternative scheme being preferred by the Secretary of State or...the withdrawal of the Government’s support for aviation expansion for Heathrow Airport”?

Does he not see that this is a massive revelation of the utmost importance? Given all the opportunities the Government have had to bring it to the attention of the House and come clean, why has this statement of principles, which effectively indemnifies HAL, been unearthed only at this critical stage? Did they think that no one would spot it?

Why was the statement of principles not included in the national policy statement or the consultation on the NPS? Why was it not disclosed to the Transport Select Committee? Has the Secretary of State secured an unequivocal guarantee from HAL that, in the event of the north-west runway not going ahead, the Government will not indemnify HAL for costs expended in pursuit of the project? Is it not the case that the Government have boxed themselves into a corner by committing HAL to a risk-free investment, while exposing themselves to either massive cost recovery on the part of HAL or crushing litigation before the decision has even been taken?

Jesse Norman: Far from this being a bombshell, I am afraid it is the dampest of damp squibs. No indemnification has been given or was ever in question. The Opposition’s

position is not a legal position; it is an expression of some other kind. The hon. Gentleman does not seem able to quote any legal authority. I invite him to quote any legal authority for his position. We have the legal authority of leading counsel and a top firm of solicitors supporting our position. The statement was entered into for a very simple reason: to make it absolutely clear, while reserving HAL’s normal rights, that the Secretary of State has an almost unfettered discretion in this area, and rightly so. I would expect the hon. Gentleman, being a taxpayer, to support that position.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): We have dithered over airport expansion for far too long, and it really has had a damaging effect on our economy. Unlike HS2, which delivers no benefits to my constituency and is an open-ended commitment from the taxpayer of billions and billions of pounds—a subject on which the Labour Front-Bench team is always so quiet—we are here making something out of nothing. Heathrow expansion will deliver benefits to my constituents and yours, Mr Speaker, secure jobs now and provide tens of thousands of jobs and opportunities in the future. May I urge my hon. Friend to get on with it and not be distracted by people trying to block it?

Jesse Norman: I thank my right hon. Friend for her question. We have seen many brilliant examples of crowbarring local and national issues into debates, and I salute her ingenuity in so doing. She rightly makes the point that this proposition has been left unexecuted for far too long, although it has greatly improved as a result. It will bring an almost £75 billion boost to the UK economy, provide better connections to growing world markets and allow better support for regional airports and the regions of the country. She is right that we need to press ahead.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I am rather naive. When the Secretary of State for Transport came to the Dispatch Box to present the decision on Heathrow expansion, I thought he was moving on from the rail shambles and on to firm ground—a subject he had a firm grip on—but clearly that is not quite the case. We are hearing mixed messages about liabilities and a rather flippant, “We don’t need to worry. It is a normal commercial recovery mechanism that Heathrow has put in.” The Government have to be clear about this if they are to carry the vote of the House and take this forward, and time is limited.

The Secretary of State said that the Government had acted on 24 out of the 25 recommendations of the Transport Committee’s report on the NPS, but that claim seems to be unravelling as we go through the Government’s response. Again, it seems the Government are not on top of this. There has been much debate about the cost of surface access and who pays for that. The Government are going to have to be very clear, because they keep saying there are no liabilities there and it will all be private-funded. They need to start to understand the mechanisms for the payment of surface access upgrades; will that be a private finance initiative through fare recovery? What will it be, and what are the associated contingent liabilities? Quite often, the Government end up giving infrastructure guarantees, so will they be in place for surface access upgrades?

In terms of the 15% of new slots—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am afraid the hon. Gentleman is way over time. If he has a single sentence to add, I am happy to hear it, but after that we do need to proceed.

Alan Brown: I will need to understand the protection of the 15% of new slots for the new domestic routes before the vote takes place; that is important.

Jesse Norman: The latter point is so far outside the scope of this UQ that I hope the hon. Gentleman will not mind if I address it in the Committee session this afternoon.

On the issues the hon. Gentleman raises that are germane to the question, let me start by thanking the Scottish National party for its support for this project, which it rightly concludes will be of great value to Scotland—and that is agreed across all parties. There are no mixed messages here and there is nothing fluffy about the legal position on which the Government have—as it appears, uniquely—taken advice. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the statement of principles was published in 2016 and has been available for almost two years, so if there is fluffiness it is not on the Government side of this House.

We have taken very seriously the 24 out of 25 Select Committee recommendations that the hon. Gentleman raised. We are grateful to the Select Committee for its detailed and painstaking work and have acted on many of its recommendations; we have left one to be a point of further discussion, and dispute potentially, but we have been overwhelmingly positive in many ways towards the Select Committee response. That should be reflected on the record, and we are grateful for the support it has given to this project.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind the House that there is another urgent question to follow. After that we have the business question and then two moderately well-subscribed Backbench Business Committee debates, so there is a premium on brevity. What I am looking for is not preambles, but single sentence—preferably short sentence—inquiries, to be exhibited in the first instance by the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt).

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Is my hon. Friend the Minister as astonished as I am that as distinguished a lawyer as the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner), could advance an argument that is so utterly threadbare in respect of the rather limited defence this agreement gives to Heathrow airport and its private investor supporters if the Government change their policy?

Jesse Norman: I could say that I could not possibly comment. But it is right to acknowledge that a future Government might create a liability or contingent liability. That is not ruled out, and there might theoretically be some recourse for HAL as a result of that. One should just be—*[Interruption.]* That has always been the case, and it is not changed by this proper recognition of the law.

Karl Turner: Shocking.

Mr Speaker: Order. The day would not be complete without the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner) uttering the word “Shocking” while sitting on the Opposition Front Bench. I am just waiting now for his usual refrain of “It’s a disgrace.”

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Transport for London has estimated that there are liabilities of something in the order of £10 billion for public transport provision, which the Government say they do not recognise. Is that because they do not think the public transport improvements are necessary, or because a private party will carry the cost?

Jesse Norman: The answer to that question is, because it is a number that we do not recognise, but if there were a better justification for it, it might be that we would. But of course it is perfectly clear that we do expect transport improvements to be made, and we expect the private sector to bear a substantial proportion of the cost.

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): This private company is running rings around the Department for Transport and the Secretary of State, and there is a history of a litany of broken promises, whether to Scotland, regional airports or the Government or on the number of jobs it would create. Why is this clause here specifically for Heathrow when it is clearly indicating that it wants those liabilities paid for should they arise: why specifically for Heathrow?

Jesse Norman: Of course these statements were not purely in relation to Heathrow; there were several of them, as discussed, but two have fallen away. All this does is recap a perfectly well-established set of rights it has in law, and nothing has changed from that point of view. The point of the detailed and careful way in which this has been taken forward is to make absolutely clear that, when HAL makes a commitment, it can be held properly publicly accountable for it by due process of law and by agreement with the Government.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): This was recommended in the 2003 aviation White Paper and confirmed by the consultation in 2008, so will the Minister confirm that, notwithstanding the question asked by the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening), the Government will not be deflected from bringing forward an early vote, because it is quite clear that there is support across the House for this proposal?

Jesse Norman: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his very constructive and positive comment, and of course we will not be deflected. That is why we have laid this national policy statement, and we will be inviting Parliament to vote on it in due course.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): Will the Minister simply confirm that it is anticipated that private investment will fund the expansion of Heathrow, and will he also confirm that the economic benefits he expects will flow to the entire United Kingdom as a result of that private investment?

Jesse Norman: I know you place a premium on brevity, Mr Speaker, so I will say, yes, and £74 billion to £75 billion of expected boost to the economy.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The whole process of forcing through the third runway has been the opposite of transparent—from overstating economic benefits to understating the cost to public funds, including

[*Andy Slaughter*]

the £10 billion to £15 billion on surface access. Will the Minister say that he will define the costs and the risks to the public purse in total, and will he give an absolute assurance that this private company will bear the full costs?

Jesse Norman: I think that it is perfectly clear that the NPS, a national policy statement, sets the guidelines within which this is to be elaborated. We expect Heathrow Airport Ltd—and other private entities, as may be required—to bear the full cost of the expansion, as has been indicated, and we have been perfectly clear about that all the way through.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that my Moray constituents, and indeed regions across the country, will benefit from greater connectivity with the third runway at Heathrow?

Jesse Norman: Yes, I can. I have visited Heathrow and discussed this issue with the chief executive, and Heathrow is absolutely clear that a central part of the proposal is to enable better domestic connectivity as part of a wider international and national strategy.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Following on from the question from the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable), the third runway will, as I understand it, double the passenger capacity of Heathrow, so on what grounds does the Department for Transport believe that the public investment figures suggested by Transport for London for the connection between London and Heathrow are incorrect?

Jesse Norman: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, Heathrow's connectivity will be very heavily supported. It is already the beneficiary of an upgraded Piccadilly line from the east and of Crossrail, too. A lot of work is being done on western and south-western access, to say nothing of potential access from the Chilterns, which will be a matter of great interest to you, Mr Speaker. It will be well connected on the ground, as well as in the air.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. If colleagues feel able to focus on the narrow particulars of the urgent question that I granted, rather than on the generality of the subject, to which I did not accede, that would be very helpful to the House. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) has now lost interest, but we look forward to hearing his mellifluous tones on

another occasion. [*Interruption.*] No, he has not lost interest; he just does not want to contribute now. Very good—we are grateful to him.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the offers made to both other competing bids were exactly the same as is now on the table for Heathrow, that there have been no changes to the offer and that Heathrow has not been advantaged as a result?

Jesse Norman: I am not familiar with any changes of the kind my hon. Friend describes. It is true that the statements of principles were in substantially the same form for all three projects, and that is what we are presently addressing.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Minister confirm that the Government will not incur any liabilities in relation to an anticipated decline in regional airports, any environmental or health liabilities associated with Heathrow not meeting its environmental targets or any transport cost liability associated with the western rail link? Given all these cumulative liabilities, would it not be safer for the Conservative party to give its Members of Parliament a free vote to reduce the political liability?

Jesse Norman: Mr Speaker, we are some way outside the terms of the urgent question, but let me respond to the right hon. Gentleman. We are clear that this instrument creates no liabilities for the Government, which is the point at issue. As I have said, it may at some point be a future matter whether changes would encumber a future Government with contingent liabilities. That Government would then be under an obligation to notify Parliament in the usual way.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In papers this week, it has been indicated that airport users could pay up to £20 extra per journey. Can the Minister confirm that the Government will put a ceiling on any extra charges for airport users?

Jesse Norman: Again, we are way off piste, but let me just say that charges are a matter for the Civil Aviation Authority, and we would expect the CAA, as the regulator, to exercise proper concern. We have made it clear that we do not want charges to rise materially from their current levels in real terms.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for his answers, his patience and his characteristic courtesy.

Supreme Court Ruling: Abortion in Northern Ireland

11 am

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Northern Ireland Secretary, following the ruling of the Supreme Court, whether sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and section 25 of the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945 are incompatible with articles 3, 8 and 14 of the European convention on human rights.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): I thank the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) for this question and I once again pay tribute to her and to all the other hon. Members who contributed to the debate on these issues in the House on Tuesday. I recognise the strength of feeling and the personal stories that lie behind this issue, many of which we heard on Tuesday. That is the case regardless of where people's views lie. As I have said in the House before, abortion is an extremely sensitive issue and there are many strongly held views across all sides of the debate on reform right across the UK, including Northern Ireland.

Members will be aware that the Supreme Court issued its judgment in this case this morning. The Government are carefully considering the full judgment and its implications. No formal declaration has been made by the Court, and the appeal has been dismissed. The analysis and comments of the Court on the issue of incompatibility will be clearly heard by this House and by politicians in Northern Ireland. While the Court made no formal declaration, a majority of judges stated their view that the laws on abortion in Northern Ireland are incompatible with article 8 of the European convention on human rights—the right to respect for private and family life—in cases of fatal foetal abnormality, rape and incest.

This is clearly a complex area of law and an extremely sensitive subject matter which raises a number of different issues to consider. I am sure that the House will understand, given that the judgment is more than 140 pages in length, that further consideration of it is needed. I am continuing to engage with the parties in Northern Ireland, where these issues are understandably being raised and discussed. It is therefore important for all of us, including the people of Northern Ireland, to consider this judgment and to approach ongoing debate on this issue with due care and sensitivity. My urgent priority is to continue to engage with the parties in Northern Ireland and to re-establish devolved government in Northern Ireland so that decisions can be taken there.

Stella Creasy: Today, our Supreme Court has ruled that the law on abortion in Northern Ireland is in breach of the human rights of women in Northern Ireland. Let us weigh that sentence for a moment, as a House. Our own law is breaking the basic human rights of our own citizens. These are laws that the Government have said they will retain whether we leave the European Union or not. They are the laws that underpin our own democracy and our own freedom.

A clear majority of the Law Lords have found that how women in Northern Ireland are treated is incompatible with article 8: the right to respect for private and family life. Two judges have also held that the law on abortion is in breach of article 3: the right to be free from inhuman and degrading treatment. The Court was clear that to deny a woman access to abortion care breaches a woman's right to bodily autonomy—to be able to control what happens to her own body and not to be forced to continue an unwanted pregnancy even in instances of rape and incest.

The Court also was clear that the Government must have known that that was the case because of the United Nations ruling. Despite this, just two days ago the Secretary of State told this House of Parliament, as she has said today:

“Abortion has been a devolved matter...and it would not be appropriate for Westminster to seek to impose its will, or to be the arbiter”.—[*Official Report*, 5 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 220.]

Clearly this ruling challenges that disregard for the human rights of women in Northern Ireland.

The only reason the Government are not facing a requirement to act today is that those bringing the case were not victims; the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission brought the challenge. The House should hear the words of Lord Mance himself:

“the present law clearly needs radical reconsideration. Those responsible for ensuring the compatibility of Northern Ireland law with the Convention rights will no doubt recognise and take account of these conclusions, at as early a time as possible, by considering whether and how to amend the...1861 Act.”

Are the Government today really going to require a rape victim to give evidence in open court to be able to access this declaration and to force them to act? Are we parliamentarians, with the responsibility under the Good Friday agreement to uphold the human rights of all Northern Irish citizens, going to pretend that if they make that happen, we are doing our job? The women of Northern Ireland deserve better. They deserve control over their bodies. They deserve not to be forced to go to court and talk about such issues to get the Government to listen. They deserve the kind of control that Arlene Foster currently has over this Government.

The Secretary of State has the power to direct Northern Irish Departments to take such action that is required under international obligations. Human rights are an international obligation. Minister, I beg of you, do not make a victim go to court. Name the date that the domestic abuse Bill will come to Parliament, so that we can get on and end this scandal. We cannot just take back control; we can give it.

Karen Bradley: I know that the hon. Lady feels strongly about this issue. The whole House will have heard her words, which were delivered with such passion, but we need to be clear about what the Court was considering. It was looking specifically at the laws in Northern Ireland. She talked about a clear finding, but the Court has not made a declaration of incompatibility. In fact, on fatal foetal abnormality, the judges found five to two in favour, but it was only four to three on rape and incest. Those were majority decisions, not the judges' unanimous view.

The Government's view is that the decisions about abortion and the laws that apply in Northern Ireland should rightly and properly be decided by the people of Northern Ireland and their elected politicians. That is

[Karen Bradley]

why I call on those politicians to come together to form a Government in Stormont and deal with the issue, because I, like the hon. Lady, want to ensure that the personal stories that we have all heard are dealt with. [Interruption.] I can hear her talking from a sedentary position, and I know how strongly she feels about this, but many people in the House feel strongly about this issue, and the right way to deal with it is in Stormont. I will continue to consider the judgment, which is 143 pages long, and there is much that we need to look at. However, I repeat that this is a matter for the politicians in Northern Ireland, all of whom I will be speaking to later today.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. This is an extremely important matter, of which the House partly treated earlier in the week, but I gently point out that it is not reasonable for colleagues who were not here at the start to beetle into the Chamber and stand with the expectation of being called. I announced the urgent question some considerable time ago, and it is incumbent upon colleagues to be here at the start of the exchanges. If for whatever reason they were not here at the start, it is discourteous to stand and expect to be called. Everybody is busy and has many commitments and full diaries, but it is incumbent upon colleagues to be here at the requisite time.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): This is a heart breaking legal case. It has basically been lost on a technicality—nothing more—and it is too important simply to be left at that. The women of Northern Ireland deserve better than the outcome of today's judgment. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is now time for the Northern Ireland Assembly and Government to get back in place and to take their responsibility to set the way forward? In the absence of that, I urge her to accept that Parliament will now start to examine what steps we can take to ensure better outcomes for women in Northern Ireland.

Karen Bradley: I thank my right hon. Friend. I agree that this is another example—one that affects people's lives—of why it is so important that politicians in Northern Ireland come together and form a Government, and it is quite right that they should do so. They represent their constituents in Northern Ireland, and they know what their constituents want. I am sure that they will have heard my right hon. Friend's comments.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): I re-emphasise the point that we are talking about real people. Although this is a legal judgment written in legalese, nevertheless we are talking about real people, which is why there is urgency in what our Parliament must consider.

Although the judgment is disappointing in that it foundered on a technicality as to who brought the case to the Supreme Court, nevertheless the Supreme Court was crystal clear, by a majority verdict, on the important point that, in relation to obligations under article 8 convention rights, it is the United Kingdom—not Northern Ireland—that is incompatible with international human rights law. The summary of the Court's judgment states:

“If an individual victim did return to court in relation to the present law, a formal declaration of incompatibility would in all likelihood be made.”

That is in relation to cases of fatal foetal abnormality, rape or incest, for example.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) is right that it would be grossly unreasonable to ask a rape victim to pursue a case up to our United Kingdom Supreme Court to have that measure of incompatibility brought to legal justice. I accept that the Secretary of State must ask her legal advisers to pore over the whole judgment, but nevertheless it is clear the judgment insists that the law must change.

I agree with my hon. Friend that it would be better if the Stormont Assembly were to seize the moment and change the law for Northern Ireland but, in the absence of Stormont, the Secretary of State now has to begin setting out a clear timetable that says to Northern Ireland politicians that, if they are not prepared to come to the Stormont Assembly, Westminster would have to act, and would have to act on the moral and legal basis that the judgment is a judgment about the United Kingdom's compatibility, not Northern Ireland's compatibility, with international law. The Secretary of State must consider that seriously and set a timescale within which the Government must act. The law must change. Who does it is now a matter for politicians in Northern Ireland.

Karen Bradley: I put on record how much I appreciated the hon. Gentleman's thoughtful and thought-provoking contribution to the debate on Tuesday.

Some Members have suggested that repealing sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 would somehow enable politicians in Northern Ireland to come together to create the laws that are right for Northern Ireland. Let us be clear that this is about the situation in Northern Ireland. I do not think anyone in this House is suggesting that the decision should not be taken in Stormont—we need the politicians to be in Stormont to do that—but if we proceeded down the path of repealing sections 58 and 59, we would be left with no laws on abortion in Northern Ireland. I do not think a vacuum of laws in Northern Ireland would be helpful to those women and girls we are all thinking about.

I make it clear that we want the politicians in Northern Ireland to make the law on abortion in Northern Ireland. We want them to come together, and we want them to do what is right for the people they represent.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The United Kingdom Government have devolved these issues to the Northern Ireland Assembly. It would therefore be extraordinary if the United Kingdom Government removed or changed some part of the law—that would make the law a complete mess. Whatever our views on this issue, we should have respect for both sides of the abortion debate, as I do. We should also have respect for the people of Northern Ireland who ultimately, ab initio, have to deal with this.

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend is right. The laws on abortion in Northern Ireland were not devolved at the time of the devolution settlements in the 1990s; these laws have always sat with Stormont since it was first founded and since it first sat in the 1920s. It is therefore right, constitutionally and morally, that these decisions are taken in Stormont.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Supreme Court judgment is as irritating as it is enlightening, with majority views holding sway, rather than unanimity. I note, however, that Lord Kerr, the former Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, was one of the justices who considered that the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission had the right to bring the case and that the law was incompatible. Given his in-depth knowledge of the Northern Irish legal framework and the fact that the judgment points to the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945 as the barrier to addressing that incompatibility, will the Government be taking the advice of the judgment and treating that Act as secondary legislation to be amended, or will they prepare the ground for a reinstated Assembly to repeal section 25 of that Act and bring the law into line with human rights?

Karen Bradley: As I said in my opening remarks, at 143 pages there is a lot to digest in this judgment. Together with my officials and lawyers, I will make sure that we have gone through every point of the judgment in order to make a final determination, but I think the hon. Lady would agree that where matters are devolved they should rightly be dealt with by the devolved legislature that has responsibility for them. That is why I want to see those politicians come back to Stormont, form that devolved Government and make those decisions.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Clearly, the number of abortions we have throughout this country is far, far too high, but when they have to happen the present state of the law means it is a question of where they happen, rather than whether they happen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) has suggested that the Northern Ireland Assembly will have to look at this *ab initio*. If we were to repeal sections 58 and 59, it would be in the same position of having to legislate *ab initio*, on the civil side and on the controls on abortion.

I ask my right hon. Friend to understand that those who back her basic approach are willing to do so only for a certain amount of time. Unless and until those in Northern Ireland who are elected are prepared to come together to deal with this issue, there will be an obligation on this country, not a European obligation, but a national, practical and moral obligation, to take action.

Karen Bradley: Again, my hon. Friend makes his long-standing views on this matter known, and I am sure the politicians in Northern Ireland will have heard them.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): May I say to the Secretary of State that the fact the decision on rape was a four-three majority decision means that it was a decision, an announcement, a pronouncement of the court? That is how the Supreme Court works; it does not matter how narrow the majority. May I also remind her of what Lord Kerr said? He said that

“it is incumbent on the state”—

the UK—

“to recognise the vulnerability of girls and women”

in relation to rape. Does she agree that human rights cannot be devolved and that she and the Government have the responsibility for them?

Karen Bradley: The questions the hon. Lady asks bring into question the whole constitutional arrangements we have and who and which legislature is responsible for which action. I repeat that my urgent priority is to get the parties back to Stormont, to get that devolved Government up and running so that they can rightly make the decisions in the interests of the constituents who elected them.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I do not agree with the law in Northern Ireland, but surely the whole principle of devolution is that people in devolved areas can make decisions with which we disagree. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we allow devolved areas only to make decisions with which the Westminster Parliament agrees, there is not much point any more in any form of devolution?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend always has an ability to use an appropriate turn of phrase to put his finger adeptly on the problem.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): A constituent has written to me as follows:

“I grew up in Northern Ireland before moving to London in 1982...I fell pregnant in 1997. My child would have been very much loved and wanted, but a scan revealed that he had Edward’s syndrome, a chromosomal abnormality incompatible with life. I was ably supported by the NHS in London through the subsequent weeks of decision and grief. I was not forced to continue the pregnancy to bear a dead child”.

What advice would the Secretary of State give to a young woman in Northern Ireland today who was facing the same dilemma that my constituent had in 1997?

Karen Bradley: It is those personal stories and the reality of the situations in which women find themselves that really bring home why it is so important that this matter is addressed, but I repeat that it needs to be addressed in Stormont by politicians elected in Northern Ireland—that is the right way to deal with this issue.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): The women of Northern Ireland deserve a long-term solution and their human rights need to be respected, but with regard to the short term, will my right hon. Friend confirm that no women who have abortion procedures in England are being charged for them?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend is right. As well as the Supreme Court judgment, we have today received the figures for women who have travelled to Great Britain for abortions. In 2016, the figure was 724 women, and in 2017 it was 919, following the Government’s announcement that we would ensure that all costs were covered. It is not a perfect solution, but it does at least show the House’s intent.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Earlier this year, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) and I were part of a delegation to Belfast. We heard evidence on a long and harrowing day from many parties, including Sarah Ewart, whose name has been mentioned in the Chamber previously, on the difficulties for not only vulnerable women but practitioners, who are often in a dilemma. At the time, my thinking was the same as the Secretary of State’s—that it looks a

[*Dr Rupa Huq*]

bit neo-colonial for us in Westminster to impose our will—but things have changed since then: there is continuing deadlock over the lack of an Assembly in Northern Ireland; there was the vote in the Republic; and now we have this 140-page judgment, which finds that there are breaches of many aspects of human rights. Will the Government not think again, as they did on Heathrow?

Karen Bradley: I understand the hon. Lady's intent. I, too, have met many organisations and people in Belfast and, in so many ways, this is something that tugs at the heartstrings and makes one want to act. But it is clear that taking rash action that may produce the wrong result is not the right approach. We need time to digest the judgment and to consider what it means, and we need those politicians in Northern Ireland to come back together.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Although I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) about the merits of devolution and where these decisions should sit, the fact is that it has now been more than a year since Stormont has been in a position to make such devolved decisions. This issue is part of a basket of others, including the private Member's Bill on same-sex marriage promoted by the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn), and there is perhaps a judgment to come about humanist marriage, which would then need some consideration. How long is it reasonable for us in this Parliament to wait, without Stormont sitting, before we begin properly to exercise our responsibilities to the citizens of Northern Ireland?

Karen Bradley: I want to see Stormont back and functioning. It always feels like a tragedy to me to walk around an empty Parliament building, which Stormont is, rather than seeing it active and making the decisions that the politicians were elected to make. I will speak to the parties later today, and I will continue to do so, because I want to see the parties coming back together. I want devolved government in Stormont and I want it urgently.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I feel very strongly about this matter, as does my party, the Democratic Unionist party. Following the Supreme Court judgment, will the Secretary of State confirm that it is categorically up to the Northern Ireland Assembly to implement any changes that it believes are necessary regarding the matter of abortion? Will she also underline the fact that it is Sinn Féin's duty to drop its red line, get back to Stormont and democratically debate this issue?

Karen Bradley: I do not want to get into what is stopping the parties getting back together. All I will say is that the hon. Gentleman sums up the situation well, and it is right that we should have those politicians coming back together, doing the right thing as Ministers in Northern Ireland, and making these decisions.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the last time Stormont debated this issue, it decided by a clear majority to keep the law

as it is. Will she undertake to the House to consult all the parties in Northern Ireland, in the light of this court judgment, on what should happen for the future?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend is right that the last time this matter was debated in Stormont—in 2016—the Bill was rejected. That is part of the reason why we have this case before us today. I have spoken to all the parties about this matter, and I will continue to do so.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): A British Government in Westminster should not abrogate to themselves powers willy-nilly, but why are the Government adamant about not intervening when human rights issues affect British citizens? It was the same in Bermuda: the Government refused to say anything about same-sex marriage being banned, but the Supreme Court in Bermuda decided yesterday that the British Government were wrong and that same-sex marriage should be reintroduced. What will happen here is that the Government will keep on losing legal battles. In the end, human rights are indivisible, so we do have to act and intervene.

Karen Bradley: We need to go through the judgment, which is detailed, and consider it carefully. The way to resolve this issue has to be with Stormont; that has to be the place in which to resolve this.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I take on board all the points that have been made this morning, especially those about maintaining the position on issues that are devolved, but I just say to the Secretary of State that, obviously, our constitution is constantly evolving. I am not speaking specifically to this issue but, as we look across the United Kingdom and all the changes that we are making, including the devolution of more powers as we leave the EU, we should consider minimums that apply across the United Kingdom for our national UK framework. When it comes to rights, for example, there should be national minimums across the United Kingdom, especially as we have elected representatives from across the United Kingdom in this place.

Mr Speaker: I am deeply obliged to the hon. Gentleman. His question is very well-intentioned, but it suffers from the disadvantage of being unadjacent to the matter before the House and a tad longer than was desirable. Nevertheless, he has volunteered his views and they are on the record.

Karen Bradley: What my hon. Friend does pick up, however, is that the constitutional implications of decisions that we take in this House regarding devolved matters should be considered and not taken lightly. They need to be carefully thought about because of implications for other parts of the United Kingdom.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): It cannot be right to criminalise women in Northern Ireland for actions that would not be criminal anywhere else in the UK. Does the Secretary of State agree with the ruling of Supreme Court Justice Mance, who has held that “the present legislative position in Northern Ireland is untenable” and that the current law “clearly needs radical reconsideration”?

If she does, can she address the point that a number of us have made about how much longer she will allow women in Northern Ireland to suffer this untenable law?

Karen Bradley: There are many views that we all need to consider in the judgment. As I have said, we will spend a significant amount of time looking at the judgment and considering the points that have been made, but I do come back to the point that this matter needs to be dealt with by the politicians who have been elected by the people of Northern Ireland.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Does the Minister agree that while there has been no declaration of incompatibility on a technicality, and although there is a lot to digest, what is crystal clear is that a majority of the UK Supreme Court has said that, in three crucial respects, the law of Northern Ireland violates women's article 8 rights. Does she agree that something needs to be done about that as a matter of urgency?

Karen Bradley: Clearly there is much that needs to be done, but it needs to be done in Stormont. That is why locally elected politicians need to come back together to form that devolved Government.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The Secretary of State's excuse for inaction is that this is a devolved issue, yet next week we will discuss Lords amendments to a Bill that will steal a whole range of powers from devolved areas to allow the Westminster Government to legislate in devolved fields. Why the discrepancy?

Karen Bradley: I am afraid that I simply disagree with the hon. Gentleman.

Business of the House

11.28 am

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

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

MONDAY 11 JUNE—Second Reading of the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill.

TUESDAY 12 JUNE—Consideration of Lords amendments to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill (day 1).

WEDNESDAY 13 JUNE—Conclusion of consideration of Lords amendments to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill (day 2).

THURSDAY 14 JUNE—Debate on a motion on the 70th anniversary of the arrival of HMT Empire Windrush at Tilbury Docks. The subject of this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 15 JUNE—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 18 June will include:

MONDAY 18 JUNE—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill, followed by general debate on acquired brain injury.

In addition to the business next week, colleagues will be keen to know when the Trade Bill and the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill will next be debated in the Commons. I agree that we must hold these debates as soon as possible, so I would like to update the House by saying that these Bills will come forward by mid-July at the latest. Every week I look very carefully at the progress we are making on all legislation, and I am pleased that the return of those Bills, along with the return to this House of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, demonstrate continued progress towards ensuring that we have a fully functioning statute book when we leave the EU. As Leader of the House, my absolute priority is to give Parliament the time it needs to debate and scrutinise these important pieces of legislation at every stage. I will continue to do exactly that as further progress is made.

This has been a particularly sporting week for Parliament. I was delighted to hear that the Commons have been triumphant against the Lords. I am, of course, talking about the Jo Cox memorial tug of war match on Tuesday in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support. Yesterday, however, MPs were less successful at the UNICEF and Department for International Development Soccer Aid tournament, with the Press Lobby emerging victorious. Huge congratulations to everyone who took part in support of some great causes.

Finally, I hope to see many women from across the House joining the Processions march on Sunday. Women and girls in London, Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh will march through the streets in the colours of the suffrage movement to mark the centenary of equal votes. I am definitely looking forward to it.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business.

I just cannot believe what I have heard. What a mess; what a shambles! The Government were briefing before Whitsun that there would be three days of debate on the withdrawal Bill. They then briefed this week that there

[Valerie Vaz]

would be one day—only 12 hours on Tuesday—and now the Leader of the House announces two days. Could we see the programme motion through the usual channels so that we will know how long we have on each of the two days?

This Government cannot handle democracy. The Leader of the House was one of those who said that we should bring back sovereignty to Parliament, but there is no say for Parliament. The Government tell us to be grateful for 12 hours and then to be grateful for two days, but the Opposition asked for four days. This is the most important piece of legislation that will affect our country and, most importantly, future generations—those young people who voted overwhelmingly to remain. There are 196 amendments from the other place, including 14 important amendments defeating the Government's intransigent position. Giving even two days of debate is no way to treat a parliamentary democracy; it hardly gives a chance for all Members to take part in the debate. The Government are still working out their position; oh no, 12.30—that is when they decide their position. We are two years on from the referendum, with two Council meetings to go. Yes, we voted to leave, but it is our duty to negotiate what is in the best interests of the country, based on evidence.

I do not know whether the Leader of the House is aware of the written parliamentary questions on Vote Leave that have been tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson), the deputy Leader of the Opposition. Does she know when the Electoral Commission report on electoral fraud in the Vote Leave campaign will be published?

The Brexit Secretary said that he may resign—not. The Prime Minister said

“we want to publish a White Paper” —[*Official Report*, 6 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 298.]

But she cannot or will not say when, and she refused to answer the Leader of the Opposition's question. Perhaps the Leader of the House can tell us when the White Paper will be published. The Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Brexit Secretary and the shadow Northern Ireland Secretary have all visited the border. When will the Prime Minister visit the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic?

The Government cannot even handle running the economy. GDP figures show that UK growth in the first three months of the year has hit a five-year low of 0.1%. Household spending rose by only 0.2%—the weakest in more than three years. Where is the Chancellor? May we have a debate on the effects of Brexit on the economy? Why is the economy shrinking?

The Government are not even fiscally competent. Let us take the sale of Royal Bank of Scotland. Tell me if this is fiscally competent: the Government bought the shares for 502p each and sold them for 271p. That is £2.1 billion lost to the taxpayer, added to £1.9 billion lost in 2015—£4 billion in total. Is that fiscally competent? [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise. As someone who repeatedly implores Members of this House not to yell at each other but to treat each other with respect, I must repeat that exhortation now. The

shadow Leader of the House must be heard, just as the Leader of the House was heard and must be heard. [Interruption.] Order. I am not interested in— [Interruption.] Order. The Whip standing at the end of the Chamber, the hon. Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher), must calm himself. His imprecations are of no interest or concern to the House at this time. If he does not like it, he is welcome to leave. We can perfectly well get on without him.

Valerie Vaz: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Prem Sikka of Essex University said:

“Why sell? Taxpayers bailed out the bank and when there is a glimpse of recovery and profits, the government sells it at a loss to ensure that profits are collected by its friends in the City.”

Those are the words of someone who works at Essex University—or is it waffle? Now the Government intend to open the National Fund, a charity fund established 90 years ago on the condition that it stays untouched until it is large enough to pay off the entire national debt. May we have a statement on what the Government are going to do to the National Fund?

The Government cannot handle democracy, the economy or the rule of law. The courts have decided that the confidence and supply agreement must be voted on by Parliament. If the Leader of the House really believes in the sovereignty of Parliament, will she give time for that debate on the Floor of the House?

On Saturday, we celebrate our gracious sovereign's official birthday with the trooping of the colour parade. I think that people will have recognised that, at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, the Queen was wearing suffragette colours.

Of course, today we remember Lady Wilson, the extraordinary wife of a great Labour Prime Minister, who died this week. Our condolences go to her family and to the wider Labour family.

The Lord Speaker was a gracious host to the 42nd Richard Dimpleby lecture given by Professor Jeanette Winterson—it is well worth watching on BBC iPlayer. I attended that brilliant lecture. She was thought provoking, funny and inspiring in equal measure, but she also reminded us that there is much to be done to get true equality.

Andrea Leadsom: I join the hon. Lady in marking the trooping of the colour this weekend. I join her in noting that it did look extraordinarily as though Her Majesty was wearing suffragette colours at the recent royal wedding. That was a great delight to all of us.

I also note the passing of Lady Wilson, at a fine age to have reached, and all her achievements. Notably, I saw that she opposed her husband's view on the UK joining the European Community, which was not something of which I had been aware before. I, too, commend Jeanette Winterson, whom I had the pleasure of meeting recently. I found her very thought-provoking—a very interesting woman.

I am afraid that that is about all I can agree on with the hon. Lady today. In answer to her first points about the announcement of business, as she knows, confirmed business is announced at business questions by me in response to a question by her. That is how it is and

continues to be, and that is how it is today. She can talk all she likes about things she has seen in the press, but the business has been announced today as it always is.

As the hon. Lady will know, programme motions are usually tabled by the rise of the House on the day before the relevant item of business is due to be taken. I do hope that we will be in a position to provide more notice than that. I am trying to be as helpful as possible to colleagues so that people can see exactly what the plans are with sufficient time to be able to prepare themselves.

The hon. Lady talks about insufficient time for debate on Lords amendments. Collectively, Parliament has spent 258 hours debating the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill—88 of them in the Commons and 170 in the Lords. Across both Houses, 1,390 amendments have been tabled, of which 1,171 were non-Government amendments. We are now providing a further two days for consideration of Lords amendments on subjects that have already been discussed and voted upon in this Chamber.

The hon. Lady asked when the Government will set out their response to the Lords amendments. I can assure her that the Government will set out their approach to the Lords amendments in good time, whether that is in Government amendments, motions to disagree or other propositions.

As for the hon. Lady's comments on the economy, she is completely wrong. [*Interruption.*] She is chatting, so she is obviously not interested in the truth. The reality of the economy is that employment is up to another record high. Unemployment is down to a 40-year low. Real wages are rising. UK exports rose by nearly 10% in the last year, to a new record high. We saw the highest growth in investment spending in the G7 last year. Our day-to-day spending is in surplus for the first time in 16 years, since 2001-02, and we have the lowest net borrowing in over a decade. Our economy has grown for the last eight consecutive years. She is utterly wrong in her assertions about our economy.

Finally, the hon. Lady talked about the sale of RBS, which just defies belief. RBS was bailed out by the taxpayer on her Government's watch, when her Government had been responsible for appalling oversight of the financial sector. The financial crash was in no small part due to appallingly soft regulation, which her Government presided over. This Government and this party have sorted out the mess left by her Government, including in returning RBS, which would have otherwise failed, to a position of health, from where we can start to give this money back to the taxpayer. She should welcome that and not condemn it, and the fact that she does not merely goes to show how little the Labour party understands how economics works.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. As the record shows, I try always to accommodate all colleagues with an interest in taking part in exchanges on the business question, and today will be no exception, but more than 30 colleagues are seeking so to do. I remind the House that there is the privilege motion to follow two Select Committee statements, and two debates to take place under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee. There is therefore a premium on brevity from those on the Back and Front Benches alike, which I know will be brilliantly exemplified in the first instance by Justine Greening.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the Leader of the House set out when the airports national policy statement will be debated and voted on?

Andrea Leadsom: The NPS was laid on 5 June and will be subject to a debate and vote in the House of Commons within 21 sitting days of laying the final NPS in Parliament. The last date that that can take place is 10 July 2018.¹

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. What an absolute and utter shambles presents itself today. First, we have a Cabinet that simply cannot agree, with all sorts of rumours that the Brexit Secretary is apparently on the point of walking. We do not need a backstop from this Government; we just need them to stop. This is not taking back control; this is taking back purgatory.

Secondly, I have no idea what will actually be going on next week with the repeal Bill. We have not seen a programme motion, and I do not know when we will. It looks like we will still have 12 hours, but just over two days. Can she confirm whether that will be the case? This is clearly unsatisfactory, particularly with a multitude of Lords amendments to consider. Our constituents will be rightly outraged at this appalling attempt to evade debate and scrutiny, with 12 hours reserved for 196 amendments, punctuated by possible breaks of 20 minutes or so, and 21 votable amendments, as we go round and round in circles with this archaic practice of a 20-minute headcount. That might be the only opportunity for the House to have a meaningful debate and vote on critical issues such as the single market and the customs union.

For Scotland, it is even worse. Amendments to our devolution settlement were designed and passed in the unelected House of Lords, while we, the directly elected Members from Scotland, have had no opportunity to debate, consider and scrutinise what has been designed in this place. May we have proper time for at least the devolution settlement?

One last thing: 650 Members of Parliament are quite likely to be exiting the House in the small hours of the morning next week, when there will be no public transport available at all, making an absolute mockery of all the security arrangements in this place. Has the Leader of the House no consideration for the safety of Members, and what will she do to ensure that we can vacate these premises safely?

Andrea Leadsom: First, with great warmth may I congratulate the hon. Gentleman, who I understand was elected 17 years ago today? He is now the longest-serving Scottish MP—he obviously quite likes being in Westminster, even though he will not admit to it.

As I said to the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), a programme motion normally comes forward the day before a debate, but we will try to bring it forward earlier than that, to help colleagues who wish to prepare themselves. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) says that we are not allowing time for debate, but on the specific points he raised, on two occasions in this Chamber the Commons voted in favour of the Government and against including any statement of membership of the customs union in the Bill. We will be dealing with that amendment by

1. [*Official Report*, 14 June 2018, Vol. 642, c. 6MC.]

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

their lordships for the third time. The Commons also voted in favour of the Government and in support of removing the charter of fundamental rights from our law books, and the Commons again supported the Government on setting exit day in the Bill. There has already been considerable debate, and, as I set out, we will continue to provide time for further debate in this House next week.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): May we have an urgent debate on the national parks review, so that we can give a warm welcome to the appointed chair, Mr Julian Glover, who I know will do an excellent job? More importantly, we can also find out who has been appointed to the advisory panel, when the review will start, and when those results will be published.

Andrea Leadsom: I join my right hon. Friend in welcoming the national parks review. I have no specific information on that matter right now, but if she would like to write to me I can certainly look into it for her.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): We are anticipating another two days of estimates day debates in early July, and the Backbench Business Committee will have four half-day slots to allocate to debate departmental estimates. Applications for those slots will need to be submitted by Friday 15 June, and details can be found on the Committee's website. I thank the Leader of the House for her business statement, and for confirming that 14 June has been protected for the important Windrush debate.

Andrea Leadsom: It is always a great pleasure to work with the hon. Gentleman on providing time for Back-Bench debates, and I congratulate the Backbench Business Committee—all Members will be delighted to see the debate that has been selected for next Thursday.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): It is now some time since our debate on the restoration and renewal of Parliament, which I and my colleagues caused to happen. We were told then that there is a present fire risk to this Chamber and royal palace, yet we are still waiting for action. If there is a present fire risk, we should be setting up fire doors and stopping up vents, and one way we can start that work is by closing this building during the entire summer recess and getting on with it. If there is a fire risk, let us deal with it.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important issue, and I hope I can assure all hon. and right hon. Members that we are getting on with the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster, as per the instructions from this House. He will realise that immediate issues of health and safety regarding fire, falling masonry or any other risk are things that the strategic estates programme works on instantly—they are not subject to the longer timeframe of restoration and renewal. My hon. Friend nevertheless makes a good point, and I am always happy to meet him and update him on our progress.

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): Employees in my constituency have time limits imposed on their toilet breaks which are often unreasonable and insufficient to

allow them time to go to the lavatory and return to work. What assessment has the Department of the Leader of the House made of businesses that adopt such practices?

Andrea Leadsom: That is not a responsibility of my Department, but I think the hon. Lady is looking for guidance on how to progress this issue. Questions to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy are on Tuesday 12 June, and that would be a good question for her to raise directly with Ministers.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the future role of the House of Lords? I have the highest regard for its work as a revising Chamber, but it does seem to be somewhat oversized, even allowing for sad deaths and retirements, and the Liberal party certainly seems to be over-represented in the other place.

Andrea Leadsom: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend and I am grateful to him for his question. There is a complete dearth of elected Liberal Democrats, which is more than made up for by their presence in the other place. The Government are committed to ensuring that the House of Lords continues to fulfil its constitutional role as a revising and scrutinising Chamber, which respects the primacy of the House of Commons. We will continue to work to ensure that the House of Lords remains relevant and effective, and addresses issues such as its size.

Mr Speaker: I hope colleagues will want to join me in congratulating the hon. Members for Southend West (Sir David Amess) and for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) in the week, if memory serves me, that they mark the 35th anniversary of their election to the House. They have served continuously ever since their first election.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): This July sees the 70th birthday of the national health service. Our House should celebrate this brilliant institution and its architect, one of my predecessors, Aneurin Bevan. May we have a debate in Government time to look at the services, the funding and the future of this much loved public service?

Andrea Leadsom: I completely share the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for and love of the NHS. It is an amazing achievement for the United Kingdom, one that is admired and envied across the world. He will be aware that it has been considered the best health service in the world on more than one occasion. He is absolutely right that we need to mark and celebrate its 70th anniversary. That will indeed be forthcoming and there will be many more opportunities to debate the successes, as well as the needs, of our NHS in future weeks and months.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): One of my constituents, Nicolle Finnie, has been selected to represent the UK in the cooking competition at the EuroSkills championships in Budapest in September. This represents the pinnacle of achievement for apprenticeships and technical skills for young people. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Nicolle and the rest of Team UK? Does she agree that high quality apprenticeships,

and technical and vocational education, which the EuroSkills championships seeks to promote, are vital in instilling the next generation with the skills employers need?

Andrea Leadsom: I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in congratulating Nicolle and the rest of Team UK on their selection. Cooking is a fantastic skill and my own daughter will be extremely jealous to hear about Nicolle's success. I totally agree that apprenticeships and vocational and technical education are vital in equipping the next generation with the skills they need. The EuroSkills championships are fantastic events, showcasing talent and skills from around Europe and the rest of the world.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The Passport Office's one name policy is preventing many British citizens, including my constituent Nabila Damasceno, from obtaining a passport. Will the Government make a statement on the Passport Office's one name policy?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises a very important and significant constituency concern. She will be aware that the Home Office is taking some very strong steps to review the way in which those who are seeking visas are being treated. The Home Secretary has undertaken to review all policies. If she wants to raise a specific constituency issue, I encourage her to raise it directly with Ministers.

Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Yesterday, along with Members from across the House, I had the pleasure of meeting veterans from the British Nuclear Tests Veterans Association—I am their patron. There are just 1,500 survivors of the 22,000 who were sent to far-off places for those nuclear tests. One wrote:

"We are doomed to spend our time in a land that time forgot."

We are the only country that does not recognise them formally and they are now asking for a medal. I wonder if the Leader of the House will ask a Defence Minister to come to this House and confirm that the Government will award that medal, so we can give to those who gave so much for us.

Andrea Leadsom: I certainly join my right hon. Friend in paying tribute to all those who undertook this extremely frightening and, in many ways, appalling experience. I encourage him to raise this directly with Ministers on Monday 11 June at Defence oral questions.

Mr Speaker: I have just been advised—I think I have started a trend—that it is the 17th anniversary of the election to this House of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). We have savoured the experience of hearing him and I am sure that we look forward to continuing to do so. Congratulations to the hon. Gentleman.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Earlier this week, I spoke to the House about my constituent Alex Hodgson who pays £285 a month to travel to work near Manchester. So far he has had to take a number of days' annual leave

because of the chaos on the rail network. Today, he has been offered compensation of £20, so could we have a debate on what meaningful compensation actually looks like?

Andrea Leadsom: I am very concerned to hear what the hon. Lady says. That does not sound right to me. She is obviously raising a particular case. I know that my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary made a statement to the House about the problems with Northern Rail, and he has proposed a special compensation scheme. It seems to me that the hon. Lady should raise this issue directly with Transport Ministers. If she would like to write to me, I can take it up with them on her behalf.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I recently organised the first meeting between the Oxfordshire clinical commissioning group and West Oxfordshire District Council to plan for our area's future healthcare needs. Does this not highlight the need for proper, joined-up planning between councils and health bosses in the complicated area of health and social care, and may we please have a full debate to discuss this very complicated issue?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is right to raise this. It is an incredibly tricky area and it certainly impacts on my constituency, not far away from his. While district councils do not have responsibility for health or social care, the Government absolutely agree that it is vital that health and social care work together at every level to plan and join up services effectively. He will know that upper-tier and unitary local authorities and CCGs are required to sit on their area's health and wellbeing board to develop a local joint health and wellbeing strategy to address health and social care needs in each and every area.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): May we have a debate about the length of time that it is taking to process personal independence payment appeals? My constituent Frankie Cooper of Hyde has waited nearly 10 months for an appeal against the decision to take away her mobility car. This is far too long and she deserves to have the issue resolved. Too often this Government have presided over a social security system that is cruel and inefficient; surely it is time to discuss just how they can do better.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is raising a specific issue. I am sorry to hear about that delay. It does not sound acceptable, and obviously it is something he should raise directly with Ministers. If he wants to do so via me, I am happy to take it up on his behalf, but equally he will appreciate that the point about personal independence payments is to give people greater power and control over their lives, to give them greater quality of life and to support them in maximising the opportunities available to them. Where it goes wrong, we need to sort it, but the policy itself is a good one.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): May we have a debate on the Queen's award for voluntary service? In Moray, we are exceptionally proud to have more recipients this year than Glasgow and Edinburgh combined. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that shows the true community

[Douglas Ross]

spirit in Moray? The organisations that were successful include Morayvia, Fochabers heritage centre, Step by Step in Moray and Moray HandyPerson Services.

Andrea Leadsom: I always enjoy congratulating my hon. Friend on the amazing achievements of his constituents. It is fantastic that four voluntary organisations in Moray were honoured with the Queen's award for voluntary service this year. I know that he was present at Morayvia on Saturday evening when the lord-lieutenant of Moray announced their success, and it is a great testament to the exceptional standard of volunteer services in Moray.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Cabinet Office officials have been conducting surveys in Wrexham about Brexit and other issues. My named day question to the Cabinet Office on the matter—on the reason for these surveys—remains unanswered, despite being lodged on 16 May. Would the Leader of the House have a word with the Cabinet Office to answer my question and find out why the Conservative party are so interested in my constituency?

Andrea Leadsom: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will understand entirely why the Conservative party might be interested in all constituencies around the UK: in Government, we are always keen to provide the best possible service to all those who live in this great country of ours. We have Exiting the European Union questions on Thursday 14 June. That would be a good question to raise then, but if he wants to raise it with me separately, I can take it up for him.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): The new rail timetable had already disadvantaged my constituents in Hassocks by increasing journey times and withdrawing peak-time services, but its introduction has been a complete shambles, and my constituents continue to be disadvantaged by the cancellation and withdrawal of services on a daily basis. May we have an urgent debate on the abysmal performance of Govia Thameslink Railway and Network Rail, so that those organisations can be held to account?

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise what must be a hugely frustrating experience for his constituents. The disruption of Govia Thameslink Railway services has been completely unacceptable and the Secretary of State for Transport has himself apologised for the disruption that passengers are experiencing. The Department for Transport is working round the clock with GTR to stabilise services, and that includes monitoring ongoing performance and agreeing on a revised, more consistent timetable. However, I hope my right hon. Friend will encourage his constituents to apply for GTR's Delay Repay compensation, so that they can get their money back in the case of all affected journeys.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Yesterday it was my pleasure to see my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) being presented with a "parliamentarian of the year" award by the road safety charity Brake. To mark that occasion, may we have a statement on when the Government intend to introduce tougher sentences for those who cause death or serious injury by dangerous driving, as was promised at the end of the consultation in October last year?

Andrea Leadsom: First, let me congratulate the hon. Member for Bradford South on receiving the award: that is a great achievement. Secondly, let me suggest that the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) might wish to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can raise the issue directly with a Minister, and ask when the Government expect to be able to take such action.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Will the Leader of the House find Government time for a debate on the challenge involved in meeting the universal service obligation for rural broadband? In communities throughout north Northumberland, including mine, the challenge of putting the infrastructure in place in time for the universal service obligation to be met is still enormous.

Andrea Leadsom: I entirely share my hon. Friend's concern about the speed of the roll-out of rural broadband. She will be pleased to hear that the Government's determination to roll out superfast broadband in rural areas—with a significant investment of more than £1 billion—is making good progress. There is more to be done and she may well want to seek an Adjournment debate to discuss her specific constituency issues.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The devolution amendments to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill that were passed in the other place would fundamentally undermine the Welsh constitution. When the Leader of the House designs next week's programme motion, will she ensure that there is plenty of time for debate on the amendments—not least the Commons amendments to the Lords amendments—so that we can vote on them?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman has raised an important point, which I shall certainly take into account.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): The Office for Budget Responsibility is currently responsible for examining and reporting on the sustainability of public finances, but it has no power to consider the effect of alternative policies, and does not score every piece of legislation like the Congressional Budget Office in the United States. Will the Leader of the House grant a debate on the establishment of an independent fiscal accountancy agency that would be responsible for analysing and assessing the sustainability of funding arrangements?

Andrea Leadsom: Having seen the eye-watering costs associated with the Opposition's 2017 manifesto, I am personally incredibly sympathetic to my hon. Friend's request. As he points out, the OBR has no current plans to extend its remit to the costing of Opposition policies. I strongly encourage him to apply for a Back-Bench debate to discuss these matters, which I am sure many Members would enthusiastically support.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): May we have a debate on the research carried out by the Forces in Mind Trust and the universities of York and Salford on the negative experience of service leavers in branches of Jobcentre Plus? There is a lack of understanding of

post-traumatic stress disorder, and of the great skills that members of our services can bring to the civilian workforce.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady has raised an incredibly important point about stress and the appalling impact of experiences in the field of war. Defence questions will take place on Monday 11 June, and she may wish to take the matter up directly with Ministers.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate on how out of touch this House is with public opinion? The EU referendum proved beyond all doubt that the House was out of touch with public opinion on the EU. It is clearly also out of touch with public opinion on sending more criminals to prison—which clearly the public want to do, whereas the House always wants to send fewer—and on the splurge in overseas aid, which most people think is ridiculous but people in this House seem to think is wonderful. May we have a debate on this to see whether there is anything at all on which the House is in step with public opinion?

Andrea Leadsom: I think that that would be a great subject for a debate. It would certainly be a very broad-ranging and well-attended one. I do not quite know where to start. I personally support that. I will give it some thought.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Tomorrow, I will be attending the Scottish Women in Sport conference, where I am sure we will pay tribute to the longest-serving sports chief executive officer in the UK, Badminton Scotland's Anne Smillie, who, after driving her sport for 38 years—28 as CEO—is retiring. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking her? To mark her service, may we have a debate on the importance of women in sports leadership roles?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a popular and important point about the role of women in sport. I was appalled the other day to hear that no woman makes it into the top-100 wealthiest sports people, which is pretty shocking. He might wish to seek an Adjournment debate, or perhaps a Back-Bench debate, so that all hon. Members can share their views on this important topic.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind colleagues of the Select Committee statements to follow, the privilege motion and the two debates. I will try to get everybody in, on the condition that each Member asks a single-sentence question. It is not that much to ask.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): May we have debate on the importance of school breakfast clubs and ensuring that all children have a healthy start to the day?

Andrea Leadsom: I am very sympathetic to my hon. Friend's request. It is an important subject, and I encourage him to seek at least an Adjournment debate.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): May we have a debate on my Plastics Bill, which would ensure that all plastics are recyclable by 2025 and provide for a 15p levy on plastic bottles?

Andrea Leadsom: I think that all Members on both sides of the House would be delighted to have further debates on plastics. The Government have done a huge amount already, but there is much more to be done, and I am sure we would all support the idea of a Back-Bench, or perhaps a Westminster Hall, debate to discuss what more could be done.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Please may we have a debate on the future of the car industry, which is so important to my constituency?

Andrea Leadsom: There are lots of requests for debates coming forward, and I always take them very seriously. I know the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) will be delighted that there will be a debate on acquired brain injury. I will consider my hon. Friend's request. The car industry is vital to the United Kingdom, particularly as we leave the European Union.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Leader of the House update us on when the domestic abuse Bill—which could prevent a rape victim from having to give testimony in open court about their human rights breaches when it comes to abortion—will come to the House so that we can vote on repealing the Offences Against the Person Act 1861?

Andrea Leadsom: I am incredibly sympathetic to the hon. Lady's work on abortion. I myself am entirely pro-choice. She has raised an important issue. The domestic abuse Bill will come forward in due course. It is being published in draft because it is important that we get the measures absolutely right, including the new definitions of domestic violence, economic abuse and so on. It is vital that we get it right, but we will bring it forward as soon as we can.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): The focus this week has been on Heathrow expansion, but regional airports, such as Manchester, which employs 3,000 people from my constituency, make a vital contribution to economic growth, not only in the northern powerhouse but right across the country and globally. May we please have a debate on the importance of regional airports to both internal and global connectivity?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that there will be ample opportunity to discuss not just the proposal for Heathrow expansion but the impact it could have on regional expansion. That debate will be coming up in the next couple of months, and I hope she will take the opportunity to contribute.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The will of the House was clear on Tuesday—the sentiments expressed were clear—so when will the Leader of the House grant a debate on removing abortion from criminal law altogether and regulating it in the same way as other medical procedures?

Andrea Leadsom: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has listened to some of the debates this week. I say again that I myself am pro-choice. On the issues for Northern Ireland, it is essential that we get a fully restored Northern Ireland Executive to tackle these issues as a top priority, and of course all issues of abortion for the United Kingdom remain under review.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): May we have a debate on the effectiveness of events such as the Jo Cox Great Get Together weekend in tackling loneliness and isolation, and will the Leader of the House come to Willenhall or Bloxwich for events I have organised?

Andrea Leadsom: I would be delighted to visit my hon. Friend's constituency and to take part in some of his loneliness events. I and many colleagues have prioritised trying to alleviate loneliness in our constituencies and the kind of get-togethers, coffee mornings and community events that take place do so much on that. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his work.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): By any logic, with 420 people investing in the fraudulent £19 million Corran hotel development, it should be seen as a collective investment scheme, but the Financial Conduct Authority refuses to recognise it as such, so will the Leader of the House make a statement outlining how we can get the FCA to take the proper action?

Andrea Leadsom: I am not entirely familiar with this issue. It seems to me that it is a question for the FCA, possibly via the Treasury. If the hon. Gentleman wants to write to me about it, I can look into what more he can do.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I am delighted to tell you, Mr Speaker, and the House that, last week, the UK Government, the Scottish Government and the local authorities finally signed the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal, which is very good news for my constituency. May we have a debate in Government time on how we can improve the way that the UK Government, the devolved Administrations and local authorities work together to benefit all the people of the United Kingdom?

Andrea Leadsom: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the signing of that city deal. It will be very important for Scotland, but also for the United Kingdom; we want to see all parts succeeding, particularly as we all leave the European Union in March 2019.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): This year marks the 50th anniversary of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. May we have an early debate on nuclear non-proliferation, particularly in the light of the developments with regard to Iran and the American withdrawal from the nuclear deal and the forthcoming Trump-Kim summit on North Korea?

Andrea Leadsom: That is an incredibly important subject and the hon. Gentleman might want to take it up at Defence questions on Monday.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while it is right to respect devolved democracies, it is also the responsibility of those devolved democracies to respect human rights and women's rights? Will she make time available in this House for a debate in Government time, or maybe even in DUP time, for a full debate on women's rights?

Andrea Leadsom: We have had a number of opportunities to debate this issue this week and I am sure that will continue, but it is a top priority for the Government to see a fully restored Executive in Northern Ireland.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): Violent crime, and knife crime in particular, continue to rise. Scotland has taken a public health approach with impressive results. May we have an early debate on the Government's funding of public health, given that it did not even warrant a mention in the last Budget?

Andrea Leadsom: The right hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise the issue of serious crime. It is of great concern right across the country. We are seeing a spike in particular in knife crime and moped crime and the Government are determined to get a grip on those things. We have launched our serious violence taskforce. A lot of money is going to community groups that are trying to encourage people away from knife crime and gang violence and working in hospital A&Es with young people who have already, sadly, been stabbed to get them to turn away from such crime. There is more to be done, but the Government are absolutely determined to get a grip on this awful problem.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I was one of those involved in the almighty tussle against the other place this week—that is, the tug-of-war raising valuable funds for the Macmillan charity. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking all who took part—we did overwhelm the noble Baronesses, Mr Speaker—and in praising the Macmillan charity? We never know if and when we might need that charity and, if and when we do, it is a great comfort to know that it is there.

Andrea Leadsom: I am delighted to congratulate all those who took part and particularly our House, who won. I also pay tribute to the fundraising effort. I understand that the tug-of-war has been taking place since 1987 and has raised more than £3 million for Macmillan, which is superb.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): More people than ever are surviving their cancer thanks to the fantastic work of NHS staff in turning research breakthroughs into life-saving tests and treatments for patients. Cancer Research UK has an ambition of three in four survivors by 2034. Early diagnosis is important. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate on that issue?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman rightly raises the achievements in alleviating the horror of cancer. Since 2010, cancer survival rates have increased year on year and there is great progress with the Cancer Drugs Fund and the £600 million cancer strategy for England. We have Health questions on Tuesday 19 June and the hon. Gentleman might want to raise that directly with Ministers then.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): This Sunday will see the annual al-Quds demonstration and march. The Home Secretary and police say that they are powerless to stop the flags of the terrorist organisations Hamas and Hezbollah being openly displayed on the streets of London. May we therefore have a debate in Government time on proscribing the entirety of Hezbollah and Hamas so that the police can then take action against these terrorist groups?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises a complicated issue. He will realise that the strategy towards Hezbollah is one of great caution, but at the same time this country will never subscribe to any terrorist activity

here and we take every step to keep our citizens safe. He might like to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise directly with Ministers his views on what more can be done.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Unless I am much mistaken the votes for women cause is very impressively represented in the Gallery today. We welcome the people who are here and thank them for articulating their views, not least through their magnificent rosettes, and it is great to see that among the adults there are also children who are conscious of their future rights and who will take pride in them.

I call Kate Green.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I am glad you have called a woman, Mr Speaker.

Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent statement to be made in response to the letter signed by me and more than 70 colleagues to the Home Secretary this week asking for an extension to the consultation on the Windrush compensation arrangements, which is due to close tomorrow? Black church leaders and Windrush defenders movements say that the community have not yet had enough time fully to submit their ideas and concerns about this process.

Andrea Leadsom: I am not entirely sure how I would be able to intervene on behalf of the hon. Lady, but I absolutely understand her concern and encourage her to take it up directly with Ministers today.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): This week, I joined pupils at Riverside Academy in Newbold and on Monday I will be at Brownsover Community School to join them in their daily mile. May we have a debate on the educational benefits of young people taking regular exercise?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I am a huge fan of the daily mile—I would like us to be doing it ourselves here in Parliament, Mr Speaker. Programmes such as the daily mile are simple and inclusive and are a very good way to include all children in physical activity. Our childhood obesity plan sets out that primary schools should deliver at least 30 active

minutes each day through break times, PE, extra-curricular clubs and so on, and over 1,200 schools in England have already signed up for the daily mile.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am enormously grateful to the Leader of the House that we are having our debate on acquired brain injury, not least because the concussion suffered by the Liverpool goalkeeper in the recent Champions league match shows absolutely that football has not yet got this right: it should not be the club doctor who makes the decision about whether somebody continues to play; it should be an independent medical assessment. I hope the Leader of the House will make sure that it is not just a Health Minister who is present for this debate, but that the whole of the Government are represented, because there are so many issues for so many different Departments. I am grateful, however.

Andrea Leadsom: First, I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is pleased. Secondly, he raises a very important point. Acquired brain injury can affect any person through any reason, whether a violent attack, a sporting accident or an industrial accident. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will make those representations very clearly, and I for my part will ensure that the Government are listening carefully.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Keeping the best until last: Jeremy Lefroy.

Jeremy Lefroy: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Given that many European countries allow their embassies in Africa to issue business and other visas on the spot, may we have a debate on our own embassies and high commissions throughout Africa taking back control and being able to do the same, to encourage investment and trade with all those countries that are such great partners of ours?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is a great champion of trade with Africa and he is right to be so. That is an interesting idea. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can first run his idea directly past Ministers.

RBS Branch Closures

SCOTTISH AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We now come to the first Select Committee statement. Pete Wishart, Chair of the Scottish Affairs Committee, will speak on this subject for up to 10 minutes, during which no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, I will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement and call Pete Wishart to respond to them in turn.

12.20 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am eternally grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I am to the Backbench Business Committee for giving us the time for this statement. It is on the third report of the Scottish Affairs Committee and is the result of our short inquiry into Royal Bank of Scotland branch closures in Scotland.

On 1 December 2017, RBS announced its intention to close 62 branches across Scotland, leading to the loss of 158 jobs. The closures would be in every part of Scotland, and they would result in the loss of the last branch in town for many communities, contrary to the commitment given by RBS in 2010. The reaction to the announcement was, as expected, overwhelmingly negative, with communities, business groups, unions and Members of Parliament from all parties in Scotland expressing their grave concern at the loss of such valued community assets. Rarely in my 17 years in the House—I am marking that today—have I seen such a unanimous response to a single issue. When protests and demonstrations are organised in usually quiet and sedate communities such as Aberfeldy in my constituency, we know that something unpalatable has been offered to these communities.

In our inquiry, we took evidence from representative groups and organisations, and we invited members of the public affected by the closures to get in touch. We had two evidence sessions involving senior executives from RBS, with the RBS chief executive officer, Ross McEwan, joining us in our second session. We also took the opportunity to hear from the Lending Standards Board, which oversees the voluntary code of practice on branch closures. We are of course grateful to all who took the time to help us with this report.

In our evidence, we were told that rural communities would be particularly affected by the closures. Scottish Rural Action told us that

“it can take people a really long time, having to use several modes of transport and at great expense, to travel to the next nearest bank, sometimes involving ferries as well as public transport.”

We were told that people with mobility issues and caring responsibilities would also be particularly badly affected, and we received accounts from individuals concerned about the impact on their elderly relatives. The consumer group Which?—it was very helpful to us in this inquiry—noted:

“Bank branch closures disproportionately impact vulnerable consumers, particularly those in rural areas, those without access to good broadband, and those on lower incomes.”

We heard from business groups, which told us that it would be much

“more difficult to run a business in much of Scotland—including many deprived communities and tourism hotspots”.

My constituents are dependent on such hotspots. In its evidence, the Federation of Small Businesses said that closures often created additional costs for business owners, making it more difficult to manage cash flow, with productivity in the wider local community suffering as a consequence.

We concluded that the closure of these branches would be a devastating blow to the affected communities, removing vital services that are relied on by businesses and disproportionately affecting vulnerable customers. We were not convinced that RBS fully appreciated the damage that these closures will do to the communities and businesses that rely on these branches.

RBS told us in its evidence that these closures were driven by changes in customer behaviour. It said that it is closing branches in response to the increasing numbers of its customers accessing services online and via mobile devices. While there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that customer behaviour is evolving, with more people now using digital services, our inquiry found a real demand for a local branch as a feature of local communities.

We also explored whether RBS was in fact trying to lead customer behaviour by incentivising customers to transfer to digital accounts and force them on to other platforms by this programme of closures. RBS was keen to assure the Committee that no targets were set and that there were no incentives for digital take-up. However, we did see such reports in the press, including a screenshot of a document appearing to show that targets were set in its centres, and we asked RBS to clarify that. In its response, it told us that

“colleagues have goals to serve our customers well”,

and that the screenshot was a

“standard performance document”,

in which staff are

“expected to agree objectives with their line manager...as well as ways of measuring against these goals”.

I will leave it to the House to assess whether public behaviour is being met or being led by RBS.

We did find, quite curiously, that these closures are not motivated by any savings to the bank. RBS will save only some £9.5 million. That is a significant sum, but absolutely nothing against a cost base of £4 billion. It is actually a smaller figure than RBS spent on sponsoring rugby, which came in at £11 million a year. That prompts this question: why is RBS antagonising its customer base with this unpopular closure programme for what, to it, is merely a pittance of a saving, but with all the subsequent reputational costs? That might have something to do with Unite the union’s view that this is intended to improve the value of the bank’s shares and for

“ripening it up to go back into the private sector”.

This week, of course, we find that RBS shares are to be marketed, at a significant cost to the taxpayer who acquired them at almost double the value when the banks were recapitalised in 2008.

That brings us to the majority shareholder: you, Madam Deputy Speaker, me and all the taxpayers of the United Kingdom, who still own over 70% of the stock of RBS. The Government are the steward of this

public interest, but they have showed no interest whatsoever in exercising any influence as our guarantor in this closure programme. The stock response from the Government was to say that they do not get involved in commercial decisions. We were profoundly disappointed that no Minister showed us the courtesy of coming to our Committee and being prepared to be challenged by the Committee on that assertion. Perhaps we could explore further with Ministers what influence may have been exerted. It remains baffling that, as the main shareholder, the Government have expressed no view whatsoever about these bank closures.

We repeatedly asked RBS what would happen if the Government sought to make their displeasure known and perhaps asked it to reconsider its closure programme, but we never secured a satisfactory response to that question. What Ross McEwan told us was that he had received no representations from the UK Government on the subject of branch closures. We say in our report:

“If RBS does not act on our recommendation to halt the closures we recommend that the Government use any influence that its majority shareholding provides to apply pressure on RBS to reconsider the closure programme.”

We did, however, make some headway in securing concessions from RBS. After our first evidence session, RBS announced a reprieve for 10 branches until the end of 2018. It also offered a variety of other concessions, such as giving the buildings it owns over to community use and assistance with digital services for high-use, regular customers. The reprieved branches were primarily the last bank in town and those more than nine miles from the next nearest RBS branch.

When this reprieve was announced, RBS said:

“Should any of these branches see sustainable transactional increases and viable new income over this period, then the bank will reconsider the closure of the relevant branch as part of a full independent review.”

RBS provided little information about how such reviews would be conducted, and the company originally charged with leading this work is now unable to do so. There remains a great deal of uncertainty about how these branches will be evaluated and on what basis decisions about their future will be taken. We therefore have serious concerns that these branches are being set up to fail. In our report, we say that

“RBS should postpone the review of these branches until 6 months after the independent reviewer has been appointed”.

Lastly, the whole process of consultation has been spectacularly woeful. There is currently no requirement under the access to banking standard for banks to consult customers or staff ahead of a decision to close a branch. Given the public response we have seen to this report, there is great interest in local communities about being consulted ahead of branch closures. We therefore recommend that the Lending Standards Board consult on amending the access to banking standard to require banks to consult their customers, to assess the impact of closures on customers and communities, before final decisions on branch closures are taken.

Branches are now being closed and vital community assets are being lost. We say, even at this stage, that we should see what we can do to keep these branches open. If RBS truly wants to meet the needs of its customer base, it should respond to this overwhelming evidence and halt its closure programme. Given the recent profits reported by RBS, this is a cost it could easily afford to bear.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I welcome unreservedly the hon. Gentleman’s Committee’s report. I am pleased to tell the House that earlier today RBS announced its decision, after much discussion, that the Bannockburn branch will now remain open at least until the end of the year. That is something, at least. He has rightly pointed out that there is no financial gain for the Royal Bank of Scotland in closing any of these branches, so does he agree that the Lending Standards Board should immediately publish all its workings in relation to the closure of these RBS branches?

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks, and I am pleased and satisfied to hear that his Bannockburn branch will be among the 10 that will remain open at least until the end of the year. He is absolutely right to say that there are major issues with the Lending Standards Board when it comes to the consultation, and we were less than satisfied with its explanation why it could not give us any of the information on the closures that had been supplied to it by RBS. There was a full discussion about those issues, and even at this stage, we will try further to secure that information for the hon. Gentleman.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the Scottish Affairs Committee for undertaking this work on what is an extremely important issue, and I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s proposals, which mirror many of those in the last Labour manifesto. Much has been made by the Government of the availability of post offices as an alternative when the last branch in town closes. Did the Committee assess whether that would be a suitable alternative for the communities in Scotland that will be particularly badly hit by the RBS proposals?

Pete Wishart: We did take evidence from the Post Office during the inquiry, to assess whether that would be possible in the way that the hon. Gentleman has described. We are not satisfied that this would provide any real alternative. I cite the example of my constituency, which is experiencing severe post office branch cuts. However, there will be transactions, and we managed to secure from the RBS a further commitment to ensure that relevant staff training would be given to sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses to improve their skills to deal with the increased number of people who will be coming to them for their services.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I thank the Chairman of the Select Committee for his statement. I was proud to work with him on the report. Does he agree that the real concern is the terms of the review for the branches being given a reprieve? The closure date is still the same, yet the period for the review is shorter. We do not know who will carry out the review or what its terms will be. As he said, it seems that those branches are simply being set up to fail.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman is an assiduous member of the Scottish Affairs Committee, and I am grateful for his contribution. He is absolutely right, and he will recall some of the conversations we had with RBS about the reprieved branches and the dissatisfaction expressed by all of us on the Committee that there is no independent reviewer in place. He will recall that, as

[Pete Wishart]

part of our recommendations, we said that those branches should be reprieved for a further six-month period until such a reviewer is in place. Also, we have to know the criteria by which those branches are being assessed. What we have secured from RBS at this stage is clearly insufficient to ensure that a proper assessment will be made.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I, too, would like to extend my thanks to my hon. Friend and to the Scottish Affairs Committee for this excellent report. Does he agree that the report absolutely lays bare the fact that RBS has ridden roughshod over our communities and that the lack of consultation by RBS throughout this entire process is clear? The access to banking standard requires banks to make an assessment of the impact of branch closures, but that is simply not possible if banks such as RBS do not consult their customers directly before making decisions on closures. Does he further agree that, with the UK Government now selling RBS shares below market value and with RBS paying £16 million in bonuses last year and recently announcing record profits of £752 million, the sense of anger and betrayal felt by my constituents in Kilwinning, Kilbirnie and Saltcoats is completely justifiable?

Pete Wishart: My hon. Friend's questions are all absolutely spot on, and they are all related. On the question of consultations, we had real issues with how the Lending Standards Board was going about this. Our report found that there is clearly a sense that the voluntary code is not working satisfactorily and that the Government should at least examine the possibility of putting statutory regulations in place so that communities can be consulted in advance about branch closures. I hope that that is something the Minister will be able to take away from all this. I will say no more about the selling of RBS shares, other than what I said in my statement, because that is not part of the report, although we note the massive profits made by RBS in the first quarter of this year and the comparatively paltry £91 million that has been saved by these branch closures, as well as the impact of the huge reputational cost to the bank.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I congratulate my neighbour, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), on this report. I also welcome the extension of the life of the Alloa branch in my constituency, which was announced earlier this morning. Will he join me and other colleagues across the House in seeking further clarification on the criteria for these branch closures? When other Members and I met RBS representatives earlier this week, there seemed to be no differentiation between the criteria being applied to urban branches and those applied to rural ones. That is a major concern for north and south Perthshire.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to my neighbour for making that point. I note that that branch in his constituency has secured a reprieve, along with the branch in Comrie, which is just down the road from my constituency. He is right to suggest that this is a critical test for RBS. This is one of the concessions that we were able to extract from the bank, and we welcomed its

announcement of the reprieves, but it must demonstrate that these branches are not simply being set up to fail. We need to ensure that, when it talks about an increase in transactions and business, it is able to assess that properly. The Committee will have an ongoing monitoring role to ensure that this situation is properly monitored, and we will report back to the House in due course.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I join others who have congratulated the Scottish Faither of the Hoose on his 17 years of service. That is a record that none of the rest of us will be able to achieve, because Scotland will be independent before any other Scottish MPs have served 17 years. Does he share my concern that these closures are taking place in the context of an overall diminishing of our high streets? We are seeing the jobcentre closure programme, for example, and the risks that some post offices are facing, alongside other bank closure programmes and the closure of some high street stores. The Government, as the majority stakeholder, have a responsibility not only for the banking services but for the overall wellbeing of our high streets.

Pete Wishart: I will offer no opinion on the longevity of other hon. Members in this House, but I very much agree with my hon. Friend about what seems to be a loss of town centre and village amenity and fixed assets. The response to the bank closure programme that we saw not only in my constituency but in that of the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) and in some urban centres—indeed, in constituencies right across Scotland—demonstrates how much value communities place on these assets. The jobcentre closures will probably have more impact on urban centres than on constituencies such as mine, but this is certainly an issue for the Government. As part of their reflections on our report, perhaps they could take a look at what is generally happening in our high streets, towns and villages across Scotland.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and his Committee on this report, which I fully endorse. Moray has had no branch closures in this round of cuts, but we have suffered a reduction in mobile banking provision, particularly in Lossiemouth, which has lost one of its visits each week to allow the mobile bank to provide a service to other areas that have lost their branches. I notice that it was referenced in paragraph 75 of the report that the quality and availability of mobile banking was a concern. What more can we do to encourage RBS to improve its mobile banking service, given that it is currently letting people down in Lossiemouth and in other areas of Moray?

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his diligent recollection of section 75 of the report. We had an extended conversation with RBS about the availability of its mobile banking system. Our constituents are already beginning to detect real issues because the mobile banks are now expected to serve areas impacted by branch closures. RBS was determined to assure us that effective and efficient timetables would be drawn up, but the evidence thus far is that it has not been able to produce them. Again, as part of our rolling brief to keep this under review, we will keep a clear eye on what is happening. Mobile banks provide a real point of

contact where customers can access banking services, and they are an important feature of the new delivery of services.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for his thorough account of what I think was an excellent report, save for the disappointing lack of input from the UK Government. Does he agree that it will be difficult for the reprieved branches to meet any meaningful increase in use, owing to restricted opening times, to a lack of a full range of services and to targets for customers to be moved online?

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I note the amount of questions that have been asked about the reprieved branches and the real interest in that as an example of what can be done. RBS owes it to the House to demonstrate that it is looking at the matter responsibly and not just setting up those branches to fail. They should be given every opportunity to demonstrate their effectiveness and their ability to pick up footfall and customers. If RBS is listening to this statement—I am sure that it is—I hope that it will have heard the real concerns of Members right across the House about the 10 reprieved branches and that it will do everything possible to assist them to meet whatever criteria will be set for keeping them open. The important thing is that we get an independent reviewer in place and that we can assess those criteria.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): A key finding of our Select Committee's very good report, and one which reflects the comments of other hon. Members today, is that RBS's impact assessments did not provide sufficient information on individual branches, such as whether customers have sufficiently reliable access to broadband, how practical it was for them to travel to the next branch or what alternative services were available in the area. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Lending Standards Board's limited interpretation

of impact is woefully inadequate, allowing RBS to avoid its responsibilities to our communities, and that the board must now listen to the communities affected by bank closures and widen the criteria that it uses?

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a diligent member of the Select Committee. As we said in the report, we have to be careful about the Lending Standards Board's role, because it is a self-regulatory body with a voluntary code of practice. We ask the Government to consider that if the situation is not working, which seems to be the case because we have dissatisfied communities who feel that they have not had their voices heard in the consultation about branch closures, the Government should start to consider a statutory code of practice and allow a consultation to be held prior to a branch closure, not afterwards, as is currently the case.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I commend my hon. Friend and his Select Committee on an excellent report. In my constituency, Stepps is due to lose its branch, and my dealings with RBS so far indicate that it probably knows more about Steps the band than Stepps the community. Disappointingly, the campaign has had no impact at all. Will my hon. Friend join me in calling upon the Government to support the Access to Banking Services Bill, which was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), that would support rural branches and community hubs in particular?

Pete Wishart: I will. It is a very fine Bill, and I hope that the Minister has cognisance of the many recommendations in it. Something needs to be done about the consultations on branch closures. There clearly are issues with the Lending Standards Board's role in all this, and it needs to be closely considered, even just in a consultation-type exercise. I look forward to the Bill introduced by our hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) making steady progress through the House.

Greening Finance

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We now come to the second Select Committee statement. The procedure is the same as for the previous statement. I call the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee.

12.42 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): I begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time today for me to present the Environmental Audit Committee's recent report on greening finance. We launched our green finance inquiry in November to examine how the UK could mobilise investment in clean energy and encourage greater consideration of climate risk in financial decision making to avoid a carbon bubble. We held hearings with investors, asset owners, experts, financial regulators and Ministers. We also wrote to the 25 largest pension funds in the UK—responsible for nearly half a trillion pounds of assets—to see whether and how they are incorporating climate risk into their investment decisions.

The situation is vital to us all. The Committee on Climate Change estimates that we need to spend up to 1% of GDP, or £22 billion a year, to meet our carbon budgets. The Environmental Audit Committee found a dramatic collapse in low-carbon energy investment since 2015 that threatens the UK's ability to meet its carbon budgets and tackle climate damage. Last year, Britain generated twice as much energy from wind as from coal, but green investment is faltering. In cash terms, investment in clean energy fell by 10% in 2016 and 56% in 2017. Annual investment in clean energy is now at its lowest level for 10 years. Is that a trend or a blip? It is too early to tell.

The Government must publish further details in time for the 2018 Budget on how they intend to secure the investment they need to meet our carbon targets. Providing clarity on the future of fixed-price contracts for renewables will be key to ensuring a pipeline of projects. We also need continuing access to development finance. The UK Government should negotiate to maintain the UK's relationship with the European Investment Bank to provide funding for riskier, early-stage green infrastructure projects in the UK.

Let me set out how we want to see a green thread running through the investment chain. The 2008 financial crisis revealed the dangers of short-termism in our financial system. Climate change already poses material threats to our economy, our investments and our pensions. Seventeen of the 18 hottest years since records began have occurred since 2001. That means more droughts, heatwaves and wildfires and more extreme rainfall and flooding. Those risks will grow. In the time it takes today's young people to reach retirement, the physical risks from sea level rise and more extreme weather will grow. That will affect investment in food, farming, infrastructure, home building and insurance, to name just a few.

Companies that do not make a timely low-carbon transition could also face costly legal or regulatory action. Some companies will be left behind by firms with cleaner, more efficient new technologies. Fossil fuel

companies could be left with stranded assets in an overvalued carbon bubble—oil and coal deposits that they cannot burn—if we are to keep global temperature rise to less than 2° C. They also face increasing liability risks. The city of New York is taking legal action against five fossil fuel firms to recover the costs of protecting the city from flooding from rising seas caused by climate change.

The direction of travel for the global economy is clear from the Paris agreement and from what scientists are telling us about the risks of climate change. Despite that, the short-term horizons of many financial institutions, businesses and investment managers mean that sustainability risks are not always factored into financial decisions. The quarterly earnings cycle and structure of remuneration for investment consultants and fund managers encourages the pursuit of short-term returns rather than long-term considerations. Institutional investors can be prevented from acting on climate change due to confusion about the extent to which pension trustees have a fiduciary duty to consider environmental risks. KPMG's 2017 corporate responsibility survey found that almost three quarters of large companies worldwide do not acknowledge the financial risks of climate change in their annual reports. More than half of institutional investors surveyed by HSBC said they were receiving "highly inadequate" information from companies about their approach to climate change.

The disclosure of climate-related risks would help financial markets work more efficiently. It would enable UK institutions and investors to position themselves ahead of the market to benefit from the low-carbon transition. My Committee is calling on the Government to clarify that pension schemes and company directors have a fiduciary duty to protect long-term value and should consider climate risks. Pension savers should be given opportunities to engage with decision makers about where their money is invested. Ministers must make it mandatory for large companies and asset owners to report their exposure to climate change risks and opportunities by 2022.

The UK's existing framework of financial law and governance could and should be used to implement climate-related risk reporting. The Government should issue guidance making it clear that the Companies Act 2006 already requires companies to disclose climate change risks where they are financially material. Companies with high exposure to carbon-intensive activities should already be reporting on climate risks in their annual reports. UK financial regulators such as the Financial Reporting Council, the Pensions Regulator and the Financial Conduct Authority should amend their codes, rules and guidance to require climate-related financial disclosures. Companies and asset owners need time to develop how they report, but only if reporting is mandatory are we likely to see comprehensive and comparable climate risk disclosures. Embedding climate risk reporting in UK corporate governance and reporting frameworks could negate the need for new legislation. However, if regulators fail to implement that, there may be a need for new sustainability reporting legislation, such as France's climate reporting law: article 173.

To those who ask whether we must do this, I say yes, we must. Climate change poses material financial risks to our pensions and our investments. To those who ask whether we are doing this, I say yes. The transition to a

low-carbon economy presents exciting opportunities in clean energy, clean transport and tech that could benefit UK businesses. And to those who ask whether we will do this, I say that London is the centre of global finance, so let us make it a global centre for green finance.

I commend the report to the House.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I congratulate the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee on, as always, doing a sterling job of steering us through the inquiry.

The Overseas Development Institute said in its evidence to our inquiry that the UK's clean growth strategy is "undermined and contradicted" by our continued support for fossil fuel production overseas through UK Export Finance, which has been averaging £551 million a year in recent years. Does my hon. Friend agree it undermines our international climate commitments and our efforts to decarbonise our economy if we continue to support fossil fuel investment by British companies overseas?

Mary Creagh: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's always excellent and assiduous attendance and contributions. She is a real trailblazer and we are lucky to have her on our Committee.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the Overseas Development Institute has stated that our international approach is being undermined by UK Export Finance, and there is a case for this House, perhaps through a joint meeting of Select Committees, to examine where we are investing overseas, because, first, they may not be smart business investments and, secondly, they are undermining our stated international policy commitments.

There is perhaps a role for the Select Committee on International Development. The UK Government are doing brilliant work through the international climate fund and the UN. That work must not be undermined by businesses that are selling old technology, instead of taking this opportunity to leapfrog and, for example, put solar panels on mud huts in South Sudan, which is something I saw at a conference yesterday. There is an opportunity to leapfrog and not to make the same mistakes we made in our electricity generation.

My hon. Friend makes an excellent point with which I can only passionately agree.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on another excellent report.

I am a bit surprised there was no contribution by the green investment bank, now the Green Investment Group. The bank was set up by Government to look at sustainable investment. I know it has been privatised, but surely it has some ongoing role in trying to get sustainable investment. Will my hon. Friend comment on what has happened to that organisation?

Mary Creagh: I did not have time to go into our examination of the green investment bank. Our previous report in the 2015 Parliament recommended a green share in a special purpose vehicle, and I am pleased that has been taken up by the Government. The green investment bank was set up in 2012 to address market failure in this area. The question is whether that market failure still exists, and the answer is yes. Do we still need an investment vehicle to create confidence and to create that pipeline? The answer, post Brexit, is emphatically

yes, which is why I mentioned access to European Investment Bank finance. Had we known Brexit was going to happen, would we have taken the same decision to privatise the green investment bank? Perhaps not.

Macquarie got the green investment bank, which has now been rebadged as the Green Investment Group, and there are still market failures. There is market failure in green transport, and our Committee heard there is no intermediate body to broker between the City of London and local authorities that want to decarbonise their local housing schemes and council housing through low-carbon combined heat and power plants. The bank could have been that bridge.

We looked at how the process of privatisation was very disrupted and took longer than we expected, and we are concerned the Green Investment Group is investing in less risky projects. Of the four projects it has financed since privatisation, one is in Ireland, one is offshore wind in Sweden, one is in India and, of course, one is in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, for which I can claim absolutely no credit—obviously it was an excellent decision.

The Committee has an anxiety about where the Green Investment Group is going to go and whether it will focus on easier-to-finance, safer and less risky overseas projects now it is part of an international bank and lose its focus on green investment in the UK. It would be a tragedy if it does that.

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): I did not intend to ask the hon. Lady a question, but this gives me an opportunity to thank her and the Committee most sincerely for an excellent report. Again, I salute her leadership in this area.

Does the hon. Lady agree that the fact we still have a very substantial, multi-billion pound commitment from the Green Investment Group to invest in exactly the sorts of low-carbon innovation she and I both want to see is a sign of reassurance that the group will continue to access funds, in this case global funds, to invest in the UK and Europe?

Mary Creagh: I certainly hope that will be the case but, as we mentioned in the report, the Bloomberg figures show there has been a huge collapse in green investment in the UK—it has gone down from about £26 billion to £10 billion. We questioned the Minister on whether things are cheaper, whether there is policy uncertainty and whether there is Brexit uncertainty. I am pleased the Green Investment Group is promising to do that, and we look forward to seeing some of this project pipeline coming through, because we need £22 billion a year. This year we are on £10 billion, so we need to get that ramped up very quickly. I look forward to hearing more about how she will make that happen from a policy point of view.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I very much welcome the report, in which I played a small part. My hon. Friend will know that, globally, the fossil fuel subsidy is some £5.3 trillion, the size of the French and UK economies combined, yet 80% of fossil fuels cannot be exploited if we are to avoid irreversible climate change and to fulfil our Paris agreement. Uranium supplies will run out in 10 years once we start using nuclear to meet 12.5% of global energy needs.

[Geraint Davies]

Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should take market leadership on investing in projects such as the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon and the wider lagoon network, which will provide 100 years of long-term sustainable and predictable energy, and that value for money should be seen in the round, alongside the climate risks identified in the report?

Mary Creagh: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work and leadership on our Committee. He is right to say that we need a stable policy environment in order to create a pipeline of low-carbon projects. The Committee found that the policy environment has been a bit destabilised by changes to feed-in tariffs and the early closure of some competitions, and things like that.

My hon. Friend is also right to say that low-carbon electricity, particularly new forms of generation, often has high up-front costs but very low operating costs. Obviously once we get it up and running, it will be up and running for the next 50 to 100 years. We need to hear from the Government, sooner rather than later, on what their green growth plan will mean and on the policy environment they will create to enable some of these innovative projects to be brought forward.

In the report, for example, we criticised the cancellation of the carbon capture and storage competition. Carbon capture and storage is tricky, risky and innovative, and companies had invested up to £60 million in research and development on those projects only for the competition to be closed with no notice. We do not want to see the same thing happen to the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon.

BILL PRESENTED

VIOLENT CRIME (SENTENCES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Keith Vaz presented a Bill to increase the minimum custodial sentence on conviction for possession of a knife or other offensive weapon for an offender aged 18 years or over and to increase the minimum period of detention and training order for a person aged 16 or 17; to set a minimum custodial sentence on conviction for an offender in possession of a knife or other weapon and intending to commit any offence or having such a weapon available to use in committing murder; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October, and to be printed (Bill 222).

Privilege

12.59 pm

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the Third Special Report of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (HC 1115); and orders Mr Dominic Cummings to give an undertaking to the Committee, no later than 6pm on 11 June 2018, to appear before that Committee at a time on or before 20 June 2018.

I am grateful to Mr Speaker for allowing the motion to have precedence today. As we all know, the function of this House is not just to vote on and pass legislation, and to debate Bills and matters of public interest, but to hold Ministers to account. There can probably be no Parliament in the world that provides more consistent or closer scrutiny of Ministers' work than the House of Commons, but it is the work of Select Committees to continue that scrutiny, and to question and hold Ministers to account. Indeed, plenty of Ministers have got themselves into trouble as a result of evidence they have given to Select Committees. The additional privilege of the Select Committees is not just to question members of the Government, but to call anyone whose role, position and power in society makes them a matter of interest and a subject of interest for our inquiries. The ability and power of the Committees to invite people to give evidence, and to issue a summons for them to appear to give evidence where necessary, is vital to the work of the Select Committees of this House.

Having checked with the Clerks of my Committee and with the House of Commons Library, I believe that this is the first time since 1920 that a motion of this kind has been put before the House. It has not been done lightly; in some ways, it is done with regret, because I wish we had not come to this point and that we could have reached a successful conclusion to the invitation we issued to Dominic Cummings before now.

It might be helpful to the House if I explain why we are in this position. In March, the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee issued an initial invitation to Dominic Cummings to give evidence to us as part of our investigation into disinformation and fake news. I should say that we are not conducting an inquiry into the referendum. We are not seeking to invite people who worked on campaigns for the Brexit referendum to give evidence, or to scrutinise the details of those campaigns. We are conducting an inquiry, and an important part of it has been the use of data in the course of campaigning. During our investigations, other witnesses have come forward and made allegations about the work of Vote Leave; as Dominic Cummings was its communications director, he is the person most fit to speak about that. In many ways, what we are seeking to do is to extend a privilege that many Committees do extend to witnesses: when allegations are made about them or their organisation, they are given the ability to come before the Committee to refute those allegations and present alternative evidence. That is the opportunity we wish to give to Dominic Cummings, but we also believe it is the right of the Committee to have the opportunity to question him, based on evidence that we have already received.

We were unable to reach a satisfactory conclusion from the invitations we issued to Mr Cummings. As a result, we proceeded to issue a formal summons, which

was passed by the Committee. Mr Cummings not only refused to accept that summons and to appear on the named day cited in it, but refused to consider alternative dates on which he might appear and to which the Committee might have agreed. He also made it clear in public remarks that he had no intention of ever coming to give evidence to this Committee and that he resented the way in which he had been treated. That left the Committee with no alternative but to seek to report this matter to the House, and to seek the support of the whole House of Commons—not just the Committee—for a motion ordering Mr Cummings to appear before us.

We felt that Mr Cummings had taken the view that appearing before a House of Commons Select Committee is not a matter for that Committee, but entirely at the discretion of the proposed witness, with it being up to him to set the time and date, even though that might be months after our inquiry has finished. Not only does that restrict our right and ability to question witnesses who have important information linked to our inquiries, but it fails to give us the opportunity to question people based on evidence that has been received and tabled against them.

Is our relationship with Mr Cummings uniquely bad? Have we treated him unkindly, whereas other Committees of the House may have treated him more favourably? He has even suggested he would be willing to come—at his discretion, and at some future point—to give evidence to another Committee.

Interestingly, Mr Cummings has given evidence to House of Commons Select Committees before. He gave evidence to the Treasury Committee in the last Parliament, and it is relevant to look at its report following the evidence he gave. That Committee took evidence from a number of parties and campaigns involved in the Brexit referendum, to analyse the arguments they were making. In chapter 7 of that Committee's report, at paragraph 236, the Committee sets out the similar frustrations it had, even though Mr Cummings had agreed to be a witness. It stated:

“In their treatment of this Committee, neither Mr Elliott”—also from Vote Leave—

“nor Mr Cummings, as individuals, have fulfilled Vote Leave's commitment, made in their successful application to the Electoral Commission, to ‘create a valuable legacy for the UK's democratic process’. Their conduct has been appalling. Mr Elliott's and Mr Cummings's expressed view that powers should be restored to Parliament sits ill with that conduct.”

The report goes on to state:

“It was the Committee's preference to hear from both Vote Leave and Leave.eu in one sitting. In the end, it took three. If Mr Elliott and Mr Cummings consider that the Committee's evidence-taking process has been protracted, uncomfortable or harmful to their cause, they have only themselves to blame.

The Committee notes that Mr Banks and Mr Tice”, of Leave.eu, “did not seek to attach conditions to their attendance.”

That is very similar to the experience we have had.

As a consequence of evidence we have received, we have also asked other people to give evidence to the Committee. We have asked Mr Banks and Mr Wigmore from Leave.eu to give evidence, and they have agreed to do so next week. We asked AggregateIQ, the tech company from Canada that Leave.eu used to work on its campaign, to give evidence and it has done so, even though the person giving evidence was a Canadian national who is based in Canada, and so was outside

the jurisdiction of this Parliament and had no obligation to attend. Nevertheless, that person crossed an ocean to do so. Yesterday, the Committee took evidence from Alexander Nix of Cambridge Analytica, who was returning to give evidence to the Committee about links and relevant issues.

It therefore seems that we have a unique problem in requiring Dominic Cummings to come to give evidence to us. I do not believe, and neither do the members of my Committee, that that is an acceptable state of affairs. These are incredibly serious matters. There is a certain irony when someone who was the communications director of Vote Leave and ran a successful campaign to seek to restore powers to Parliament seemingly holds that institution in such contempt.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should have issued his notice to Mr Cummings on the side of a bus, because he might then have seen it and come to Parliament.

Damian Collins: I will not go down that road or follow that bus. As I say, this is not necessarily directly about that campaign, but there is a certain irony when someone who campaigned to restore powers to Parliament is not willing to come to Parliament to give evidence before one of its Committees. This is someone who, in his campaign, was so critical—many would say rightly so—of European civil servants and bureaucrats exercising power remotely, unelected and unaccountable to any institutions. He held a very important position in this country during a very important campaign. We believe that we have important questions to put to him, but he declines to appear. He did suggest in his initial communications, after we invited him in March, that he might appear at some point later in July. He has subsequently said in his public statements that he will not appear until other investigations—those being conducted by the Electoral Commission and the Information Commissioner, in particular—have concluded.

There are rules that prevent Committees from calling witnesses, but those are normally restricted to matters before the courts. This matter is not *sub judice*. Mr Cummings has not been charged with any offence and he is not in proceedings before the courts. We sought guidance from the Electoral Commission and the Information Commissioner, given their ongoing inquiries, to ask whether our calling him to give evidence would in any way undermine the work of those investigations. They have said that it would not, and that they would welcome it if Mr Cummings gave evidence to the Select Committee, so there is no founded excuse there. Whatever he says, his decision not to come before us is one of his own making. It is a deliberate attempt to deny Parliament its right to question witnesses on matters of importance. That is why we have brought the motion before the House—to stand up for an important point of principle; and to support the work of the Select Committees and their inquiries across Parliament. We are seeking to maintain the right that we should have to call witnesses when we believe it is important to our work and in the public interest for them to give evidence before us.

1.7 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I support the motion. I do not want to debate the issues that give rise to the Select Committee's requests for Mr Cummings to

[Hilary Benn]

appear, because, as the whole House would probably agree, those are properly matters for the Committee, and I trust its Chair and members to do their job with their usual diligence and care. The reason why I wish to contribute briefly relates to the question of the power of Select Committees to ensure that witnesses do turn up, which is the point of principle that is, quite properly, now going to be referred to the Committee of Privileges. Mr Cummings is clearly refusing to do so, although he has appeared previously before Committees. I agreed absolutely with the Chair of the Committee, the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins), when he said a moment ago that Mr Cummings was showing contempt for the House. Indeed, the phrase in Mr Cummings's letter of 11 May was:

"As you know you have no powers to compel my attendance and your threats are empty."

In the email exchange cited at the very end of the report, he said:

"I'm calling your bluff. Your threats are...empty...Say what you like, I will not come to your committee regardless of how many letters you send or whether you send characters in fancy dress to hand me papers."

There is a very important point of principle at stake here, which the House has debated in the past and will need to debate again: what do we do when witnesses refuse to appear? This issue has been looked at in several reports. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who I think will also try to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, is a great expert on these matters. There have been two substantive reports—in 1999 and 2013—on whether we should legislate. At the time of the Murdoch situation, there was a lot of discussion about what happened in the past and powers that had fallen into abeyance. There are two views. The first says that, in the end, almost everybody who initially refuses to appear then turns up. The Messrs Murdoch situation is a good example of that. I think the Assistant Serjeant at Arms was dressed for the occasion and a journey was made to Wapping with a notice to require attendance. It is true for many people—the argument is forcefully made—that the threat to their reputation if they do not appear is, in the end, what obliges them to turn up.

The second argument against legislating to give us some power is the fear that the courts will interfere in the functioning of Parliament. I understand that argument, but I must say that I come down on the other side. If we end up in a situation in which one witness gets away with not appearing, it might catch on with others. Think of the really important role that Parliament has played recently by calling in the chairs and chief executives—they may regard themselves as private individuals—of major companies that have done things that have impacted hugely on our citizens' lives. If it comes to pass that people think, "I don't have to turn up," how can Select Committees and Parliament continue to do our job of holding the powerful to account? In the main, there are two types of Select Committee witness: the powerful who are being held to account; and others who have information and expertise that can inform the work that we undertake. In supporting the motion and asking that the Privileges Committee should look into this matter, I do not think we can accept a situation in which people think they do not have to turn up.

I am advised that Australia and New Zealand have offences of failing to appear before Parliament—people can be fined and imprisoned if they do not turn up as a witness. By the way, the witnesses do not have to answer questions, although it would be quite an appearance to sit there and say, "I decline to answer that question"—it would be the equivalent of taking the fifth amendment in front of a congressional committee in the United States of America. I do not want to be in a position where the courts start to question the reason why a witness has been called or what questions might be asked of them. I would have thought it would be perfectly possible to draft legislation that said, "If a Select Committee has issued a requirement for a witness to appear and the witness does not turn up, without reasonable excuse, it is for the courts"—not Parliament; I am not in favour of being able to fine people by a decision in this Chamber or of the Privileges Committee, or to clap recalcitrants in irons—"to apply an appropriate penalty to the individual who failed to turn up." In such circumstances, I do not see how the courts could say, "We want to go over the reasons why the Select Committee wanted to call this witness," because although I am not a lawyer, I suppose it would be a strict liability offence, because if a summons has been issued by the House of Commons, someone either appears or they do not.

This is an important point of principle. This unfortunate case, and the response of Mr Cummings, reminds us of the need to ensure that we end up with a system that does not allow the powerful and those who need to answer questions and to be held to account for what they have done—in the normal, courteous manner under which almost all Select Committees operate—not to appear. We cannot allow that to happen because, if we do, we cannot do our job on behalf of the people who send us here. The Liaison Committee debated this issue recently. As I understand it, we have sent to the Privileges Committee the view that there are two sides to the argument and it really needs to be looked into, but I wanted to take this opportunity to say where I stand. We have to ensure that when we call people, they turn up.

1.13 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): The Select Committees of this House do vital work on behalf of the people of the United Kingdom, and the Government are strong supporters of the independence of the Select Committee system. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) and the other members of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee for all their work on behalf of Parliament.

Today's debate is not about the substantive issues under investigation by the Select Committee; it is about Select Committees' right to undertake the duties assigned to them by the House. The Government have full respect for the privileges of the House of Commons and we will continue to uphold them. They are crucial to Parliament's independence and the strength of our democracy. I therefore support the motion.

1.14 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): As a fellow Select Committee Chair, I wholeheartedly support the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins). I hope that the motion is passed and that he

gets the witness he requires. It is unfortunate that it has to go to the stage where he has had to come to the House to move such a motion. It is important that we all support him in these endeavours.

It is imperative that Select Committees secure the witnesses that they feel they require to make progress in their inquiries. We think long and hard about who we consider bringing before the Scottish Affairs Committee. The process involves the Clerks and fellow Committee members, and we look to see who could supply us with the best possible information, which will then shape and inform our inquiries. It is important that we get the people we need.

I totally support the remarks made by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn): we have to get an absolute, determined process for what we do about reluctant witnesses. He and I serve on the Liaison Committee, which is currently considering this issue, and I hope that the Chair of that Committee, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), will say a few words about it so that we know exactly where we are with getting clarity as to what we do with reluctant witnesses. We cannot have a situation in which we in this House require people to help us with our reports and inquiries and they simply refuse to do it. Some of the extraordinary language that Mr Cummings has used to evade that responsibility is quite bizarre and shows nothing other than contempt for the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe's Committee and for this House.

We have been here before: the issue of the Murdochs has been raised, and the Scottish Affairs Committee has had difficulty in securing witnesses, although in the end we have managed to ensure that they came before the Committee. I must say, though, that the situation is not helped by Ministers also refusing to appear before Select Committees. I just made a Select Committee statement on bank closures, to which you listened patiently, Madam Deputy Speaker. I could not get a Treasury Minister to come to my Committee to answer questions about bank closures in Scotland. I am sure that people like Mr Cummings, and others who are reluctant to come before Select Committees, observe that and think, "Well, if Government Ministers will not come in front of Select Committees of the House, why should I?" We have to make sure that if Ministers are asked to come before Select Committees, they come. It is not good enough for them to say that it is not their responsibility or that they answer to another Select Committee.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I endorse what the hon. Gentleman has just said. The same applies to senior officials. The Defence Committee very nearly got to the point of issuing a summons, but common sense broke through. The Government, whether Ministers or senior officials, are required to set a good example.

Pete Wishart: Absolutely. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments; I know that he has had difficulties with securing the appearance of members of the Government. Whether they are civil servants or senior officials, they have to come before a Committee. I hope that that is something that we can take away from this, because I am sure that all these reluctant witnesses the length and breadth of the country are observing what happens today.

The only route available to us is to do exactly as the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe did, which was to get a motion to summon Mr Cummings to come to his Committee. The process is then to go to the Privileges Committee to get a ruling in respect of privilege in this House. We have to look into this matter and make sure that we can amend our practices and procedures to allow us certainty when we deal with reluctant witnesses. I hope that the hon. Gentleman gets his witness, and I am pretty certain that he will, after today's debate—I am sure Mr Cummings is observing what is happening and realising that time is up and he should just agree. Let us put in place a proper process for ensuring that we get the people we need to appear before our Select Committees.

1.18 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I put on record my thanks to all those who appear as witnesses before our Select Committees. Many of them do so knowing that they will face a considerable level of challenge, but they come prepared to put their case, on the public record. They do so because they know that to refuse to appear shows contempt not only for this House but, more importantly, for the public, because Select Committees carry out their work on the public's behalf, and in almost every case the House delegates to us the ability to call for persons, papers and records. That is an extraordinarily important role that we have on behalf of the public.

I join my hon. Friend in condemning the action of Dominic Cummings and the way that he has behaved. It is a disgrace, frankly, and we should call it out. I also think that we need to reflect on what we now do when individuals refuse to appear. I agree with the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) that it is time now to take action. I speak in a personal capacity, because there is a difference of opinion over the pros and cons of taking this matter forward. I welcome the further inquiry of the Privileges Committee. There is a difference of opinion on the pitfalls of involving the courts, but, ultimately, the experience of other jurisdictions such as New Zealand and Australia, which have that final backstop, is that they have not had to use it. There is a case for saying that, where we do not have a final backstop, we will increasingly see examples of witnesses like Mr Cummings refusing to answer to the British people and to Parliament.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Lady also agree that if witnesses feel that they are not obliged or compelled to appear before a Select Committee, they could be bribed or intimidated into not attending? Someone might have an interest in a witness not attending, and bribe them or intimidate them.

Dr Wollaston: There is a danger that people will increasingly come under pressure to make the judgment that, by not appearing at all, the reputational damage will be less, so the hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. However, we have now come to a point where having the final backstop of a penalty—

Dr Julian Lewis: May I just say to my hon. Friend in her role as Chairman of the Liaison Committee that she was enormously helpful to the Defence Committee—as were other members of the Committee—in getting the

[*Dr Julian Lewis*]

senior official to agree to come, and in getting the Prime Minister to agree to his attending the Defence Committee? In the end, it was a very valuable session. I do not know Mr Cummings, but I support his cause, and he is in danger of doing grave damage to the cause that he and I both support because the effect of his refusal is far more damaging than anything that could happen at a hearing if he actually gave evidence. Finally, may I appeal to her to stop using the word “backstop”, which, at the moment, is not my favourite expression?

Dr Wollaston: I thank my right hon. Friend for that point. Yes, the point has been made before that someone may want to call for powers to be restored to Parliament, but actually not when it comes to themselves.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I was pleased to see this motion on the Order Paper today. I serve on the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and we have often had to call witnesses before us who were perhaps not quite as enthusiastic about attending as they should have been. Does she agree that there is some deficiency in this, because the motion on the Order Paper merely asks Mr Cummings to appear before the Committee at a time and place? It does not ask him to appear and answer questions. Would it not have been better to make that specific, because, in theory, it is possible for Mr Cummings to appear but then not to answer any of the questions of the Committee?

Dr Wollaston: I thank my right hon. Friend for her point. Even in other jurisdictions where people can be compelled to appear, they are not compelled necessarily to answer a question. For Mr Cummings to have behaved in the way that he has is a grave contempt not only of this House but, more importantly, of the British people.

Damian Collins: For the benefit of the record, Alexander Nix came back to the Select Committee yesterday to give evidence. We were concerned that he had said things that were not consistent with the evidence we had received, and he came back to correct the record and to answer our questions. He was also under investigation by the Electoral Commission, the Information Commissioner and other agencies and other jurisdictions. He managed the process perfectly well, answering questions where he felt he could and giving guidance where he felt that there were things he could not answer—there were very few of those. Even with someone under investigation who has not yet been charged with an offence it is perfectly possible to conduct a successful hearing.

Dr Wollaston: I thank my hon. Friend for that point.

In closing, I pay tribute again to all those who do appear before our Committees and take the opportunity to thank all members of Select Committees for the work that they put in and all of our staff who do a magnificent job in supporting us. Thank you.

1.24 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) on bringing forward this motion; he was absolutely right to do so. There are whole series of ironies here.

The man who derided unelected bureaucrats in Brussels now, as an unelected bureaucrat, refuses public scrutiny by elected MPs. The man who coined the phrase “Take back control” now defies Parliament when it tries to take back control. And the man who demanded that Britain assert her independent sovereignty denies the sovereignty of Parliament. However, I question in my mind whether that is irony or, frankly, hypocrisy. To be honest, I come to the conclusion that it is hypocrisy. I wondered whether this is some high-minded act of principle, but I think it is not; it is sheer cowardice.

The point has been made that Rupert Murdoch chose in the end to attend the Culture, Media and Sport Committee because he felt that his reputation might be harmed otherwise. Perhaps Mr Cummings thinks that his reputation is now so poor that it could not possibly be harmed any more. In the end, the debate today is not particularly important because of Mr Cummings and his refusal to attend the hearing—it is pretty clear from everything that he has said in his letters, emails and public announcements that he holds Parliament in complete and utter disdain. In the past, we would have been very robust, and more quickly so, than we are being today. The real issue, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) made absolutely clear, is that this poses the question of what we do if, in the end, somebody point blank refuses to attend a hearing.

The idea of sending the Serjeant at Arms is nice and quaint. Yes, undoubtedly he can deliver a letter, but I do not think that he has subpoena powers any more. It is also slightly strange for a political body to arrest somebody, which is, in effect, what we have to be able to do. The idea of politicians deciding on a political motion whether somebody should be arrested is, I am glad to say, anathema under habeas corpus. We simply do not believe in that way of pursuing justice any more.

In the end, we will have to legislate. We will have to make sure that there are proper bodies that operate in full recognition of human rights legislation in this country and in the European convention of human rights and provide due process so that someone cannot claim that they are being arrested on the political whim of politicians.

As my right hon. Friend has already said, two Committees—a Joint Committee and a Committee of this House—have looked at this issue over the past 20 years. They came to different conclusions. They held those conclusions very firmly, and Governments of different colours chose to do absolutely nothing about it. Indeed, the coalition Government produced a White Paper on the matter and said that they were going to legislate, but nothing has happened.

I am really delighted that the Leader of the House is here today because, in the end, she knows, as must everybody else, what will happen if one person decides not to attend and gets away with it. By getting away with it, I mean that either we choose to do absolutely nothing because the Privileges Committee decides that there is nothing that we can do, or we decide that we will just issue a statement saying, “You’re a very naughty boy.” Either of those is, to my mind, impunity. If that happens, every lawyer in the land for a big captain of industry will say, “There is no requirement for you to attend.” The whole thing will be blown to pieces and we will have lost an enormously important part of the way we do our job.

It was Norman St John-Stevas who set up the modern Select Committee system, our pride and joy. Some have argued in recent days that Select Committees should have the power to summon Members of this House, Ministers and Members of the Lords—oddly enough, that is the one thing that they do not have the power to do—but that they should not have the power to summon private individuals. However, in the modern era, Parliament is there to redress the grievances of our constituents, of the whole of the country. Often those grievances are not particularly against the powerful in Government, but against the powerful in every other aspect of our modern life—whether it is those running our broadcasting companies, our newspapers, our big businesses, our greengrocers, our banks, or whatever it may be. We would be losing a phenomenally important tool in holding to account the great and the good, and the powerful in this land if we were to surrender this by default.

I do not mind how we legislate—whether we go with the conclusions of the Joint Committee or the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee—but I am absolutely certain that we will end up having to change the way in which we do our business. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who speaks for the Scottish National party on his 17th anniversary of being an MP, said that we will have to do something. I very much hope that the Leader of the House will take that away. We cannot allow impunity any longer.

Question put and agreed to.

Backbench Business

Tuberculosis

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I remind colleagues that we have two debates to get through this afternoon, and they are both well subscribed. The guidance from the Backbench Business Committee is that opening speeches should last for 10 to 15 minutes. Because of the pressure on time, I will have to impose an immediate time limit of eight minutes once the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) has moved the motion.

1.31 pm

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House recognises that tuberculosis (TB) remains the world's deadliest infectious disease, killing 1.7 million people a year; notes that at the current rate of progress, the world will not reach the Sustainable Development Goal target of ending TB by 2030 for another 160 years; believes that without a major change of pace 28 million people will die needlessly before 2030 at a global economic cost of £700 billion; welcomes the forthcoming UN high-level meeting on TB in New York on 26 September as an unprecedented opportunity to turn the tide against this terrible disease; further notes that the UN General Assembly Resolution encourages all member states to participate in the high-level meeting at the highest possible level, preferably at the level of heads of state and government; and calls on the Government to renew its efforts in the global fight against TB, boost research into new drugs, diagnostics and a vaccine, and for the Prime Minister to attend the UN high-level meeting.

The motion stands in my name and that of the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma), and I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing us to have this debate on ending tuberculosis.

I believe that this is the first time that this issue has been debated on the Floor of this House for 65 years. Responding to an Adjournment debate in 1952, the Joint Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, Commander T.D. Galbraith, said:

“Tuberculosis is still the major health problem in Scotland...we must press forward...with every weapon that is available to us until the disease, which is said to be preventable, has been eradicated.”—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1952; Vol. 495, c. 158.]

At that time, people were optimistic because antibiotics had been discovered and put into mass production, housing was improving and there was no longer any reason to believe that tuberculosis would not be beaten. Tuberculosis was the great killer of history. A disease that dates back at least 7,000 years, it has killed 2 billion people in the last two centuries alone. John Bunyan said that TB was

“the captain of all these men of death”.

TB—otherwise known as consumption or the white death—is caused by a tiny bacteria. When it was first identified in 1882, it was still killing one in seven people. Indeed, TB killed more people in the United States in the late 19th century than any other disease. It is a disease that has killed kings, poets and paupers throughout history. Tutankhamun, Edward VI, Cardinal Richelieu, Eleanor Roosevelt, Keats, Chekhov, Emily Brontë, D. H. Lawrence, Orwell and Chopin all died from TB. Of course, the heroines of the operas “La bohème” and “La traviata” notoriously die from tuberculosis. That

[Nick Herbert]

was expected in that age, which was not so long ago. Millions of others down the ages have suffered from TB—notably, Nelson Mandela, who suffered greatly from it.

With better housing, better nutrition, the discovery of penicillin by Fleming in 1928, and the mass production of antibiotics in the 1940s, it was thought that tuberculosis would be beaten. In 1962, a Nobel laureate virologist said:

“To write about infectious disease is almost to write of something that has passed into history.”

But TB was not eradicated or eliminated at all. It resurged on the back of the AIDS epidemic. TB is a bug carried by a third of the world’s population that can exist in our bodies latently, but strikes when immune systems are compromised.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. I chair the all-party parliamentary group on HIV and AIDS, and he knows that we very much share his concerns about TB and are pleased to work with his all-party parliamentary group on global tuberculosis. Today, we met the chief executive of the he Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that organisation is doing excellent work, not least on co-morbidity, as people live with HIV/AIDS and TB? People living with HIV are 30 times more likely to develop active TB, and TB is the leading killer of people with AIDS.

Nick Herbert: I strongly agree with the hon. Gentleman that the diseases must be treated together. However, great progress has been made on tackling AIDS, partly because of the tremendous new tools available. By comparison, less progress has been made on tuberculosis. Last year, 1.7 million people died of tuberculosis. That is more than AIDS and malaria combined. The single fact that most people do not realise is that tuberculosis is now the world’s deadliest infectious disease, and it deserves more attention than it gets. Some 10 million people globally are falling ill each year as a result of this disease.

TB was declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organisation 24 years ago. Since then, 54 million people have died. That is not a great advert for the declaration of a global health emergency. Three years ago in New York, the world’s leaders set the sustainable development goals. Target 3.3 was to eliminate these major epidemics in 15 years. At the current trajectory, TB will not be eliminated for 160 years, so another 28 million people will die in the sustainable development goal period alone, costing the world economy \$1 trillion cumulatively. Middle and lower-income countries will be the most severely hit, with lower-income countries experiencing a reduction of something like 2% of their GDP.

On top of this, there are new threats. I mentioned that TB strikes when immune systems are compromised, and they can be compromised in new ways, including by the acquisition of diabetes. In Indonesia, TB is striking people with diabetes, which is a growing problem.

Above all—this should concern the House greatly—is the growing risk of drug resistance. TB is the only major drug resistant infection that is transmitted through

the air. It is already responsible for one in three deaths worldwide from all forms of drug resistance. Drug resistance generally now kills 700,000 people a year, but Lord O’Neill’s commission, set up by David Cameron, predicted that drug resistance would kill 10 million people a year by 2050, and that those deaths would fall in the west and advanced economies, not just in poor and middle-income ones. That compares with, for instance, 8 million deaths a year from cancer. We are talking about catastrophic loss and catastrophic economic cost, with a cumulative GDP loss of \$100 trillion, knocking 2% to 3.5% off global GDP. It is significant that a quarter of those deaths from antimicrobial resistance would be due to tuberculosis, which is already responsible for a third of antimicrobial resistance deaths; that is 200,000 deaths a year.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. Will he also accept the connection between TB and conflict? In the parts of the world where TB is rife—including South Sudan, which I know very well—conflict is adding to the complexity for people suffering from disease.

Nick Herbert: That is a very interesting point. TB is a disease of poverty. This opportunistic infection will strike if there are no basic health systems and if nutrition and housing are poor, and all those conditions would probably exist in areas of conflict.

Drug-resistant TB is a terrible affliction. It can be dealt with, but even in an advanced healthcare system, it requires a course of treatment in which some 14,000 pills have to be taken. This treatment is appalling, as it can cause patients to become deaf and creates a lot of suffering. Only half of drug-resistant TB patients are successfully treated. In fact, there is a lower survival rate for drug-resistant TB than for lung cancer.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Just to step back, the right hon. Gentleman mentioned diabetes. In this country, we can change our lifestyles as we have access to lots of food and other things to reduce diabetes, but people in third-world countries where TB and diabetes are rampant do not have the same choice. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that this complicates issues?

Nick Herbert: I do agree. There is a growing list of reasons why we should act, and that is one of them.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is making a very powerful speech. He is right to draw attention to the scale of the problem in the developed world as well as the developing world. In my constituency, the incidence is now about the same as in Sudan, at just over 80 per 100,000. Does he agree that it is important that people realise that, notwithstanding drug resistance, this is a treatable and curable condition and that people need to get help when they are suffering from it?

Nick Herbert: Again, I do agree. The scale of TB in London makes it one of the TB capitals of Europe. We have some 5,000 cases of TB in the UK. That figure is coming down with the new public health strategy, but it is still too high. The right hon. Gentleman is right. This

disease is easily and cheaply curable, and it has been since the discovery of antibiotics, so why are we not doing it?

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his very powerful speech. Further to his points about the importance of public health, would he urge the Government, in their future strategy, to make sure that we look at NHS public health and social care as part of a single system?

Nick Herbert: Yes. My hon. Friend is probably aware that there is a collaborative TB strategy that was introduced by the Government, urged by the all-party parliamentary group on global TB, which the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall and I co-chair. That strategy shows very promising signs. It represents exactly the kind of partnership that we need between Public Health England and NHS England. I commend the Government for having introduced that partnership.

Most people do not realise that there is no vaccine for tuberculosis. There is a child vaccine, BCG, that some of us had when we were young, but there is no adult vaccine that works for tuberculosis—and no epidemic in human history has been beaten without a vaccine. The reason there is no vaccine is that there is market failure. Unlike HIV/AIDS, this is primarily a disease of the poor. With HIV/AIDS, there were people dying in western countries as well. The pharmaceutical companies do not have a commercial incentive to invest in the new tools that we need—better drugs, better diagnostics and a vaccine. Without partnership funding that comes from the Government, and Governments around the world who can afford it, we will not develop these new tools and we will not beat TB in the requisite timeframe.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for all the work he does on TB. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on malaria and neglected tropical diseases, I would like to point out that there is a malaria vaccine, which is being deployed for the first time. We are not sure how effective it is. It is clearly quite effective, but a lot more work needs to be done on it. Companies such as GSK, which is behind this vaccine, are prepared to invest in these things even though they have no commercial return from them. Let us hope that a similar approach will be taken by commercial companies and Governments in respect of TB.

Nick Herbert: I agree that some companies are willing to take a non-commercial view, such as Johnson & Johnson and Osaka Pharmaceuticals, but many other major pharmaceutical companies are not developing new TB tools because there is no commercial incentive. Therefore, we do need that partnership funding to make this happen.

I would argue that there are three powerful reasons for us to act: a humanitarian reason because of the number of deaths, an economic reason because of the cost to the global economy of not doing so, and a global health security reason because of the risk of drug resistance.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I make a practical suggestion? We sometimes hear that the overseas aid budget struggles to find the best possible

causes in which to invest our 0.7% of GNI. Could the rules possibly allow for an investment from that funding in the sort of research that is necessary to find a cure for TB?

Nick Herbert: My understanding is that they already do. That is a good example of how we already—although we need to do more—deploy the resources that are available to us. Indeed, the commitment that we make as the second biggest donor to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria—£1.2 billion in the last replenishment—has been made possible because of the increase in aid spending and the target that has been set.

At last, this disease is commanding greater political attention. It has got on to the G7 and G20 agenda, partly because of the lobbying that is being done by the Global TB Caucus, which I co-chair with South Africa's Health Minister, and now numbers 2,500 parliamentarians in 130 countries. In November, there was a WHO ministerial summit in Moscow. In February, Prime Minister Modi of India announced a TB strategy.

Above all, there is a reason to be optimistic because, at the United Nations on 26 September, there will be, for the first time ever, a high-level meeting on tuberculosis that it is intended that Heads of Government and Heads of State will attend, where a new declaration will be launched, with a commitment by the world's leaders to act. That has to address the current funding gap whereby we are \$6 billion a year short of the funding needed properly to eliminate TB by the SDG deadline in 15 years' time. It also has to introduce greater accountability so that Governments are locked into proper targets to ensure that they really do reduce TB. In addition, there needs to be a dramatic increase in research and development to develop the new tools that I mentioned. All this requires leadership.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I am hoping to speak later in the debate, but my right hon. Friend is already making a powerful case. Has he had any indication from the Prime Minister on whether she intends to attend that high-level meeting, because it would seem to be of great significance that she does?

Nick Herbert: My right hon. Friend asks a very pertinent question. Last month, 100 Members of this House and the other place wrote to the Prime Minister to ask if she would attend the meeting. The motion before the House specifically requests that the Prime Minister attend, as the UN General Assembly has asked. So far—understandably, I believe—the Prime Minister is not committing to attend.

In the time remaining to me, I would like to make the case for the Prime Minister to attend this meeting. It would be completely consistent with UK Government policy. We have made that major investment in the global fund. We are world leaders in international development. We set the agenda on antimicrobial resistance. We have a leadership position, and we should take it on this issue. TB is now the world's deadliest infectious disease. This needs the support and attention of the world's leaders. The UK is in a very powerful position to show that leadership and to give that support. Indeed, it is very difficult to see what would be the downside of the Prime Minister attending. I believe it would be all

[Nick Herbert]

upside, and it would send a very powerful message to other world leaders. It is completely consistent with the ambition for a global Britain. Indeed, it is worth noting that TB is an issue in 19 Commonwealth countries, and 17 of the Department for International Development's priority countries are high-burden.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity. The high-level meeting is the chance, at last, for this disease to get the attention that it needs. It is an easily and cheaply curable disease. Frankly, it is a global scandal that so many people are losing their lives completely unnecessarily when since the 1940s they need not have done so. We can act and we should act. The UK can play a major role in this respect. Speaking at the UN on Monday, I was asked what was the single message that I would want to send to the world's leaders about whether or not they should attend. I simply said this: if 1.7 million deaths a year is not enough to encourage the world's leaders to attend, what is?

1.48 pm

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) on securing this very important debate and on his very powerful speech.

Tuberculosis remains the world's deadliest infectious disease. It was responsible for the deaths of 1.7 million people in 2017. TB was declared a global emergency in 1993, and the sustainable development goals envisioned ending it by 2030. At the current rate of progress, this target will not be reached for 160 years.

I have the privilege of representing a Liverpool constituency where work of world-class excellence in combating this scourge is based. Liverpool University's Institute of Infection and Global Health, led by Professor Tom Solomon, and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine are international leaders. They undertake world-renowned collaborative research in this area. It is because of Liverpool's outstanding work that it was chosen as host of the 47th Union World Conference on Lung Health in October 2016. I was pleased to be able to participate in that in a small way.

The work in Liverpool to combat this disease is wide-ranging. Scientists at the Institute of Infection and Global Health are leading a €25 million European public-private partnership aiming to accelerate development of new combinations of drugs to fight TB, both in the UK and abroad. They are also looking at how poverty is contributing to the challenge of tuberculosis. Poor people are more likely develop the disease and, indeed, to die from it.

The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine undertakes significant research into complex poverty-driven global diseases, including TB. The International Multidisciplinary Programme to Address Lung Health and TB in Africa—IMPALA—is led by Professor Bertie Squire, Dr Angela Obasi and Dr Kevin Mortimer. It is a £7 million project funded by the National Institute for Health Research to create an Africa-focused NIHR global health research unit for lung health and TB. It works across 11 African countries, and its work includes strengthening research infrastructure in African institutions.

Dr Gerry Davies is leading the major €25 million European public-private partnership aimed at accelerating the development of new combinations of drugs to fight TB. He is also part of a WHO taskforce on treating TB. STREAM is an international project to investigate treatment of anti-TB drugs for patients with multi-drug-resistant TB, which is a major issue in combating the disease. The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine is one of the international collaborators on that vital project.

The relationship between poverty and the growth and spread of TB has been mentioned, and significant parts of the pioneering work taking place in Liverpool focus on that relationship. Dr Tom Wingfield is leading much of that research, including studies currently taking place in Peru. He is part of the WHO's taskforce on the catastrophic effects of TB, and he is also responsible for cross-campus collaboration between Liverpool University and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. Some of the key work involves training conducted by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine that focuses on TB microbiology, epidemiology, care and prevention, and it attracts international students.

Those are just a few examples of the inspirational work based in Liverpool. It reflects dedicated people with high levels of expertise and institutions that enable this important work to progress internationally in a collaborative way. It is about combating a disease that takes millions of lives a year.

I agree that much more international support is required, and I fully endorse the call from the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs for the Prime Minister and others of a high status to attend the important impending conference. That is vital to show the importance attached to combating this dreadful disease. International support and more funding are required, but I ask the House to take note of the groundbreaking collaborative work currently taking place in Liverpool. Liverpool should be proud.

1.53 pm

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): May I start by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) on not only his excellent speech but the way in which he has pursued this matter relentlessly across an international audience? He is renowned on an international basis, as I know myself.

I am proud to represent the UK at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe with many other colleagues from both sides of the House. The Council of Europe represents 47 countries and is an institution that is far older than—and, I think, vastly superior to—the European Union. It takes up some very important matters. I am pleased to report that on 27 April, in our main plenary session, we were privileged to hear from a very competent and capable Ukrainian Member of Parliament, Serhii Kiral, who was appointed the rapporteur for the “Drug-resistant tuberculosis in Europe” report, contained in document 14525 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. He presented his report, which was passed unanimously in the plenary session.

Mr Kiral has done much investigation into this area, and he started his speech by saying:

“My report is about fighting tuberculosis, but tuberculosis is like corruption—you do not see it, but it is there. It is equally dangerous, but it is also curable.”

Although many of us thought that TB was a disease of the past, he informed us that during the course of his investigations a professor from the University of Oslo told delegates from the Council of Europe on a fact-finding mission that more than 900 new cases are registered every day. Europe accounts for one in five multi-drug-resistant TB cases in the world, and nine out of 30 countries that the World Health Organisation has identified as needing to solve their TB problems are in Europe. It is of particular concern that 45% of cases affect young individuals aged between 25 and 44.

Owing to the time limit, I will concentrate not on the broader facts but on two specific areas: the importance of disease surveillance and diagnostic gaps. On World TB Day this year, 24 March, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control released an alarming set of statistics, including the fact that the number of cases of extensively drug-resistant TB has increased fourteenfold in the last four years, with almost 5,000 cases reported in 2016, the majority being in eastern Europe. Those statistics are startling and demonstrate the vital importance of TB surveillance systems.

Epidemiological surveillance is a vital global public health investment, since it allows experts to monitor the trajectory of the epidemic and, particularly in the case of the emergence and spread of drug resistance, allows us to identify where we are failing and how we need to address it. Marieke van der Werf, who is the head of tuberculosis at the ECDC, has confirmed that the threat to Europe is caused by the mobility of people who bring drug resistance with them. Countries really need to be vigilant about that. The data released by the ECDC is available because of investments in laboratory and surveillance infrastructures. Routine surveillance of drug-resistant TB, where every case identified is reported, is now available in 90 countries worldwide, with the majority being in Europe and North America.

At the global level, progress is being made. Since 2015, 22 high-burden countries have begun the process of conducting national drug resistance surveys, six of them for the first time ever. In 2016, we saw the discovery of an additional 600,000 cases of TB as a result of those surveys. It is clear that the data garnered from those surveys will be vital in shaping the global response, but gaps remain to be filled.

The need for urgent action is self-evident on the basis of current data alone, but to ensure that our efforts are as appropriately targeted as possible, we had better get on with it. Will the Minister work with colleagues across Government, as well as bilateral and multilateral partners, to improve TB surveillance globally, particularly for drug-resistant forms of TB, including through future programmes of the Fleming fund?

Ultimately, all efforts rely on the availability of accurate diagnostic tests. Currently, that is far from guaranteed, to the detriment of both epidemic preparedness and the individual patient. In 2016, some 3.8 million cases of TB were never formally reported, going completely undiagnosed or at risk of being treated inappropriately. In the same year, just 57% of reported cases were bacteriologically confirmed, and of those, just 39% were tested for resistance against first-line drugs.

In the past 10 years, immense progress has been made in the diagnosis of TB, with new diagnostic tests that allow for accurate diagnosis and the detection of first-line drug resistance in under two hours having the potential

to transform our fight against TB. Despite those advancements, however, the vast majority of TB diagnoses made today still rely on the methodology used by Robert Koch to discover TB in 1882. When the Minister responds to the debate, will she commit to finding the missing millions, and to working with partners to guarantee access to WHO recommended diagnostics for all people at risk from TB?

I conclude by returning to the UN meeting and the motion before the House today. This issue is of such importance to the lives of people around the world because of increasingly mobility and the flows of people. It is of such significance that I feel the Prime Minister must put in an appearance on behalf of the UK, not only to bang the drum about the advances we have made, but to make that valuable contribution that will save lives. If one statistic brought me up, it was learning that 700 children die every day from TB. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs said, if those statistics are not enough to make world leaders sit up, take notice and attend this meeting, goodness only knows what would be enough.

I am sure we will hear about the projected economic effects of TB in subsequent contributions. If anybody wants to look at them they are quite alarming. They provide both the head and the heart with a reason to participate in this high-level UN meeting, and I therefore hope that the Prime Minister will attend and give this issue her full attention. It is probably one of the most important things she will be asked to do to save lives around the world.

2.1 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan); I echo everything she said about this important subject. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) on securing this important and long overdue debate, on his active leadership of the all-party group on global tuberculosis, and on his co-chairing the Global TB Caucus. I also echo everything said by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) about the fantastic contribution made in this field by Liverpool University and Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.

Let us all welcome the upcoming UN high-level meeting on tuberculosis because it is an unprecedented opportunity for Governments around the world to come together and secure a global commitment to bring an end to the world's deadliest infectious disease. I join other Members, and the motion, in saying that I very much hope the Prime Minister will attend the meeting in September, as that would send a powerful signal of the United Kingdom's leadership and commitment to tackling deadly diseases and global health emergencies wherever they develop.

As the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs rightly reminded us, goal 3 of the global goals for sustainable development is "good health and well-being", and it commits the world to bringing an end to TB by 2030. That is in just 12 years' time, and it would be no small feat. On current projections, we are not likely to see an end to TB for 150 years, because the current rate of decline is about 2% on average, and it needs to be closer to 10% if we are to eradicate the disease by 2030.

[Stephen Twigg]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) reminded us, many of those who live with TB are also living with HIV, and people with HIV have a weaker immune system, meaning that they are at much greater risk of developing TB. People with HIV are up to 27 times more likely to develop active tuberculosis than the average person. I welcome the Minister to her place, and when she responds to the debate, will she say whether the Department for International Development has any plans to develop a new strategy to deal with the two ongoing health emergencies of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS?

Worryingly, of the 10 million people who fell ill with TB last year, only two thirds were diagnosed with the disease—that builds on what the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham said about diagnosis being a key challenge. Almost 4 million people were therefore “missing”, either because they were misdiagnosed or because they did not receive the correct treatment. Children often fare the worst, as just a quarter of cases of TB in children under five are diagnosed correctly and successfully. That has significant implications for treatment. TB is a curable disease, but it requires strict, continuous treatment with a number of antibiotics over a period of months. One reason why drug-resistant TB is becoming such a major problem is that many people do not finish their course of antibiotics, leaving them with mutated TB that is resistant to new antibiotics.

How can we address this issue? Funding is clearly a major part of the challenge we face, and the WHO’s global TB report suggests that more than \$9 billion a year is needed to deal effectively with the crisis. In 2016, the amount available was less than \$7 billion, so there was a shortfall of more than \$2 billion, and funding is a serious barrier to making real progress on driving down the incidence of tuberculosis. The Department for International Development spends £2.3 million on solely TB-focused programmes, but some of the £93 million that it spends on broader infectious disease control is also allocated to tuberculosis. If we are serious about seeing an end to TB by 2030, we must ensure that the funds are there to meet that ambition.

The funding issue is compounded by some of the questions about poverty and TB that a number of hon. Members have addressed in this debate. In recent years, DFID has rightly focused more of its work on the poorest people in the poorest countries, but TB is often a major killer in countries where DFID no longer provides, or is migrating out of, bilateral official development assistance. That is a real challenge not just for DFID, but for the rest of Government and the international system. It is right that UK ODA is focused on the poorest countries, but we must ensure that middle and even high-income countries have effective mechanisms to deal with TB. The World Bank has been looking at mechanisms to help to fund a response to TB in countries that are not eligible for ODA. For example, low-interest loans could be made available to those countries to help them tackle their ongoing TB issues, allowing them to deal with TB without shifting funds from other areas of public expenditure. DFID has a wealth of experience in tackling infectious diseases, but if the money is not there to support those programmes, there is a risk that

they fall flat or do not get off the ground in the first place. Will the Minister say what more DFID plans to do to tackle that significant funding gap?

The right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham rightly focused on diagnosis, and we know that even when somebody shows the symptoms of TB, it is often difficult to diagnose. The tests take a long time and are often inaccurate. They also suffer from low sensitivity—that is the ability to correctly detect people with TB—or low specificity, which is the ability to detect people who do not have TB. Together, those two factors mean that people who take TB tests often receive a false negative or a false positive, and that can only further perpetuate the spread of TB in general, and of drug-resistant TB in particular. We need more accurate testing, such as the culture test, although that can take several weeks and its administration requires specialised equipment and skilled medical staff. Clearly a radical new approach is needed to ensure that there is the best diagnosis, treatment and prevention. That will involve improving our understanding of the basic science behind diagnostics, drugs and vaccines, as well as increasing research and development.

Education about disease prevention is important, and some of the most obvious steps in prevention are often the most effective, such as washing hands regularly, or covering our mouths when we sneeze or cough. That might sound obvious, but such small lifestyle changes can go a long way to prevent the spread of TB. Education is also important during the treatment phase, as people need to know how to take their antibiotics correctly and to be aware of the implications of skipping treatment. Will the Minister say what DFID in particular is doing to work with other Government Departments, including Health, to find new and more effective ways to both diagnose and treat TB?

DFID, rightly, is a hugely respected development body in the world. It has long played a strong leadership role in health emergencies. We have an opportunity, as set out in the motion, to reinforce that long-standing UK reputation. The United Kingdom has a chance, if the Prime Minister attends the UN high-level meeting, to send a very clear signal to the world of our priorities and our commitment to fighting TB.

2.10 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate and to follow some excellent speeches. I hope that we do not have to wait a further 65 years before we have the opportunity to debate this important matter again. My right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) and the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) are vocal campaigners on this subject. I am encouraged by the fact that we are now giving it the attention it deserves, particularly in the same week as the UN civil society hearing on the fight against tuberculosis.

I would like to add to some of the dreadful statistics we have heard this afternoon. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) pointed out that around the world an estimated 700 children a day die from this disease. I want to make it clear that 80% of those deaths occur before that child is five. Fewer than 5% of those children have access to the sort of treatment that we all know could save their lives. Treatment gets ever easier. Thanks to DFID-funded

research, new child-friendly drugs have been developed. They taste of strawberry and can be added to water in a single dose, which makes things much easier for doctors and parents who until now have had to try to get children to take adult-sized pills. We have done the research on so much of this. We now need to ensure that the treatment programmes are rolled out so that many, many more of those 700 children a day who are dying of this disease get the treatment that they need.

I heard what the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) said about treatment in countries where DFID is no longer actively engaged. That is critical in relation to the worldwide disease, but we should also be concerned that TB is still prevalent in the UK. Some of the highest rates in the developed world are found right here in the city we are standing in. My own family has personal experience of tuberculosis. When this matter was last debated in the Chamber, my grandfather was very ill and ultimately died of the disease in south Wales. Since I became an MP some three years ago, I have been surprised to note that I have had quite a lot of casework to do with TB in north Oxfordshire. One of those cases involves a constituent who moved to the UK in the late 1990s. He joined the British Army in 2009. During phase two of his basic training, he was diagnosed with TB. He had never been diagnosed with it before; it has been assumed that he contracted it during his training.

I have also had cases involving the immigration process for people applying for visas from countries including Morocco, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic. They have to undergo quite invasive TB tests by a Home Office-approved clinic as part of their application process. Clearly, the Government, in the wider sense, recognise the extent of the problem, but there is perhaps not always the joined-up cross-departmental working needed to tackle it.

We should be proud of the Government's efforts so far in the fight against tuberculosis. We should be proud of our contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The number of new TB infections is dropping. DFID's support in developing new drug combinations to treat TB and the provision of funding to the TB Alliance demonstrates our commitment. In Oxfordshire—we heard earlier about Liverpool, so it is only fair that I mention Oxfordshire—we are fortunate to have one of the world's largest TB vaccine research centres, based at the University of Oxford. With the support of the Medical Research Council, the Wellcome Trust, DFID and product development partnerships, the centre has been able to undertake cutting-edge research. I am hopeful that that will transform how we treat TB in the future.

There is clearly a great deal more to do. I am sure that the Minister will mention the progress we have made because of DFID's investment in research. Like everybody else who has spoken, I would welcome assurances that the Prime Minister, or another senior Minister if she is unavailable, will attend the UN's high-level meeting in September to ensure that research is appropriately funded and co-ordinated so that it can be sustained in future.

I am also concerned that primary healthcare services and maternal and child health programmes are too often run separately from TB programmes. Awareness among healthcare workers, and the capacity more broadly for diagnosis and treatment, remain limited. I

hope that the Minister will be able to provide reassurances that she will look at how we improve access to vital diagnosis and treatment services, in particular for children with TB.

My grandfather probably got TB from infected milk. We do not know and we will never know. We still have much to learn about the way in which TB spreads and about cross-species transmission. I would not be doing my job as the Member for Banbury if I did not mention in a debate on TB the fact that bovine TB remains a very hot issue in the fields and market towns I represent. I appreciate that this falls outside the Minister's remit, but I have serious concerns about the continued effect of bovine TB and its human impact on the farming communities I represent. The relevant Minister from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met me and my hon. Friends the Members for Henley (John Howell) and for Witney (Robert Courts) earlier this week to discuss how to reduce TB in cows in our area. We looked at compensation levels for farmers and reduction mechanisms, such as whether we can stop store cattle being moved from high-risk to low-risk areas. We also talked about badger control. If we are to eradicate TB once and for all, we have to look at what is happening in species other than our own.

We have made great progress in the right direction, but there is still much more to do, both at home and abroad. I hope that we will have the chance to talk about tuberculosis many times before we reach our goal—hopefully well before 2030—of eliminating it.

2.17 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a very brief contribution to the debate. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who made a very good contribution. There is a bit of controversy about the Government's solution to bovine TB, but it is a very serious issue and it does need to be addressed. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) on securing the debate, his excellent presentation of all the facts and the sterling leadership he has given the House on this issue over a considerable period of time. It is valued and valuable, and we are grateful for the amount of time and effort he puts into it. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for affording the time for the debate.

The right hon. Gentleman, in his presentation, said that the motion succinctly outlines the main issues, so I do not see any reason for me to repeat all the messages contained in the excellent contributions we have already heard and I am sure we will hear before the close of the debate. It will suffice if I just make a few points.

TB is the world's deadliest infection with, as we have heard, 1.7 million deaths in 2017. The WHO declared it a global health emergency in 1993 and it has not diminished since then. The UK has a very proud record. DFID should be pleased with the respect and recognition it and the UK have received for helping to address the issue across the world. World progress, however, is slow. It appears that the comparison with funding for HIV/AIDS and for malaria does not stand up to scrutiny, and I will come back to that in questions that I will pose to the Minister in due course.

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

If I may, however, I will stray for a moment from infectious diseases to one of the world's other huge killers—that is, road crashes—which has an even lower profile. Annually, 1.25 million people die on the world's roads and 20 million are seriously injured. The figures for malaria—I am not diminishing this in any way, shape or form—show that 429,000 died from malaria in 2015, which is the last year for which figures are available, and 1 million died from HIV/AIDS. There were 1.25 million deaths from road crashes. The UN and the World Health Organisation have recognised that this carnage needs to be addressed and two specific sustainable development goals address just that issue.

The United Kingdom is a world leader on safer roads. We can be of great help to many countries. The fire and rescue service and fire industry charity Fire Aid, which I chair, delivers post-crash response equipment and training to 30 countries. We are engaged with DFID and the Department for Transport and I hope that we can strengthen those links in future, because we can contribute much more to reducing these awful deaths—many are children on the way to and from school.

As I mentioned, I have just a few questions to pose to the Minister. I would be grateful if she could respond later, and if not, I would be very happy to receive correspondence in due course. First, can DFID commit to working with partners to close the TB funding gap? Secondly, will UK embassies champion TB in all high TB burden countries? Thirdly, will DFID establish a specific programme for new resources for TB, as it has for malaria and HIV/AIDS? Fourthly, will the Minister make DFID's overall investment in HIV, TB and malaria in each of the last five years available through the devtracker website?

In conclusion, east London has been the hotspot in the UK for TB for—forever probably, but certainly in recent years. As the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs mentioned, the number of notifiable TB cases was 5,000 in 2017, down from 8,000 in 2011. We are going in the right direction, but people still die from TB in the UK, so it is a domestic issue as well as a global one.

I am grateful to consultant physician Dr Veronica White and her colleagues—she is a TB specialist at Barts and the Royal London NHS Trust—for all the work that they do in east London and to help the UK's efforts, and for her briefing. I am also grateful to Alysa Remtulla from STOPAIDS and Janika Hauser from the all-party group on Global Tuberculosis for their assistance in producing briefings for all of us for this debate.

This is a hugely important issue. I echo the request to the Prime Minister—I think I signed the letter that the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs circulated last year—to attend the high-level global meeting. She will need relief from Brexit at some point. This would give her the perfect antidote by letting her concentrate on something on which I am sure the whole House will agree. It will give her the opportunity to take her mind off what is happening here and between us and the Commission.

2.23 pm

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Sometimes we come to a debate in the House of Commons and really learn things. I am grateful for the speeches that we have heard so far, because I have learned a lot. I particularly learned about the work that the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) has done and I pay huge tribute to him not just for securing this debate, but for that. The fact that parliamentarians from this House work around the world to tackle this incredible disease is a tribute to the House and, of course, to him.

It is also great that this country, with cross-party support for the 0.7% of GDP, is enabled through DFID to take a leadership role. One of the reasons we should always defend the cross-party achievement of raising the level of spending on overseas aid is that it can do such a huge amount of good. The relatively small sums of money that are spent on research into TB, for example, can do such a huge amount of good—the value for money is unquestionable.

That is what I want to pick up on in the first part of my remarks. The right hon. Gentleman talked about this concern in reference to Lord O'Neill's report: although we are having some success, the danger is that with drug-resistant TB, the success will be reversed. Therefore, the urgent need to redouble our efforts, either through DFID funding or by working with others at the UN, could not be greater. If there is one thing that I would urge the Minister to do, not only in replying to this debate but when she goes back to Whitehall, it is to see what more we can do on that. There is some fantastic work, including the trials that we saw in 2013 and 2014, and the trials that are ongoing, which will not report for a few years. There is the work that Médecins sans Frontières and some of the great scientists in our universities are doing. We need to make sure that that concludes and helps us to produce the new drugs that will be essential to avoiding, frankly, a global pandemic, if we are not careful. Remember that this is an infectious disease that kills more people than any other infectious disease in the world, so the importance of that work cannot be underestimated.

I want to turn back to this country, following on from the remarks made by the right hon. Gentleman, the mover of the motion. This is a disease that hits the poorest in society, whether in developing countries or in the UK. We have had real success in this country in reducing the incidence—it has fallen by nearly 40% in the last six years—and we should pay tribute to Public Health England, the NHS and all the people who are working to bring that about. However, one group in our society is not seeing a reduction—that is, the very poorest. Homeless people, drug and alcohol addicts, prisoners and destitute migrants are not seeing any reduction, and one can sort of understand why. Their need for formal healthcare is much greater. A homeless person is twice as likely to die from TB as any other person who contracts TB, so we have to look at that group of people.

Some work is being pushed, and Governments have responded to this need. In particular, I want to bring the work of the London find and treat team to the House's attention. The team have just one van. They have a mobile digital X-ray unit, and they find, diagnose and enable people to access the healthcare that they

need. Remember that this is an infectious disease, so it is really important that we find and treat, so that we help those people to help wider society.

I have one spending request for the Minister. There has been a pledge that there will be more money for these find and treat teams in the UK, so that we can help the most vulnerable in society who are contracting this disease, among whom the incidence of TB has not gone down. I do not believe that this is a massive spending request, but if we could find a bit more to help those find and treat teams—indeed, to expand their work so that it is not just on TB, but on one or two other infectious disease that have high incidences—that would be a tremendous advance, and I am sure that it would get cross-party support. The Minister may not be able to answer that today, but if she could say that that outreach work could be a real boon and talk to colleagues about it, I would be grateful.

I end by paying tribute to those from this House who have done such great work around the world. It is truly impressive.

2.28 pm

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) and all the other speakers. I fully support the motion and all the actions that it calls for. Much has been said about the urgency of ending the scourge of tuberculosis abroad, but I want to focus on what we can do here in the UK to help to stamp out TB among our citizens. If we are going to champion the fight against TB in countries where the prevalence is far greater, but where the general economic situation is far poorer, how can we hold our heads up when England still has one of the highest rates of TB in western Europe? That is from the Public Health England report of this March, so I apologise to colleagues from other nations of the UK—no doubt the figures are similar there.

Of course I support research into the causes and prevention of TB. Of course I support our programmes abroad to help to reduce the millions of deaths in less developed countries. Of course I support the search for new, more effective drugs, but we already know some of the causes, and the lack of effective policies on poverty and homelessness in our country make our commitments to eradicating TB abroad look—how shall I say this?—inconsistent. Public Health England is doing many of the right things, such as improving access to testing and diagnosis, but if we look for the reasons for the 20-year rise in TB rates in the UK from the mid-1980s to the early years of this century, the causal factors are not hard to find.

Some of the policies of the present Government, and, indeed, all Governments since the 1980s, have not helped. First, there is homelessness. Whether the homeless person was born in the Marshall Islands or in Margate, we know that if they are sleeping rough they are far more susceptible to infection and far less likely to seek treatment. Thirty per cent. of people in this country with TB do not seek treatment for more than four months, even after the symptoms have started, and during that time they are infecting the people around them. A very high proportion of those people are marginalised, without easy access to healthcare and

without the motivation to seek it. We can try to work with homeless people, and I was delighted to hear about the London find and treat team, but how much better and more effective it would be to eradicate homelessness, and especially rough sleeping.

Secondly, there is our attitude to immigrants. It is yet another outcome of the hostile environment that so many immigrants suffer from diseases and do not have the information or the confidence that would enable them to seek help. Three quarters of TB sufferers in this country last year had not been born in the United Kingdom. That does not mean that they brought the disease with them, but it does mean that we do not do enough to inform immigrants to this country of the healthcare that is available, and do not give them the confidence to seek help from official organisations, including the national health service.

Jim Fitzpatrick: My hon. Friend is making a very important point. A matter that attracted quite a bit of controversy about 10 years ago was the number of people coming to this country as refugees or asylum seekers, from sub-Saharan Africa in particular, suffering from TB. The question to NHS England at that point was, should they be screened on entry? There was sensitivity about whether that was discriminatory and whether it was the right thing to do. It now appears that there has been an adjustment to the attitude of NHS England, which is screening people much more effectively. We need to let people know that they are carrying the disease and we can help them, but that means that we need to check them as they come into the country. There is great sensitivity about that, and I am not sure what the current position is.

Sandy Martin: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful intervention. I would fully support a screening programme to help people who have TB and do not know it to receive the treatment that they need, and I cannot understand why anyone would be opposed to that. However, we are not just talking about people who were infected when they arrived; we are also talking about immigrants in this country who have contracted TB and who are afraid to go to the national health service, or do not know how to do so. Unless all UK residents can trust the major public institutions in our country, we are endangering ourselves. I urge Her Majesty's Government to carry out a serious study of the take-up of health services by first-generation immigrants, and what can be done to remove the hurdles.

I fully support everything that has been said about the need to eradicate TB throughout the world, but let us also do something to remove the beam in our own eye, and deal with the poverty and marginalisation that prevent us from eradicating it here in the United Kingdom.

2.33 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am last but hopefully not least.

I thank the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) for setting the scene so well. I think that his speech gave us all an appetite for the debate, but he also challenged us in the House to do better. I thank other Members for their contributions as well; they have been much appreciated.

[*Jim Shannon*]

Most diagnoses are still made with the use of a technology pioneered in the 19th century that relies on laboratory infrastructures and several weeks of culture to determine drug resistance. In the weak health systems to which many Members have referred, where so much of the global TB burden is concentrated, the consequences are catastrophic. That is the issue for me and, I think, for others who have spoken today. The hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin) was right to refer to what has been done on the UK mainland, but I want to focus on what is happening in the rest of the world, where TB is rampant and can be catastrophic in terms of the lives that are lost and the lives that are affected.

The drug regime that is used to treat TB was developed in the 1950s. It is cheap and can cure the disease, but it is no match for drug resistance. People who suffer from drug-resistant strains of TB must currently undergo up to two years of treatment, swallowing thousands of tablets and having painful injections that lead to the most severe side effects and may ultimately not cure the disease. We also have no effective adult vaccine for TB.

The BCG vaccine that many Members will have received as infants offers protection against only the most severe forms of childhood TB. Although it is worth while, it does not do what vaccines are usually so good at: preventing disease for life and interrupting the chain of transmission. If we want to talk about the eradication of any disease, whether TB or HIV, we must invest in vaccines research. A Member who is no longer in the Chamber mentioned that to the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs in an intervention.

If new tools are to become available to us in seven years, we must invest. Currently, we are not doing so. Funding for TB research has consistently fallen short of 50% of the estimated annual need. We must address that issue as well, and I look to the Minister for a response. She is always very forthcoming, and I know that she will take our views on board. Unless that funding shortfall is addressed with great urgency, we have no hope of ever achieving the sustainable development goal to which our Government signed up three years ago.

It should be noted that the UK Government have done a great deal in this regard and currently rank as the second largest funder of global health research. Let us give some credit to our Government, to the Department and to the Minister for what has been done. The Government's work, the product development partnerships and the researchers working on TB, HIV, malaria and other diseases should be celebrated. We have led by example—I wish that others could follow that example—but the funding gap for TB persists, and we will never close it unless concrete pledges are made. It would be a shame for the UN high-level meeting to pass with just another set of empty promises that have no impact on the people most affected by TB.

The Treatment Action Group estimates that if countries pledged to devote just 0.1% of their overall gross domestic expenditure on research to TB research and development, the R&D funding gap would be closed. That is a goal for which I am sure other countries could aim. People watching this debate could say, "Let's do that." If other countries did that along with us, we could do something significant very quickly. In terms of the average over the past five years, the UK Government have already been

hitting the target, but many other countries continue to invest far less than their fair share, and without them, we will not achieve the sustainable development goal.

The UK has established itself as a leader on TB research, in respect of both funding and our fantastic research institutions in the public and private sectors. That is a very good example of the two sectors working together for the benefit of a great many people. The UN high-level meeting gives us an opportunity to demonstrate our leadership and to bring other funders to the table to talk about how we, as a community, might close the funding gap in a way that is fair and does not place an undue burden either on countries that are already investing significantly or on those that are simply unable to afford it. Will the Minister and her Department commit themselves to working with partner countries to develop concrete, fair-share funding targets for closing the research funding gap at the high-level meeting?

Let me end by saying something about co-ordination. As we work with partners to increase investments in TB research, it is essential for those investments to be well targeted and co-ordinated so that they can have an impact on patients' lives as quickly as possible. I do not think that that is currently the case. The first two new drugs that became available for the treatment of TB were developed in isolation, which necessitated years of additional research to see how they could be safely and effectively integrated into existing regimens. That is something we should consider. The new diagnostic test, GeneXpert, which promised to revolutionise the diagnosis of TB, remains inaccessible to most. That is another shortcoming, which is due in no small part to the lack of operational and implementation research that would tell us how to use the tool most efficiently. We need to address that as well.

The UK Government have demonstrated the ability and willingness to convene partners and co-ordinate research funding, particularly in the field of antimicrobial resistance, of which TB is such a major part. Most recently, the Government supported the launch of the G20 AMR research and development collaboration hub, which has been a really good step in the right direction, providing an innovative new model through which research investments by countries from across the G20 and the world can be effectively co-ordinated to ensure patients have equitable access to innovation as quickly as possible.

In conclusion, I urge the Minister to work with partners through the G20 AMR R&D collaboration hub, which is a great idea that could really do things and move us in the right direction. The consensus from everyone who has contributed today, on both sides of the House, is that we want this to happen. We want the hub to make TB one of its priority pathogens and to begin work to co-ordinate TB R&D investments. I thank the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs for securing the debate. I am happy to have contributed and to support both him and the energy of the House in its desire to make things better for those who cannot do it for themselves.

2.40 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I am pleased to be able to speak in this important debate, and I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) and the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) for securing it.

The fact that TB continues to kill more people every year than any other infectious disease is appalling. We have enjoyed a harmonious and well-informed debate, and I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs for his tremendous summary and history of the issue. I have a bit more history for the House. First, though, I would like to give the Scottish picture. TB levels in Scotland are relatively stable and low. It accounts for between eight and nine cases per 100,000 of the population and is a contributing factor in about 40 deaths a year—although any death is a death too many.

Archaeological records show signs of tuberculosis in the remains of ancient mummies, and on this very day 689 years ago, Robert the Bruce, King of Scots, is alleged to have died of tuberculosis. TB has killed more people than any other disease in history. The modern Scottish Government are playing their part in tackling global challenges, including epidemics and health inequalities. Since 2005, the Scottish Government have committed at least £3 million a year towards funding international development work. This was initially focused on Malawi to reflect 150 years of collaborative development between our two countries. In 2017, that was increased to £10 million a year. TB is a major public health problem in Malawi, and multi-drug-resistant TB is an emerging issue. As mentioned, there is also a significant link between TB and HIV, with more than half the cases in Malawi being infected with both.

When Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin back in 1928, the world changed, yet for as long as there have been antimicrobials, there has been antimicrobial resistance—as much as I hate acronyms, I will refer to it as AMR throughout the rest of my comments. Indeed, from the discovery of the very first anti-TB drug, streptomycin, scientists identified that the TB bacteria swiftly evolves to resist treatment, in large part due to its waxy shell and ability to pump drugs out from inside its cell wall. This unique trait led Sir John Crofton to pioneer what would become known as the Edinburgh method for treating TB with a combination of different drugs, ensuring that if any one bacterium were to develop a resistance to an antibiotic, it would fall prey to another. That model still forms the basis of TB treatment today. TB treatment, in the best-case scenario, requires six months of consistent treatment, but when these drugs are used sporadically, as is often the case in remote and difficult healthcare environments, resistance flourishes.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Lord Jim O'Neill's independent AMR review estimated that multi-drug-resistant TB was responsible for one in three AMR-associated deaths and described it as

“a cornerstone of the AMR threat”

not least because it is also the only major drug-resistant infection to be transmitted through air. As is the case with so many resistant infections, we lack the tools we need to treat it. The few drugs available to treat drug-resistant TB are slow, toxic, require daily injections and are associated with severe side-effects, such as deafness, blindness, liver failure and neurotoxicity. It can take over two years to complete treatment, and success is not even guaranteed. In addition to side-effects, many people require months of hospitalisation, and the months of missed employment can drive patients to make the impossible choice between completing treatment and going back to work to provide for their families.

The cost of drug resistance for health systems is also profound. A survey in 2011 found that while drug-resistant TB made up only 2% of cases in South Africa, it took up nearly one third of the budget. Through the UK Government's commissioning of Lord O'Neill to conduct a review of AMR and the campaigning of the chief medical officer, Dame Sally Davies, the UK Government have established AMR as one of the world's leading health priorities.

In spite of TB being declared a cornerstone of AMR and having been included on a World Health Organisation list of priority pathogens with a high risk of drug resistance, initiatives to tackle AMR have not given TB the focus that it warrants. The UK's investment in the Fleming Fund, established to improve surveillance capacity in developing countries, does not include TB in its remit. Will the Government commit to including TB in the next round of Fleming Fund programmes and press for the mainstreaming of TB within the AMR agenda?

At last year's G20 summit, Governments recognised the importance of addressing drug-resistant TB with great urgency. The G20 is home to over 50% of global cases of TB and will feel over 60% of the economic impact of the disease over the next 15 years—a significant estimate of about \$600 billion. The G20 is also responsible for funding over 95% of all publicly supported TB research and development, so co-ordinated action on addressing drug-resistant TB within its AMR agenda is critical. Following the 2017 G20 leaders' declaration, the G20 launched an AMR R&D collaboration hub at last month's World Health Assembly. In the year of the UN high-level meeting, this collaboration hub is the perfect vehicle for co-ordinating and enhancing publicly funded TB research and development from across the G20.

In conclusion, I have a couple of asks for the Minister. Will she commit to contacting her counterparts on the board of the G20 AMR collaboration hub and asking them to prioritise TB within its initial work? Furthermore, can she assure the House that the UK Government will champion a continued focus on TB in the G20 AMR agenda both at the forthcoming Argentinian summit and through any future AMR initiatives?

2.46 pm

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) on bringing this debate to the Floor of the House, and I thank every Member who has spoken for bringing so much knowledge and passion to the debate, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), who spoke about the University of Liverpool and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, which lead on research here in the UK. I also pay special thanks to Lucy Drescher and Janika Hauser from RESULTS UK for producing parliamentary briefings for the debate and providing the research that went into my speech.

The forthcoming United Nations high-level meeting on TB offers a truly unprecedented opportunity to transform the fight against TB, so today's debate could not have been called at a more significant moment to discuss TB. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl

[Kate Osamor]

Gillan), the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) and the 150 Members from across the House who are calling on the Prime Minister to confirm her intention to attend the meeting personally in September.

Some 10.4 million people are infected with TB. In 2017, 1.7 million people died of TB—almost 5,000 a day. In the time allocated for this debate, 582 people will lose their lives to a curable disease—that is perhaps the most outrageous fact of all. TB is curable, and has been for more than 50 years. Every death from TB can be, and should have been, avoided. The global response against TB has been one of failure: not a failure of those doctors, nurses, scientists and civil society groups who have been working tirelessly in a system stacked against them, but a failure of political will.

Two years ago I visited Zambia with RESULTS UK and met with doctors who spoke of the horror of needing to prescribe drugs they knew to be toxic and potentially ineffective despite years of treatment, in the knowledge that there is simply no alternative. Those on the treatment whom I met spoke of the pain of side-effects, the stigma, and the feeling of hopelessness. Those who successfully make it through the treatment bear lifelong mental scars.

I want to put on record that I welcome the work that the Minister and the Department are already doing in the global response to TB. In the debate we heard my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) and the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs speak positively of the impact of UK aid on communities most affected by TB through investment in the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and through strengthening of public health services, but the consistent funding shortfall for TB programmes has had catastrophic consequences. Some 3.8 million people go undiagnosed each year, and global treatment outcomes are nowhere near what they could be. When the Government signed up to the sustainable development goals the UK signed up to the commitment to be at the forefront of their delivery, but projections show that at the current rate of progress there is little likelihood of ending TB by 2030 and that that will not be met for more than 150 years.

Last year's World Health Organisation global TB report stated that there is a \$2.1 billion funding shortfall for the diagnosis and treatment of TB drug susceptibility alone, and funding for drug-resistant TB services will need to double before 2020 to be in line with the WHO global plan to end TB. The global plan estimates that the annual investment needed for TB is \$9.2 billion a year, rising to \$12.3 billion a year in 2020. With a single course of MDR-TB treatment costing 10 times more than drug-sensitive treatment, the global cost of ending TB will skyrocket unless action is taken now. The UK's investment in TB continues to be dwarfed by our investments in HIV and malaria. I have no criticism of the UK investing in strengthening HIV maternal and child health systems, but sadly, antimicrobial resistance continues to exclude TB programming.

I must add that despite TB being the world's deadliest infectious disease, 17 of the Department's priority countries are classified as high-burden countries, but DFID currently

has no dedicated TB programmes and offers no direct bilateral investments, and often bilateral funding is dependent on country requests. Does the Department have a plan in place for addressing TB in its own priority countries? Many high-burden countries can and should invest more in their national TB programmes.

Another central theme of today's debate is the need for TB research and development. Sadly, in the absence of adequate funding for TB programmes, drug resistance has emerged and spread, rendering a curable disease increasingly difficult to treat. The UK's investment in TB research and development is already transforming lives second to none on the global stage. New diagnostic tools will allow us to diagnose people more quickly and accurately; new drugs and paediatric formulations are improving treatment outcomes. None the less, data collected from the Treatment Action Group show that global funding for TB research and development falls consistently short of 50% of the annual funding need. I therefore join my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) in asking the Minister whether DFID will commit to working with global partners to ensure concrete steps are taken at the UN high-level meeting to close the TB research funding gap and to ensure that funding is appropriately co-ordinated so that affected communities can access the products of such innovation as easily and quickly as possible.

If we are to talk seriously of ending TB before 2030, we will need to diagnose and treat a cumulative total of 40 million people before 2022. The WHO's "End TB Strategy" shows that we will only reach the SDG 3 target if new tools to prevent, diagnose and treat TB are made accessible to affected communities before 2025. With just seven years left, we have a long way to go. The UK has an opportunity to use the high-level meeting to lead on the global challenge—ultimately, by demanding and effecting change to deliver on the SDGs.

I therefore ask the Minister: does the Department have plans for fairer national targets to be discussed or developed at the UN high-level meeting? I join the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) in asking the Minister to commit to DFID improving cross-departmental working to ensure these targets are delivered. I know that the Minister literally embodies cross-departmental work, so I hope that will make it easy for her to do so.

In conclusion, I hope that the Prime Minister will attend the UN high-level meeting in earnest, first, to demonstrate the UK's commitment to ending TB and, secondly, to convene partners at the UN to demand a meaningful political declaration that will effect change. It would be a tragedy if all that came out of the UN high-level meeting was another political declaration full of empty promises. Let the current trend be a warning to the Government: we cannot let our successors stand at these Dispatch Boxes years from now to have the very same debate once again.

2.56 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker. I, too, thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) and the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) for persuading the

Backbench Business Committee to arrange this very important debate. I thank all Members in the Chamber for contributing to an absolutely excellent debate. They have really shown a commitment to keeping TB high on the agenda.

Most of the questions I have been asked will be covered in my speech but, in response to the specific points raised, I want to add my tribute to the work done on this agenda in Liverpool and in Oxford, which was highlighted by colleagues. I pay tribute to the work done by the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) and others on the subject of road deaths, which has been covered elsewhere. I also pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) for bringing to the House's attention the work of the find and treat teams. Such work is clearly outstanding, and those responsible for funding those teams will have heard that.

We heard excellent contributions from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan), the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse, the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton, and the hon. Members for Ipswich (Sandy Martin), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day). That is testament to the importance of this subject.

I am pleased to say that the UK Government are truly a leading player in global health generally. Good health is clearly valuable not only in its own right, but in contributing to the prosperity and stability of developing countries, as well as to the health of people in the UK. As colleagues may know, the UK is in fact the largest funder of GAVI—the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation. In 2016 alone, that vaccines alliance immunised over 15 million children against vaccine-preventable diseases such as diphtheria and polio, and saved approximately 300,000 through its work that year. Through such programmes, I am proud to say that we have almost eradicated polio and guinea worm worldwide, while typhoid and diphtheria are being tackled and small pox has been eradicated.

However, as colleagues have stated, tuberculosis presents a vast challenge, with 10.4 million people falling ill with, and 1.7 million dying from, TB in 2016 alone. Although the TB death rate dropped by 37% between 2000 and 2016—that success should be applauded—TB is now the world's leading infectious disease killer. That is why the Department for International Development will provide up to £1.1 billion for the 2017 to 2019 replenishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

As colleagues have noted, this year's high-level meeting at the United Nations General Assembly presents an important opportunity for the world to accelerate global progress in tackling TB and drug resistance. The debate—and, indeed, the letter from 150 colleagues—has shown the importance that this House attaches to the Prime Minister's attendance at the high-level meeting. The UK will work closely with other member states to negotiate the commitments to be made in the political declaration of the meeting. In fact, I can assure hon. Members that the entire diplomatic network will be engaged in ensuring that the declaration is ambitious,

including through G7 and G20 discussions. For example, we have already helped to secure specific references to TB in the most recent G20 Health Ministers' and leaders' declarations. I cannot personally commit the Prime Minister's diary at this time, but No. 10 will have heard the voices of parliamentarians this afternoon. I assure Members that, whatever happens, there will be strong, high-level UK representation at the meeting.

Of course, that one meeting is only part of the story. The UK should be rightly proud of the action it has taken to fight TB at home and abroad. At home, there has been a remarkable 40% decline in new cases since 2011. In fact, TB cases in the UK are at their lowest level for 30 years. Most of the recent decline is down to the TB control measures that have been discussed today, and to screening in the 59 high-incidence clinical commissioning group areas. I pay tribute to the excellence of the cross-departmental and cross-country working that has been done as part of this initiative.

Abroad, DFID is a global leader on tackling the TB epidemic, and we do that in three ways. Mainly, we fund increased access to care through our contribution to the global fund. We are the second largest funder, with £162 million of this investment going to tackle TB. That will support the treatment of 800,000 people with TB and accelerate innovation to provide access to new drugs and diagnostic tests. Secondly, we tackle TB through programmes to strengthen health systems in a wide number of countries. We are working with national Governments, particularly in low-income countries, to help people to access high-quality healthcare for all priority health needs, including TB. The prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of TB are underpinned by people having access to good-quality health services. Given that TB is most widespread amongst the poorest, our wider work on reducing poverty and increasing access to services, including efforts to reduce the poverty and vulnerability of populations, also has an impact on this terrible disease.

Thirdly, we fund research into developing new products to combat TB. This is hugely important. We need better and cheaper diagnostics that are available on the spot, including diagnostics that detect drug resistance. Thanks to UK funding, a new test—the GeneXpert test mentioned by the hon. Member for Strangford—has been developed. It reduces the diagnosis time from many days to under four hours, and is now available in 140 countries worldwide. It is also used in the UK, so this is a real, practical example of UK aid funding something that is in our national interest.

Research is also needed to provide shorter drug treatments, which make it easier for people to complete treatment courses and to help themselves, and prevent drug resistance. We provide support to the TB Alliance for this. It has successfully developed paediatric TB drugs and is now working to develop new, faster-acting and more effective TB drugs, including drugs that can be taken by people with HIV. DFID is funding this drive for new drugs and diagnostics as part of the £1 billion Ross Fund portfolio.

Many colleagues have mentioned antimicrobial resistance. Tackling drug-resistant strains of TB, like other forms of antimicrobial resistance, presents a significant challenge to all our work on TB. The disease accounts for one third of all antimicrobial resistance-related deaths worldwide. We are therefore working to prevent, identify

[*Harriett Baldwin*]

and treat drug-resistant TB globally. UK support to Gavi for immunisation reduces infections and the need for treatment. The UK's Fleming Fund is improving laboratory capacity for diagnosis and surveillance of AMR in low-income countries. Our support to the TB Alliance is helping to develop new regimens for treating drug-sensitive and drug-resistant strains of TB. We also fund Unitaid, which aims to triple access to RAID testing for drug-resistant TB, and to reduce prices for drugs to treat TB and drug-resistant TB. The UK Government recognise another challenge: many of those suffering from TB also have HIV; and, as several colleagues mentioned, being HIV positive increases vulnerability to TB. UK aid has helped the global fund to keep 11 million people alive with HIV therapy. DFID prioritises the integration of services to avoid siloed HIV and TB responses through our programmes.

I started with praise for the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs in his work on TB globally, and I will end by recognising the significant UK contribution to that agenda. Our universities carry out basic science research, explore how to improve TB services, and work to develop new treatments and vaccines. The UK's world-leading pharmaceutical companies also contribute by developing new TB treatments and vaccines. The UK is working hard with the global community to achieve progress on the agenda and a successful high-level meeting. We hope that our shared efforts will enable us to achieve the ambitious targets of the WHO's "End TB Strategy" and the global goals. I thank all hon. Members for discussing this important issue today.

3.6 pm

Nick Herbert: This has been a good debate, with a large degree of consensus across the House and many well-informed contributions from right hon. and hon. Members on both sides, including the Front Benchers. I am grateful for that and for the help that hon. Members are giving to raise the profile of this disease.

I pay tribute to the work of the co-chair of the all-party group on global tuberculosis, the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma). He was expecting to

speaking, but was taken away from the House for something else. However, I am sure that he would have wanted to draw attention to the huge progress being made in India, where the Prime Minister, as I mentioned earlier, has shown real leadership by getting India to commit to eliminate TB on a tighter timescale than the one in the sustainable development goals. That has shown the kind of global leadership that will be necessary, and if we can encourage other global leaders to follow that lead, we will make huge progress. I congratulate the Government on what they have been doing. I accept the Minister's description of all the things that DFID and other Departments are doing, and I note that the International Development and Health Secretaries have personally committed to the issue, for which I am grateful.

TB has been the orphan disease. Despite its terrible record of claiming lives, it does not have the celebrity champions or the pop stars of other diseases, and it does not get the same media attention. Although the disease claims more lives every year than any other infectious disease, I can guarantee that the media will pay no attention whatsoever to this debate. That needs to come to an end. Today, we in this House have at least played our part in raising the profile of the disease, helping to make TB truly a disease of the past.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House recognises that tuberculosis (TB) remains the world's deadliest infectious disease, killing 1.7 million people a year; notes that at the current rate of progress, the world will not reach the Sustainable Development Goal target of ending TB by 2030 for another 160 years; believes that without a major change of pace 28 million people will die needlessly before 2030 at a global economic cost of £700 billion; welcomes the forthcoming UN high-level meeting on TB in New York on 26 September as an unprecedented opportunity to turn the tide against this terrible disease; further notes that the UN General Assembly Resolution encourages all member states to participate in the high-level meeting at the highest possible level, preferably at the level of heads of state and government; and calls on the Government to renew its efforts in the global fight against TB, boost research into new drugs, diagnostics and a vaccine, and for the Prime Minister to attend the UN high-level meeting.

Turkey

3.9 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered early elections, human rights and the political situation in Turkey.

I am pleased to have secured this debate, and I thank the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) for accompanying me to the Backbench Business Committee to make our request.

This is an important opportunity for the House to show our strongest possible support for democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Turkey. Turkey is a key NATO ally, one of our strategic partners in the fight against Daesh and a major trading partner of the UK. In short, our bilateral relationship is vital.

As the representative of vibrant Turkish, Kurdish and Alevi communities in the London Borough of Enfield, I have been contacted by many residents about the current situation in Turkey. They are deeply worried for the safety of their family and friends.

It has been six years since we last had a general debate in this Chamber on issues relating to Turkey. This debate could not have come at a more urgent time. In 17 days, on 24 June, Turkish citizens will head to the polls to vote in presidential and parliamentary elections, more than a year earlier than scheduled. There are major concerns that the elections will be neither free nor fair. The elections will happen under the state of emergency that has been in place since the attempted coup in July 2016. Under these conditions, the freedoms of expression, assembly and association have been severely curtailed, creating a clear and present danger that democracy is being undermined in Turkey.

This debate is a crucial opportunity to raise these concerns and to call on the UK Government to ensure that Turkey upholds its international human rights obligations.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on securing this timely debate.

I sit on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and I will be going on an observer mission to scrutinise the elections in Turkey, which I agree need to be free, fair, transparent and in line with international standards so that people in Turkey can have confidence in the results.

What should the people going to observe the elections in Turkey particularly look out for? What has the right hon. Lady heard about in advance that may make the elections not free or fair?

Joan Ryan: A key point is where polling stations are located. There is evidence that polling stations are being moved from areas of towns and from villages that clearly have a population that will not be voting AK party to areas where there is a larger number of AK party supporters, which I consider to be voter suppression.

We could compare that with what happens in this country, because many people in London and other areas are able to vote in these elections. The polling station for London, for instance, is in Kensington, but a

very large majority of the Turkish population are in north London and it is extremely difficult for elderly people and people with children to get across London. The community has had to make buses available, but the location of the polling station hugely reduces the turnout when people actually want to vote. That is one point of which we should be very careful. Of course, intimidation is also a serious issue in some areas of Turkey. I am glad the right hon. Lady will be an election monitor, and I have much confidence in her ability.

This debate is a crucial opportunity to raise our concerns and to call on the UK Government to ask Turkey to uphold its obligations. In pursuit of greater economic co-operation, our Government cannot turn a blind eye to the rapidly deteriorating political and human rights situation. Trade between the UK and Turkey is worth more than £15 billion, but our partnership with Turkey must be honest and critical. We must hold President Erdoğan to account and ensure that he adheres to international human rights law.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has said that Turkey's state of emergency and restrictions on fundamental freedoms do not in any way

“provide for the safe and free environment essential for the holding of a referendum or any other election.”

How did we get to this position? Why did President Erdoğan call these early elections? He is widely expected to win the elections, which follow the highly contentious 2017 Turkish constitutional referendum. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which monitored that referendum, found that it

“took place on an unlevel playing field”

where

“fundamental freedoms essential to a genuinely democratic process were curtailed.”

President Erdoğan labelled some of those who opposed the constitutional changes “terrorist sympathisers”, and in numerous cases the OSCE found that the no supporters faced bans on their campaign activities, and police interventions and violence at their events. That is further behaviour that the right hon. Lady, and Dame, no less, could look out for when she is an election monitor.

The constitutional changes backed by President Erdoğan's AK party were approved by just 51% of the vote, despite all the pressure that was applied. Such opposition to these changes shows that many Turkish citizens are increasingly worried by what they see as his growing authoritarianism. It shows how divided Turkey is over the direction its Government are taking. These constitutional changes will transform Turkey's parliamentary system of government into a presidential one, with vast executive powers. The elected President will become Head of State, Head of Government, head of the ruling power and head of the army, and the office of Prime Minister will cease to exist. After the elections on 24 June, the President will be able to call a state of emergency without the approval of the Cabinet, to issue decrees that bypass Parliament and to appoint more judges than ever before. Although the new constitution limits a President to two terms in office, it is possible for a President to seek a third term in certain circumstances. That means President Erdoğan could remain in office until 2029. The Centre for American Progress has said:

“When the president's party holds a parliamentary majority, checks on presidential power would be virtually nonexistent.”

[Joan Ryan]

These sweeping powers have serious implications for the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law, and they raise questions about whether the Turkish Government will sustain a genuine democracy. This is a worrying preview of the sort of harassment and intimidation we can expect in the weeks before and after elections on 24 June.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The right hon. Lady is making an excellent speech. It would be bad enough if these developments were happening in an ideological vacuum, but they are not. Does she agree that this is not just a power grab on the Putin model in Russia but a power grab that is allied to the dismantling of Turkey's former reputation as the model state where there could be a Muslim society where religion was kept separate from politics? All that, too, is being put into reverse.

Joan Ryan: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman on that. The struggle since the first world war has been to move Turkey to a secular democracy. It is not very long ago, some 10 or 15 years, that we were all excited about the developments in Turkey and about it becoming a European Union accession country. It is sad to see where Turkey is today, but more than that the situation is very threatening, not just for its own population but much more widely—to Europe, to the UK and across the middle east.

Turkey's state of emergency was extended for the seventh time on 18 April, despite warnings from the European Parliament in February that

“the state of emergency is currently being used to silence dissent and goes far beyond any legitimate measures to combat threats to national security”.

When the attempted coup took place in July 2016, Turkish citizens from across the political spectrum took to the streets to defend their democracy. It is a supposedly temporary state of emergency. President Erdoğan said:

“This measure is in no way against democracy, the law and freedoms”.

He continued:

“On the contrary it aims to protect and strengthen them.”

At the same time, he also suspended the European convention on human rights, in line with article 15 of the convention, which allows for derogation from the convention in times of public emergency. However, that does not give states the right to suspend their commitment to international human rights obligations.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I take the right hon. Lady's point about the suspension of human rights, but is she aware that the number of appeals to the European Court of Human Rights from Turkish citizens has gone through the roof?

Joan Ryan: I am certainly not surprised to hear that. I expect the situation to get worse because, as we know, the suspension of the commitment to the international human rights obligation does not ever permit the use of torture, yet that is precisely what has happened. In the words of Human Rights Watch, President Erdoğan

“unleashed a purge that goes far beyond holding to account those involved in trying to overthrow”

the Turkish Government. The UN special rapporteur on torture found that

“torture was widespread following the failed coup”.

Non-governmental organisations reported that there were 263 incidents of torture in detention in south-east Turkey in the first quarter of 2017 alone. The level of complaints and representations being made is therefore no surprise.

Thousands of Turkish citizens, particularly members of the Kurdish and Alevi communities, have been arrested and persecuted by the very Government they sought to protect. In March 2018, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights found that nearly 160,000 people had been arrested during the state of emergency. Civil servants, police officers, teachers, academics, and members of the military and judiciary have been detained or dismissed from their jobs, often without reason. The speed of the arrests was so alarming that in 2016 the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Johannes Hahn, stated:

“It looks at least as if something has been prepared”, in reference to lists of arrests being prepared before the attempted coup even took place.

On the first anniversary of the attempted coup, President Erdoğan announced that he would approve “without hesitation” the death penalty if the Turkish Parliament voted to restore it. If that happened, we would have no choice but to draw a line in the sand, and such authoritarianism would in effect end Turkey's bid to join the EU. What a backward step that would be.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Does the right hon. Lady also appreciate that if Turkey re-imposed the death penalty, that would put its Council of Europe membership in total jeopardy?

Joan Ryan: I thank the right hon. Lady for that contribution. It is at least reassuring that there will be some reaction to these measures, but we need from our own Front Benchers a reaction that is a little stronger than anything we have seen so far, because it has been very disappointing.

Throughout Turkish society, freedom of speech and expression has come under sustained attack. Amnesty International reports that more than 1,300 NGOs—including groups that assist displaced children and that support survivors of sexual assault—have been shut down for unspecified links to terrorist organisations. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has said that the Turkish Government's emergency powers are being used to

“stifle any form of criticism or dissent vis-à-vis the Government.”

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Turkey is now the biggest jailer of journalists in the world, and more than 300 journalists have been arrested since the attempted coup. The Council of Europe's Venice Commission has described the closure of more than 180 media outlets as the “mass liquidation” of television and radio stations, newspapers and publishers. In the words of Reporters Without Borders, the stark truth about the current situation is that President Erdoğan “now has complete control of the media in the run-up to general elections in 2019. Amid an unprecedented crackdown on civil society and the political opposition, only a handful of low-circulation newspapers still offer an alternative to the government's propaganda.” It is a stranglehold.

The crackdown on the media has taken place alongside a severe crackdown on Opposition parties. In December 2017, all 60 Members from the main Opposition party, the Republican People's Party—the CHP—were put under investigation for

“defaming and insulting the presidential post, the Turkish nation, state and its institutions”.

Both CHP leaders—Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and CHP presidential candidate Muharrem İnce—have issued statements to say that they believe that their phones have been illegally wiretapped by Erdoğan's supporters.

As of 13 June, at least 136 officials from the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic party—the HDP—had been detained and 14 arrested. HDP leader Selahattin Demirtaş, who is running for President, has been imprisoned since November 2016. The HDP has also reported, as I have said, that polling stations are being moved from villages where the party has strong support to neighbouring villages where the AK party has strong support.

This crackdown has affected all areas of civil society, but the Kurdish and Alevi communities in particular have suffered targeted and sustained harassment. They are deeply worried that their communities may be intimidated during and after the election period. In my capacity as chair of the all-party group for Alevis, I have received numerous reports that Kurdish and Alevi neighbourhoods have been harassed by the Turkish Government and supporters of President Erdoğan's AK party. That intensified following Turkey's assault on the predominantly Kurdish region of Afrin in Syria earlier this year, when hundreds of people were detained for voicing criticism of the military operation on social media. Such flagrant restrictions on freedom of expression served only to weaken Turkish democracy and civil society. There can be no justification for the oppression of communities on the basis of their religious or cultural identity. The Kurdish and Alevi communities that have made the UK their home are looking to us as Members of Parliament to speak out against these abuses.

I was extremely disappointed to see the Prime Minister welcome President Erdoğan to the UK with open arms just three weeks ago. Aside from Bosnia, we are the only European country to have hosted President Erdoğan during the election period. Germany, the Netherlands and Austria all banned him from holding political rallies in their territories. I have no doubt that President Erdoğan's photographs with the Prime Minister and with Her Majesty the Queen will be used for his own election propaganda. My constituents, many of whom make up the 80% of British Turks who voted against last year's constitutional referendum, expected the Prime Minister robustly to address Turkey's growing authoritarianism in her joint press conference with the President. Instead, concerns about human rights and the political situation were alluded to only at the very end of the statement, after details of the UK and Turkey's growing trade relationship had been announced at some great length.

The Kurdish constituents to whom I have spoken were also deeply shocked and insulted to read that the only reference the Prime Minister made to the Kurdish people was in relation to the “extraordinary pressures” Turkey was facing from Kurdish terrorism. That is an inflammatory remark and it could be interpreted that the Prime Minister views all Kurds as terrorists.

Dr Julian Lewis: In fairness to Turkey, it must be said that, in years gone by, there were huge numbers of civilian casualties caused by some Kurdish terrorist movements, but our Government have chosen to support Kurdish fighters against ISIL-Daesh and we are entitled to expect some consistency. If Kurdish fighters are to be supported against the terrorists of ISIL-Daesh, surely Kurdish civilians should be supported against political oppression as well.

Joan Ryan: I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman, and he pre-empts a few comments that I am going on to make.

There is a vital distinction to be made between the actions of proscribed organisations and the peaceful law-abiding Kurdish community. To add further insult to injury, the Prime Minister, in her press conference, also failed to mention the crucial role that the Kurdish people should play in securing the political settlement in Syria—an issue of utmost importance to Turkey, the UK, Europe and the middle east—yet in a letter to me in 2016, the previous Prime Minister acknowledged the “great courage and skill” shown by the Kurds and the extraordinary sacrifices they made on the frontline in the fight against Daesh. He also recognised that the Kurds will play a critical role in any political settlement in Syria. Today, I call on the Government to reaffirm their support for the Kurdish people and to recognise their fundamental rights and freedoms.

The Prime Minister said in her statement with President Erdoğan on 15 May that, in the defence of democracy, Turkey must

“not lose sight of the values it is seeking to defend.”

I believe that the Government and the Prime Minister are, in fact, paying lip service to these values. It is clear that the UK is putting trade before human rights, which flies in the face of the values that we should be seeking to promote and defend. We cannot turn a blind eye to President Erdoğan's growing authoritarianism and his crackdown on fundamental human rights. By failing to hold him to account, the situation in Turkey is being allowed to get worse.

As the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has said, there is a

“constantly deteriorating human rights situation, exacerbated by the erosion of the rule of law.”

I urge the Government to hold President Erdoğan to account by calling for him to implement the key recommendations of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, including to

“end the state of emergency and restore the normal functioning of institutions and the rule of law... revise and repeal all legislation that is not compliant with Turkey's international human rights obligations, including the emergency decrees”,

and to enforce a zero-tolerance policy on the use of torture.

I look forward to the Minister's response and his assurances that this Government are committed to supporting democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Turkey.

3.31 pm

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I congratulate right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) on securing this debate. I had not realised that it was quite

[Paul Masterton]

so long since this place had had such a debate on Turkey. Considering what has been happening in the country over the past five or 10 years, that is somewhat remarkable. Today provides a long overdue opportunity for us to air some of the issues Turkey is facing, particularly given the upcoming early elections.

Like many, I have watched with disappointment as President Erdoğan's Turkey has in recent years slipped towards illiberalism, hard-line nationalism and authoritarianism. I am disappointed not just for Turkey, but for the wider region and for global stability. Turkey is such a key country in terms of its placement. As neighbour to the Balkans, the Caucasus and the middle east, Turkey is a deeply important and influential country. Issues that arise in Turkey can frequently overspill into its neighbours. There is no question that an open, stable and democratic Turkey, with a strong and mature civil society, has the potential to be not only a strong ally, but a beacon of liberal democracy to its many neighbours.

Unfortunately, the trend towards illiberalism has accelerated since the failed coup attempt in 2016, which has been used by the Erdoğan Government as an opportunity to consolidate power and silence critics. Entire newspapers have been hijacked and eventually shut down altogether by the Government. Journalists continue to be arrested and jailed at a rate not seen anywhere else in the world. Over 1,000 companies have had their assets seized, and thousands of judges, teachers and other officials have been fired or detained. Even Wikipedia has been blocked.

Following this, Erdoğan has pushed through constitutional changes granting himself sweeping powers as President, with the changes approved in a referendum that has been blasted by the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the opposition. This summer's snap elections—should President Erdoğan win—will be the final piece in the puzzle entrenching him in power beyond the Turkish Republic's centenary in 2023. It is important to remember the symbolism of 2023, not just because of the centenary celebrations, but because it would mark 20 years since Erdoğan took office and the conclusion of his flagship 2023 vision—a set of economic and political goals for Turkey to have achieved by that year.

Worryingly, Erdoğan's response to the economic crisis that has completely derailed any progress towards meeting those 2023 vision goals has been to spread conspiracy theories and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Erdoğan is no stranger to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. He has blamed Israel for the overthrow of President Morsi in Egypt, called a protestor “spawn of Israel” and complained that the Turks are

“accused of being Jews, Armenians, or Greeks”.

More recently, Erdoğan has sought to blame virtually all setbacks or criticisms on what he calls the “mastermind”—those who are apparently behind the 2016 coup, the Gülen movement, ISIS, the PKK and Turkey's ongoing financial crisis, all as part of an attempt to overthrow him and destroy Turkey. While he is generally vague about who the mastermind is, or are, there are clearly strong anti-Semitic currents running through this ultra-nationalist conspiracy theory. For

example, during the election campaign, Erdoğan has blamed the devaluation of the lira on “some Jewish families”.

This is a deeply regrettable turn of events in what had been, in the past, one of the most open and tolerant countries in the region. The undoing of this work in recent years has been tragic and cannot bode well for the future of Turkey or its neighbours. As the right hon. Lady suggests, this poses a threat. Erdoğan has allied with an ultra-nationalist party to force through his constitutional reforms and now these snap elections, arrested most of the leaders of the main pro-Kurdish party and overseen the collapse of the solution process with the PKK.

In 2013, it emerged that Erdoğan's Government were secretly coding people of Greek, Armenian, and Jewish ancestry in population registers. Just months ago, Erdoğan fuelled nationalist paranoia even further by making this genealogy database publicly available, which, perhaps unsurprisingly, has led to some quite violent attacks online, in the media and on people in the street. The service allows Turks to find out whether their ancestors were, for example, Greeks or Armenians who had passed themselves off as Muslim Turks 100 years ago to save their lives and homes.

Nationalism is resurgent; conspiracy theories are widespread; and the Government are fuelling anti-Semitic tropes. I hope, but do not expect, that despite the pattern of recent years, Turkey can change course once again. I hope, but do not expect—despite the best efforts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan)—that the elections will be free and fair. However, I suspect that if anyone can manage that, she probably can. I certainly would not want to mess with her.

Given its location, a strong, liberal and democratic Turkey could be a great force for good in the world, standing for stability and human rights and against terrorism in all its forms. I therefore hope and expect that the Government will maintain their commitment to strong relations with Turkey—an absolutely key NATO ally and trading partner—while not being afraid to make criticisms where they are merited. The right hon. Member for Enfield North has a point in saying that the Government's response to some of the things that have been going on has not been strong enough. I do think that slightly stronger language would have been possible and merited, because our commitment to promoting human rights and liberal democracy worldwide has to be absolute—not just in Turkey, but right around the world.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I call Ann Clwyd.

3.36 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Thank you very much for calling me, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was half asleep, but not because I disagreed with anything I have heard so far. It has been very nice to be in the Chamber and agree with Members on the Government Benches on this issue.

I am a very old friend of Turkey. I first went there when I was a Member of the European Parliament in 1983-84. I went to Istanbul on behalf of Amnesty

International to monitor the trials of members of the Turkish Peace Association—the Turkish equivalent of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Anybody who was involved in it was put on trial and put in jail. One of my colleagues' nephews lived in London and I was persuaded to go there for the trials. Then, of course, there was a military dictatorship in charge. It was not a very pleasant experience monitoring the trials, but eventually all the people were freed, and I was pleased about that.

On another occasion I went to Turkey to see someone in jail—a young woman who had been jailed for a very long time, again under the military dictatorship. I was allowed to go to the prison. I spent about two hours talking to her there. Then the governor of the prison told me that she should not have been there in the first place. Of course, that did not stop her serving quite a long term in jail.

My next involvement with Turkey was as a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union; I chaired its human rights committee, which met in Geneva. We were dealing with the human rights of parliamentarians. One of the countries that was in trouble for killing, disappearing or keeping in jail its Members of Parliament was Turkey. Members of Parliament from Turkey appeared before our committee, and we had robust discussions with them on the subject. Luckily, all those people were eventually freed from jail.

Over the years, I have had quite an interesting association with the country. I have many friends there, and I go there occasionally on holiday. As a friend of the country, it pains me to make these criticisms today, but as a true friend, I have to make them in any case. I would like to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for securing this important debate. We do not have enough opportunities to discuss the situation in Turkey, and we should be able to do so.

The situation in Turkey is quite tragic. I implore the Turkish Government to change tack before it is too late and things deteriorate further, to the detriment of all Turks, the region, the UK and the wider international community. I also implore the UK Government to do more to challenge—both behind the scenes, as I am sure they do, and in public—what is happening there. We must have more critical and robust engagement with the Turkish Government about the very real deterioration in the political and human rights situation in the country, as my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) said.

While Turkey was once a beacon of democracy and progress in the region, it can only now be a cause for considerable concern for us all. The same leader and political party who were working on substantive reform to move towards EU accession and had begun peace talks with the Kurds—former PM and current President Erdoğan, and the Justice and Development party—are now systematically undermining the rule of law, undermining democratic governance and persecuting Kurds not only within Turkey's borders but in Syria. That is despite, as we all acknowledge, Kurdish forces in Syria having been one of the west's most flexible, reliable and effective partners in its fight against Daesh.

It is in no way an exaggeration to say that people's lives, livelihoods and dignity are being taken from them as a result of the actions of the present Turkish Government. To hold a general election during a state of emergency is most regrettable, but on top of that, a

number of Members of Parliament have been detained and prosecuted, including Selahattin Demirtaş, the leader of the opposition Peoples' Democratic party—the HDP—who is running for the presidency from his prison cell. At the present count, about 10 MPs have already been sentenced, including a number of HDP Members of Parliament. I understand that they have received sentences ranging from two years to 10 years. Enis Berberoğlu of the Republican People's party—the CHP—has been jailed for almost six years, reduced on appeal from 25 years, for disclosing Government secrets after he gave an opposition newspaper a video purporting to show Turkey's intelligence agency trucking weapons into Syria.

In addition, according to the Turkish Journalists' Association, there are at the moment—it varies from week to week—about 160 journalists in jail, which is more than in any other country in the world, and prosecutions are taking place. Independent organisations have been shut down, according to Human Rights Watch. Hundreds of media outlets, associations, foundations, private hospitals and educational establishments that the Government have shut down by decree remained closed in 2017, having had their assets confiscated without compensation.

Dr Julian Lewis: The right hon. Lady is painting a worrying picture of detentions. I recall that in the aftermath of the coup, and for a considerable time afterwards, we constantly heard reports of tens of thousands of people being arrested. We know that huge numbers of people were arrested en bloc, but can she share any information with the House about whether a significant proportion of those have been released?

Ann Clwyd: That was to be my very next line. Tens of thousands of people are under arrest, and some 150,000 people were sacked or suspended from their jobs in the aftermath of the failed coup. Police, military personnel, teachers, academics, judges, lawyers and other public servants have been among those caught up in the crackdown, and they include friends of mine. Some of those academics, for example, have no idea why they have been arrested. Fortunately, some have been released, but tens of thousands of people are still in jail and not quite sure what they are doing there at all.

The chair of Amnesty International in Turkey, Taner Kılıç, remains in prison a year after being arrested and charged with membership of the Fethullah Gülen terrorist organisation. His arrest was based on the false allegation that he downloaded ByLock, a messaging app that the authorities say was used by the followers of Gülen, which the Turkish Government hold responsible for the July 2016 coup attempt. No credible evidence has been presented to substantiate that claim. Mr Kılıç's next hearing is set for 21 June, and if found guilty he could face up to 15 years in jail.

Those who have criticised the Government, whether in connection with Turkish military operations in Afrin in Syria, the activities of Turkish security forces in the south-east of the country, actions taken in response to the attempted coup, or alleged corrupt practices, are labelled and pursued as terrorists, traitors or subversives. We should be in no doubt that political opposition in Turkey has now been criminalised, and we must therefore question whether free and fair elections can be held

[Ann Clwyd]

under such circumstances. We must also question the direction of travel of the current President and his party, and we must be in no doubt that the actions undertaken by the Turkish Government cannot be viewed as a legitimate and proportionate response to the attempted coup in July 2016.

Let me remind the House of the findings of the Foreign Affairs Committee, on which I sit. In its March 2017 report on the UK's relations with Turkey it stated that:

“we disagree with the FCO's implication that the severity of the measures undertaken by the Turkish government after the coup attempt is justified by the scale of the threat...Despite the severity of the threat posed to Turkey by terrorism and the coup attempt, the scale of the current purges—

we did use that word—

“means that we cannot consider them to be a necessary and proportionate response. The number of people who have been punished is extraordinary, and their means of redress are inadequate.”

We should be in no doubt that a country with such serious, systematic and flagrant abuses of human rights is unlikely to prosper in the long term. I say that having followed the political trajectories of many countries across the world, and having seen that appalling human rights violations almost always result ultimately in instability, growing conflict and financial turmoil, as well as in the relevant leader's downfall and that of those around him.

I would also like to quote, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North did, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, who said about the Turkish elections:

“It is difficult to imagine how credible elections can be held in an environment where dissenting views and challenges to the ruling party are penalised so severely.”

He went on to say:

“Elections held in an environment where democratic freedoms and the rule of law are compromised would raise questions about their legitimacy”.

In addition, it has been highlighted that in the run-up to the elections, Opposition candidates are likely to find it difficult, as my right hon. Friend said, to find media outlets willing or brave enough to publish or broadcast their speeches, in contrast to President Erdoğan's complete hold over the airwaves which allows his and AKP's message to dominate.

If there is an Erdoğan-AKP win, I fear we are likely to see a further clampdown through the use of enhanced presidential powers granted via the adoption, narrowly and controversially last year, of constitutional amendments by referendum. International observers said the whole process was deeply flawed, with Opposition voices muzzled and rules changed at the last minute. The changes adopted would, among other things, restart the clock on President Erdoğan's term limit, meaning he could lead the country well into the next decade.

More generally, according to Human Rights Watch cases of torture and ill-treatment in police custody were widely reported throughout 2017, especially by individuals detained under the anti-terror law, marking a reverse in long-standing progress despite the Turkish Government's stated zero tolerance for torture policy. There were widespread reports of the police beating detainees, subjecting them to prolonged stress positions, threats of rape, threats to lawyers and interference with medical

examinations. There is also an entrenched cultural impunity for abuses committed by the security forces. According to Amnesty International, in the face of extreme political pressure, prosecutors and judges were even less inclined than in previous years to investigate alleged human rights violations by law enforcement officers or to bring them to justice. Intimidation of lawyers, including detentions and the bringing of criminal cases against them, further deterred lawyers from bringing criminal complaints. Amnesty International has concluded that it seems likely that human rights violations will continue as long as the state of emergency continues.

Given the actions of the Turkish Government inside and outside the country, I ask the UK Government to review as a matter of urgency their approach to Turkey, including their continuing arms sales to that country. With Turkey a priority market for British weapons, UK weapons sales since the attempted coup include a \$667 million deal for military electronic data, armoured vehicles, small arms, ammunition, missiles, drones, aircraft and helicopters. They also include a \$135 million deal for BAE Systems to fulfil Erdoğan's plan to build a Turkish-made fighter jet.

Ideally, Turkey would continue to be a close UK ally, as we could—indeed, we really need to—work together on so many matters of mutual interest. I do not deny that there are matters on which the UK will need to continue to liaise closely with Turkey, in particular in connection with the refugee crisis. Turkey, to its credit, has taken in millions of refugees, most of them from war-ravaged Syria, and provides many refugee children with an education. However, the UK Government have to ensure that they do not become complicit or are wilfully blind in their dealings with that country. Given the lack of shared values at the moment, if the situation in Turkey deteriorates even further, there will be unfortunate consequences that will have a negative impact on us all. I am very glad that the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) will be an election observer. That is very important. I hope that she is joined by other colleagues from this Parliament, because it is important that our presence is seen there, along with the OSCE monitoring mission.

I also note that the Foreign Affairs Committee recommended that the FCO designates Turkey as a human rights priority country in its next annual human rights and democracy report. I hope that we will see that when the FCO launches the next report shortly.

I conclude with one of the Foreign Affairs Committee report's most pertinent recommendations:

“When defending human rights, the UK must be both seen and heard. Discretion is sometimes necessary for impact, and private behind-the-scenes meetings will also play an important role in the UK's influence on human rights in Turkey, but the FCO must be prepared to raise its concerns about Turkey with the Turks publicly. Currently, by giving human rights insufficient prominence in its dialogue with Turkey, the UK risks being perceived as de-prioritising its human rights values. If that impression is sustained, then it would damage the UK's international reputation and not serve the protection of human rights in Turkey”,

or the population of that country.

3.57 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd). I congratulate the right hon. Member for Enfield

North (Joan Ryan) on securing the debate. She and I often follow each other around this place and outside it trying to make sure that Israel gets a fair view. It is an extreme pleasure for me to be able to say that our co-operation in that area also extends to Turkey, although I wish to park the Israel allegations that have been made for a moment.

It is very difficult to have a debate on Turkey that does not mention the Council of Europe, which was set up to look after democracy, the rule of law and human rights. It is the pre-eminent body in Europe for dealing with human rights, yet not once has its role been mentioned in all this. There are two reasons why we should stress the role of the Council of Europe. The first is that pre-eminence, to which Turkey has already signed up. It may have suspended the European convention, but it ratified that as long ago as 1954. It showed a willingness to participate in it up until the last few years, when it has engineered a dispute with the Council of Europe over funding. It has refused to be what is termed a "grand payeur" of the Council, really to stop its role being criticised and its human rights record being attacked.

As for the second reason, I know that the Council of Europe is often criticised for being just a talking shop, but boy do we need a talking shop where we can talk to MPs from other countries as much as we do now, and the body provides that for us. It is worth pointing out that all our political groups in the Council of Europe have Turkish members. It is incredibly useful to be able to sit down with them and talk off the record about the situation in Turkey so that we can get a good view of that.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I put on record the esteem in which my hon. Friend is held in the Council of Europe by many of our colleagues in the 47 member countries as a result of his numerous and valuable contributions to our debates during the plenary sessions. Does he agree that one of the Council's most important missions has been to bring about the abolition of the death penalty, which was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan)? Its success is shown by the fact that there have been no executions in those 47 member states for the past 10 years, and for that record to be broken by a member state, as Turkey is, would be beyond contemplation.

John Howell: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend. The issue of the death penalty is key to retaining membership of the Council of Europe. We are engaged in a debate with Belarus, because the existence of the death penalty there prevents it from becoming a member of the Council. If Turkey were to adopt the death penalty again, it would automatically cease to be a member.

It is important that we maintain relationships with Turkey through our political groups at the Council of Europe. That is one of the most useful facilities that the Council provides.

We have already heard that my right hon. Friend will be going to Turkey as an election monitor, and such monitoring is a crucial role provided by the Council. It will not be the representatives of just one political party who will be going, but representatives across the political parties. I know that the right hon. Member for Enfield North has given my right hon. Friend some pointers

about what to look out for, but I wish her luck. I wish all that it is possible to wish that she will be able to gain a fair view that the elections are in the spirit of democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

In an intervention, I mentioned appeals to the European Court of Human Rights, which is an essential component of the Council of Europe. In fact we elect its judges, and, incidentally, we have a phenomenal record of success. It must be recognised, however, that appeals to the Court have gone through the roof because individuals are taking their cases there. Some 160,000 people have already been arrested and 152,000 civil servants have been dismissed, as well as teachers, judges and lawyers. Those are the people who are taking their cases to the Court.

I have a great deal of sympathy for Turkey's role in helping us in the fight against terrorism, and I do not think we should ignore the enormous consequences of terrorism for the territorial area that it represents. However, if we are to support Turkey in that regard, it will be crucial that it shows it can fulfil its human rights obligations. The legal measures that need to be undertaken during the state of emergency must be proportionate and justified. They must be in line with the principles of democracy that Turkey has established for itself, and they must also be in line with its promise to the Council of Europe that it will fulfil the obligations of a member country.

I finish by pointing out that something close to 2,000 organisations have already been permanently closed by the Turkish Government. They include human rights organisations, lawyers associations, foundations and other NGOs. More than 100,000 websites have reportedly been blocked in Turkey, including many pro-Kurdish websites, as well as satellite television stations. This does not speak well of Turkey's attitude to fulfilling its Council of Europe obligations, or those that it has made to us as a NATO partner and ally. I urge the Government to put pressure on Turkey to fulfil those obligations.

Joan Ryan: I would just like to add one thing to the hon. Gentleman's important contribution. He will be aware that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has, in the key findings of his report, identified the use of torture and ill treatment in custody, including severe beatings, threats of sexual assault, actual sexual assault, electric shocks and waterboarding by police, gendarmerie, military police and security forces. That is a very long way from recognising and adhering to human rights.

John Howell: I agree with what the right hon. Lady says about the UN's assessment. When Turkish citizens have brought cases to the European Court of Human Rights, it has invariably found against the Turkish Government. If I had the papers on me, I would be able to provide quotes from its judgments that align with her comments.

In conclusion, I urge the Government to take a strong line in making sure that Turkey fulfils its obligations to the Council of Europe and its promises to us as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I call Jim Shannon.

4.7 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am used to being the last to be called, so I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak at this stage of the debate.

I thank the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for asking me to join the deputation to the Backbench Business Committee that applied for the debate—I was very pleased to do so. I congratulate right hon. and hon. Members on their magnificent contributions on a subject in which I take a great interest.

This is a timely debate, given Turkey's forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections. As the right hon. Lady and others have rightly said, they are taking place when a state of special control is in place across the nation. As chair of the all-party group for international freedom of religion or belief—FORB, as it is better known—I am deeply worried about developments in Turkey in respect of freedom of religion and belief, as well as the associated freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

I am pleased to see the shadow Minister and Minister in the Chamber because both of them are well versed in this matter. I hope that both their contributions will effectively bring together all our points of view. I want to discuss some of the vital issues of concern, particularly the crackdown on human rights and civil society in Turkey that followed the 2016 coup attempt. I shall then move on to the specific restrictions on the right to FORB.

I was trying to think of an analogy that might sum up Turkey. As a country sports enthusiast, I came up with this: it runs with the hare and hunts with the hounds. Turkey fraternises with the USA and NATO, and also Russia and Syria, and it seems to play one off against the other. The situation worries me greatly. We have a nation that seems to be finding its own way and is perhaps becoming a big player—if it has its own way—but we must remember that it has been an ally in the past and is an ally within NATO as well.

The Turkish Government's response to the 2016 coup attempt significantly damaged Turkey's human rights protection framework and tightened that Government's control over all aspects of Turkish society, as the right hon. Member for Enfield North and others mentioned. In the aftermath of the coup, the Turkish Government dismissed some 150,000 public servants from their jobs—their only crime was that they had a different opinion from that of President Erdoğan. Disgracefully, more than 1,200 schools were also shut down in a blatant, concerted attack on education and opportunity for children young and old. Some 15 universities and 185 media outlets were also shut down, and 73 journalists were arrested, with a further 250 Turkish journalists having to flee the country for fear of arrest and persecution. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Turkey arrested the highest number of journalists of any country in 2017. There has been a significant clampdown on media expression. When authorities control the media in the way that Turkey's do, they control what happens and what people hear across the entire country. The independence of academics in Turkey has also been curtailed greatly after the attempted coup; over 6,500 academics lost their positions and hundreds of them were imprisoned.

Those people would all have expressed concern about Turkey's human rights abuses. If this debate were happening in Turkey, each one of us in this Chamber would have been arrested and put in jail—we would not be able to express ourselves as we have done. We are taking the opportunity in this House, in the seat of democracy, to express ourselves on behalf of those in Turkey who do not have that right—politicians and those involved in political parties who are sitting in prison and do not have the right to express themselves. They cannot conduct election campaigns, knock on doors or speak to people.

As well as these other groups, many human rights defenders have been arrested and charged with membership of terrorist organisations, including the head of Amnesty International in Turkey. This has had a chilling effect on human rights and religious freedom advocates working in the country. According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, in this environment, many religious minority groups have maintained a low profile and have largely ceased pursuing their previous long-standing demands for fear of being arrested or put in prison, so they cannot even express themselves in the way they have before because they are restricted.

Of course, the Turkish Government justify their crackdown on human rights and the unjust jailing of thousands of public officials, academics, journalists, politicians and human rights defenders by saying that is necessary to fight terrorism. I agree that they have been on our side in fighting terrorism, but they cannot use the same rules to clamp down on their own citizens and to restrict the rights and freedoms they had beforehand. Unfortunately, such disregard for a country's own citizens is often counterproductive. As we have heard, history shows that those countries that do such a thing will feel the wrath of the people at some point, and I think Turkey's day is coming—it will not just be turkeys for Christmas; it will be Turkey's day for other reasons. That is because the public's willingness to co-operate with authorities to combat terrorism can be lost if their human rights are violated by those same authorities. Moreover, human rights violations can create the grievances that drive people to take up arms against the state, so Turkey needs to be very careful about what it is doing internally.

The second issue I would like to discuss is the FORB situation in Turkey specifically. There is simply not enough time to go through all the freedom of belief issues in Turkey that cause me and the all-party group significant concern. Funding for non-Muslim houses of worship remains very limited in comparison with funding for Sunni mosques. Anti-Semitism continues to be a problem for Turkey's Jewish community, and there are significant reports of Protestant churches being vandalised and pastors being targeted with hate speech via text message, Facebook and email. We have brought those issues to the House in the past.

The European Court of Human Rights has made many judgments on these and other long-standing issues, which have not been addressed by the Turkish Government. Those issues include the right to conscientious objection to military service—meaning that those who do not want to serve would have the opportunity to say no—and the right to raise one's children in line with one's religious or philosophical views. Is that wrong? It seems to be in Turkey. They also include the right to establish places of worship—when people want to establish or build a

church, whether a house church or a physical church, they are denied that right—and the right not to disclose one's religious beliefs. In the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief, which I chair, we speak up for those with Christian beliefs, with other beliefs and with no beliefs. In other words, we speak for all those people in Turkey whose freedoms are being denied.

Other fundamental issues include the difficulty that religious communities face in providing formal religious education and training for their clergy and followers, and the impossibility of their obtaining independent legal status. Independent legal status for churches and their related educational institutions is totally restricted in Turkey. Even the Sunni Muslim community is not allowed to be independent from the state. It is controlled by the Diyanet, which is part of the Prime Minister's office. This is another example of an autocrat taking control over everything that happens in Turkey, and it is something about which I and other Members here have spoken out strongly. These issues have been extensively documented by human rights organisations such as the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the Freedom of Belief Initiative and Forum 18. The United Nations is also concerned about them, but we do not see anything happening. We just see an autocratic leader in President Erdoğan pursuing a singular and blinkered policy to deny people their rights.

Another critical freedom of religion or belief—FORB—issue I would like to discuss is education in Turkey. Primary and secondary school students in Turkey are required to complete the religious culture and moral knowledge course, which is rooted in Islamic principles and which Turkish officials claim is necessary to raise law-abiding and moral Turkish citizens. They deny all the other religions their rights, but they are happy to impose a course that tries to nurture, focus and singularly point towards what they want. In 2014, the European Court of Human Rights held that the course should not be compulsory, as the classes

“do not respect parents', guardians', and pupils' freedom of religion or belief.”

The Government have yet to comply fully with that ruling. Is it not time that they did so? Is it not time that Turkey listened to the United Nations? Is it not time for it to start giving freedoms and rights to its people, just as other countries across the world do?

The situation regarding FORB and education in Turkey is likely to worsen in the coming years, as the curriculum in Turkey's public schools is set to change in 2018. This will mark another critical and singular change. According to numerous human rights reports, the education ministry has revised more than 170 curriculum topics in an effort to raise what President Erdoğan has called a “pious generation” of Turks—a generation of people who will know nothing other than what the President tells them. What a society that would be if everyone thought the same things, dressed the same way and ate the same things. Imagine how it would be if everyone wore the same uniforms and did the same jobs. What a terrible place that would be.

The ministry will remove evolutionary concepts such as natural selection, and critics claim that lessons on human rights, gender equality and openness towards various lifestyles will also be altered. North Korea will pale into insignificance if President Erdoğan has his way.

This is a concerning development for all of us who believe that education should be used not to foster divisiveness but rather to open minds and broaden horizons, to teach respect and love for one another, and to inspire genuine curiosity and the search for truth. That is what education is about. It is about acquiring a vast amount of knowledge in order to advance ourselves and create opportunities.

I am also immensely concerned about how the Turkish Government have treated the Kurds. Their situation is totally unacceptable, and I hope that the United Nations will—*[Interruption.]* Okay, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am coming to the end of my speech. I shall sum up.

Since the 2016 coup attempt, the Turkish Government have been systematically attacking civil society and trying to replace it. They have created a new media, a new deep state, a new code of conduct based on nepotism and a system that revolves around one man, in which the violation of Turkey's international human rights obligations is worryingly commonplace, unquestionable and unjustifiably arbitrary. Thousands of Turkish citizens have been imprisoned, including many who have stood up for the rights of their countrymen and women.

FORB in Turkey has also been on a downward trajectory. The proposed changes in the educational curriculum and the failure to implement many of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights ensure that Turkish religious or belief groups will continue to have their article 18 right to FORB denied. I call on the British Government to publicly and privately urge the Turkish Government to implement their binding international human rights obligations. If those obligations are met, Turkish people will be free to make their own choices about their own society, in regard not only to elections but to the exercise of their rights to the freedoms of religion and belief, expression, association and peaceful assembly. If that happens, Turkey can be part of a vision for the world; if it does not, it will be going backwards, and we have to make sure that it cannot do that.

4.19 pm

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I bow to his great skill; he gets more words into a minute than any other human being I have ever met. The speed with which he speaks is quite enviable.

Before the Front-Benchers start to speak, it might be useful if I touch on what is happening with the Council of Europe election observer mission, because it has been mentioned so many times. The pre-electoral delegation, a precursor to the mission, has already taken place and a report is available. It was led by Olena Sotnyk, a prominent Ukrainian Member of Parliament, and included our own Lord Blencathra. I thought it may give some colleagues some comfort that we are approaching this matter with an open mind, but we are not unaware of some of the issues that have quite rightly been raised in today's contributions.

The mission will be made up of 33 members and will observe the parliamentary and presidential elections, both of which are unusually being held at the same time under a state of emergency. The pre-election delegation met several organisations and interlocutors, including the head of the OSCE election observation mission,

[*Dame Cheryl Gillan*]

members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of different political parties, journalists and media representatives, NGOs, the chairman of the Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey, the vice-president, members of the Radio and Television Supreme Council, and the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly. They went through what is going to happen on 24 June, which is the first time that the two elections have been held together.

The delegation first noted that the six candidates running in the presidential election would in fact offer a genuine and pluralist choice to the electors, which is important. However, it is no doubt of interest to the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) and me that an insufficient number of women have been included in the electoral lists for the parliamentary contest, which we will all regret.

There are high stakes in these elections, and it is important, as all have said, to ensure that they are free and fair and that international standards are adopted. However, we have had to note that substantial amendments to electoral law were adopted just one month before the announcement of the elections, and the so-called harmonisation laws were adopted even later. The short time between the introduction of changes to electoral legislation and the holding of elections is really not in line with the Venice Commission, which I am working with as a Council of Europe rapporteur on referendum rules at the moment, and is contrary to the usual notice that has been given in previous elections in Turkey. The Opposition parties have pointed out that the process that led to the introduction of the amendments was not inclusive and that they could not adequately prepare in such a short period of time. The observer mission has already taken that on board.

Various other matters were raised, including concerns about the substance of the electoral registration that weakens the safeguards in security and transparency and about the risk of Executive interference in the administration of the elections. The provisions appear to be particularly problematic when it comes to recognising the validity of unstamped ballots, allowing the transfer or merging of ballot boxes for security reasons at the initiative of governors, restricting the notion of the ballot area and increasing the chance of police being present at polling stations. However, the observer mission thought it positive that mobile ballot boxes had been introduced, which could have a positive impact, particularly on the political participation of people with disabilities. However, the proviso is that there are suitable safeguards in place to prevent abuse. An Opposition party has challenged some provisions in electoral law before the Turkish constitutional court, which is important to note.

Most people to whom the delegation spoke in preparing its pre-observation report underlined the state of emergency and the limitations on freedom of expression and assembly that have been introduced under its aegis, together with the ongoing security operations in the south-east and, as has been noted, the large number of politicians and journalists who have been arrested, which will no doubt have a negative impact on the elections. Of course, it is of great concern that we hear that violent incidents have already taken place during the election campaign.

Some Opposition parties brought up the interference in their ability to campaign freely, and the HDP informed the delegation that its presidential candidate, who we now know is in pre-trial detention, cannot campaign. That has already been noted and taken on board by the observer mission.

The Parliamentary Assembly has regretted that the previous recommendations relating to the funding of election campaigns and political parties in Turkey have remained unaddressed, and we will continue to pursue that. The Parliamentary Assembly has also noted that the legal frameworks in those areas require further development in Turkey, and the delegation will be encouraged to look at that. The great fear is that state resources may be used by the ruling party in the context of the campaign, which would produce an inequitable situation.

There are concerns about the impartiality of the ballot box committees in adequately managing the election. Indeed, the pre-election report has not pulled its punches in any way, so the observer mission is going in to examine what happens on election day with a very clear view of the backdrop against which these elections are taking place.

The chairman of the Supreme Electoral Council has said that all national and international observers will be allowed to observe all steps of the electoral process, including the counting of the vote and the tabulation of the results, as well as a newly introduced procedure to publish on the Supreme Electoral Council's website the minutes of each ballot box as they are received.

Provided parliamentary business allows me to join my colleagues from this House and the other place, and of course the international members of the Council of Europe observer mission, I hope we will be able to produce a good report on what we observe that puts these elections clearly in context.

It is sweet that my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) says I am not someone to be messed with, but he probably misunderstands the nature of an election observer mission to another country. I assure him that the international cross-section of politicians chosen to go on this mission, provided parliamentary business allows us to attend, will try to produce a report that is as honest and as objective as possible in order to put these very important elections in context.

Turkey is our friend. We are a friend to Turkey, and Turkey is our ally, but a friend must not be afraid to be a critical friend. We all need to improve, but we all need to improve together.

4.29 pm

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): I, too, wish to praise the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for bringing this important debate to the Floor of the House. The power of her speech was such that the Minister will want to take heed of all the major points she managed to squeeze into it. Many of the other speakers who followed made equally powerful and compelling points, and I hope that, given the agreement across the Chamber on some of them, he will want to address as many of them as possible in his summing up.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in this timely debate, especially ahead of the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey later this month.

There is mounting evidence to suggest that Turkey's record on human rights since the attempted military coup in 2016 has been somewhat questionable. It is therefore important that the UK Government, in pursuit of closer relations with Turkey and in line with their plan to have a global Britain vision, put pressure on the Turkish authorities to ensure these elections are conducted freely and fairly. The Foreign Secretary must also urge President Erdoğan to reverse his decision to derogate from the European convention on human rights as soon as possible.

The report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights paints a less than rosy picture of the human rights situation in Turkey; since a state of emergency was declared in July 2016, the Government have conducted a widespread campaign of media clampdowns, arrests and dismissals. That has included the arrest of 300 journalists on the grounds that their publications contained “apologist sentiments regarding terrorism” or other “verbal act offences”, or for “membership” of terrorist organisations. Nearly 160,000 people have been arrested and 152,000 civil servants have been dismissed. That and the other findings of the UN report amount to an attack on civil society by a Government almost unprecedented in modern times. Although I and my Scottish National party colleagues unreservedly condemn attempts to overthrow democracy, such as the failed coup, we equally condemn any response that does not respect human rights or the rule of law. The Turkish Government have clearly used the coup to target their democratic opponents.

Let us not forget the Turkish Government's treatment of the people of Afrin, in northern Syria, where their unprovoked, aggressive airstrikes have killed and injured hundreds of innocent civilians. Military action of this nature, in a place which has hosted more than 200,000 internally displaced people fleeing war-torn parts of Syria, should be strongly condemned across the international community.

Turkey's derogation from the European convention on human rights is highly regrettable, and I urge the Turkish Government to reverse this decision immediately. Equally regrettable is the fact that the UK Government have also chosen to derogate from certain articles of the ECHR, and indeed have threatened to withdraw altogether. The UK, of all states, should lead by example, so I urge the Government to reverse their decision to derogate from articles 2 and 5 of the convention. They will then be in a position to call on President Erdoğan to do the same without reeking of hypocrisy.

For Turkey to move forward on to a solid democratic footing, it is vital that the upcoming elections are free and fair. As I said, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has expressed concern over the legitimacy of the elections should the state of emergency remain. Allegations of unfair media coverage by opposition candidates have led to questions over the integrity of the Turkish state body RTÜK. Yet more concerning is the \$6 billion incentives package recently announced by the AK party Government, including cash payments to pensioners, which some local commentators have understandably denounced as “election bribery”. In this context, it is difficult to foresee how credible the elections will be and how the results can be accepted, and what an illegitimate result will mean for Turkey's future.

Despite Turkey's questionable human rights record of late, the Prime Minister rolled out the red carpet for President Erdoğan during his visit to Downing Street last month. The UK Government appear to have abandoned democratic values and human rights in their pursuit of Brexit by wooing world leaders known for oppression of their own peoples. Moreover, it has been reported that Britain has sold more than \$1 billion of weapons to Ankara since the failed coup, yet the UK Government have admitted that they cannot categorically state that UK weapons have not been used by Turkish troops in the area of Afrin.

I am not in any way disregarding the importance of the UK's relationship with Turkey. Like many other Members who have spoken, I have friends in Turkey—I work with Turkish representatives at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly—and I am keen to see the strengthening of our trade, security and defence links with this geopolitically strategically-sited country. We have much to gain from improving our co-operation on things such as information sharing and on tackling cross-border crimes such as money laundering and people and arms trafficking—not to mention the mutual benefits of the British-Turkish collaboration on the Turkish TFX fighter jet.

However, those shared interests must not be prioritised over the human rights of the Turkish people or, indeed, the securing of democracy itself. The UK Government cannot turn a blind eye to the human rights abuses in Turkey because of purely national interests. A global Britain has the moral authority and a moral responsibility to demand adherence to democratic values from its international partners. I therefore urge the Secretary of State to heed the words of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and call on the Turkish Government to restore the country's constitutional order and ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected as quickly and as fully as possible.

4.36 pm

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) on securing this debate, together with her co-sponsors. As she said, it has been six years since we debated Turkey in the Chamber, although it is only 15 months since the Westminster Hall debate, in which I was also privileged to speak. I recall my right hon. Friend saying in that debate that it was time that we had a debate in the Chamber; here we are, 15 months later, and sadly things in Turkey have got considerably worse.

My right hon. Friend said in her opening speech that she has serious concerns that the state of emergency will prevent the elections in Turkey on 24 June from being free and fair, and that theme was echoed by many other right hon. and hon. Members who contributed to the debate. She said that this debate was the opportunity for the British Government to ensure that Turkey keeps to its international human rights obligations and that our Government cannot turn a blind eye to human rights violations, in spite of the fact that Turkey is such a valuable trade partner.

My right hon. Friend quoted the OSCE saying that the constitutional referendum in April 2017 “took place on an unlevel playing field”.

[*Fabian Hamilton*]

Many of us similarly felt that it was not a fair referendum, yet still the changes only just squeezed through with 51% of the vote—even tighter than our own Brexit referendum. She asked whether the Turkish Government will sustain a genuine democracy, and that has been the theme this afternoon. Of course, she also condemned the use of torture since the July 2016 coup attempt, as we all do.

My right hon. Friend said something else: she asked for a stronger reaction from her own Front Benchers, so let me take this opportunity to assure her and the House that the Opposition condemn utterly the human rights violations, the use of torture, the rolling back of human rights, the arrest of journalists, the increasingly authoritarian regime of the Turkish Government and President Erdoğan's AK party, and, of course, the horrific violence and military action in Afrin, allegedly against Turkish PKK brigades and militia, who have now joined the YPG in Syria. The action in Afrin was not only a gross violation of the lives of those Kurds who had sought refuge in Syria but the violation of another state's territory. We utterly and wholeheartedly condemn that, and have done since the Turkish army took that action.

We also heard a very good speech from the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) who talked about the authoritarian crackdown by President Erdoğan and the AK party. He said that the AK party and President Erdoğan were determined to remain in office under the new constitution past that centenary that he mentioned of the modern Turkish republic being established in 1923, and, from the evidence that we have seen, there is no doubt that that is exactly what President Erdoğan wishes to do.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned something else that is very important and close to my heart and the hearts of all Members present in the Chamber today: the increasingly anti-Semitic rhetoric that we hear from President Erdoğan and his Government. It is all the more tragic given the sanctuary that Turkey and the Ottoman empire offered to the Jews escaping persecution in other parts of Europe, down the centuries, including to my own ancestors who left Spain in 1492. That old trope of blaming Jews worldwide for the devaluation of the lira, for currency fluctuations and for financial issues is something of which we have heard far too much. It is a tragedy that that country that we have come to admire over the years is going down that path.

We then heard an amazing, knowledgeable, experienced and excellent contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd)—my colleague and friend—who talked about the treatment of Turkish MPs who had been jailed. Over the years, she has been associated with many friends and activists in Turkey. Importantly, something she said was echoed by many Members this afternoon, which is that, as a true friend of Turkey—I believe that we are all true friends of Turkey in this Chamber this afternoon and that our country is a true friend of Turkey—we have to hope that the criticisms that we make are heard in good faith, because we want Turkey to be back on the path of democracy and the liberal values that we so treasure in this country. Many Members said that the UK Government should challenge Turkey in public, and I look forward

to hearing what the Minister has to say on that. They said that Turkey, once a beacon of democracy and freedom, is now a great cause for concern.

My right hon. Friend also said that we should now cease arms sales to Turkey until the authoritarian regime returns to some kind of democratic values. I am talking about those who have been arrested and imprisoned for simply speaking their mind, not for plotting to overthrow the Government of Turkey, and about the widespread use of torture and the arrest of journalists. Turkey now arrests and imprisons more journalists than anywhere else in the world per head of the population, including countries such as China and other authoritarian regimes. That is a disgrace. We want to see that practice reversed.

The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) said that it was difficult to have a debate on Turkey without mentioning the Council of Europe. He talked about the important role played by the Council of Europe. He said that 2,000 organisations and NGOs have been permanently closed by the Government since the coup attempt.

We then heard from my friend—I hope he does not mind me calling him that—the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who was one of the backers of the motion. He said that it was a timely debate given the elections on 24 June. He is well known as the chair of the all-party group for international freedom of religion or belief. He talked about the crackdown on freedom of speech and human rights since the coup, expressing his concerns that our counterparts in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey can no longer express their views freely as we can in this House. Had we been Turkish, we could well have been arrested for expressing our views today.

Following the coup attempt of July 2016, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), the shadow Foreign Secretary said:

“Turkey is of pivotal cultural, political and strategic importance to the world, straddling as it does the east-west divide with borders to eight countries. It is a vital NATO ally and has important minorities, particularly Kurds and Armenians, as its citizens. Half a million people of Turkish or Kurdish descent live in the UK and they are desperately worried about their families. With 2 million British visitors a year, Turkey is greatly loved in this country, and the interests of our two countries cannot be separated.”—[*Official Report*, 19 July 2016; Vol. 613, c. 686.]

Things have got considerably worse in a country with which we have a very close friendship and in which we have very good alliances.

The coup of 2016 resulted in a state of emergency enacted by the Parliament that was expected only to be temporary, yet it has been extended almost indefinitely. It allows, as we know, for rule by decree and the temporary suspension of so many rights in Turkey. The authorities have used it to target suspected political rivals and to reduce the space for civil society. As a consequence—we have heard about this today—checks and balances on human rights have shrunk, and Turkey is pushed further away from a system in which the rule of law is guaranteed. On 18 January 2017, just as Donald Trump was taking office in the United States, *The Guardian* said that Turkey was

“fast degenerating into outright dictatorship, emboldened by the imminent ascent of Donald Trump”—

a rise that has of course now happened.

Turkey under President Erdoğan is part of a new generation of authoritarian populists who seek to overturn the concept of human rights protections. The irony is that before President Erdoğan and his party democratically won power, they were themselves victims of human rights abuses under the old regime before 2002. In fact, Erdoğan was imprisoned in 1999 for reciting a religious poem. The fiercely secular constitution and the then elite consistently attempted to undermine even mildly Islamist political forces in the country.

The UK Government consistently state that they work closely with Turkey—as I hope they do—and underline the importance of the rule of law and the protection of freedom of expression. It is a statement that the Government make frequently when confronted with the issue of human rights and the current political situation in Turkey, but this seems to be having no effect. I urge the Minister to do more, speak louder, and I hope upon hope that the Turkish Government will listen.

The Turkish Government blamed the coup on followers of the exiled Turkish Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen and imposed the state of emergency, which suspends many of the normal functions of the constitution and derogates many provisions of the European convention on human rights. Since the coup, nearly 160,000 people have been arrested and 152,000 civil servants dismissed—many, as we have heard, totally arbitrarily.

Let me conclude with a few words about the situation for women in Turkey. There is no doubt that Turkish journalists are being arrested and held in prison in a way that we have never seen before, but the situation for women's rights is also going into reverse. Erdoğan has publicly stated that he does not believe in gender equality. He calls abortion murder and birth control treason. The AKP has been accused by critics of seeking to erode the country's secular principles to limit the civil liberties of women. In 2013, the World Economic Forum ranked Turkey 120 out of 136 nations for gender gaps in education, politics, health and economics.

This has been a timely debate. I hope that, as a close friend of Turkey, we will emphasise how important Turkey is to the rest of Europe, the region and the world and that we can see a reversal of this appalling slide into authoritarianism.

4.47 pm

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): I congratulate my old sparring partner, the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan), on securing this debate. I also commend her for all of her sterling work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Alevis. The Minister for Europe and the Americas is currently travelling abroad on ministerial duties, and sends his apologies that he is unable to respond to this debate. It is my pleasure—in the broadest sense of the word, I hasten to add—to take his place and respond on behalf of the Government.

I am grateful for the heartfelt contributions from a number of hon. Members, including that of my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) and the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who gave a heartfelt commentary. She is right to conclude that this trajectory is not one that inspires confidence for the credibility of the Turkish elections on 24 June. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley

(John Howell) rightly talked about the Council of Europe, and said that Turkey needs to do more to fulfil its obligations. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) also spoke. I will try to touch on all those points.

The right hon. Member for Enfield North rightly pointed out in her opening comments that a long-standing relationship underpins the UK's alliance with Turkey. Over the decades we have enjoyed many shared interests, including the strongest of people-to-people connections, trade, security, migration and of course the fellow membership of NATO. We rely on the Turkish state for the protection of millions of British tourists who enjoy Turkey's historical sites, and sunshine, each and every year. Turkey deserves the gratitude of the international community for hosting over 3.5 million Syrian refugees on its soil, at considerable cost and potential danger. We should also recognise that Turkey has stood on the frontline in the battle against Daesh. We commend its continuing efforts to deter foreign terrorist fighters from engaging in the conflict in Syria and returning to wreak havoc in Europe.

Turkey is also, as has been pointed out, an important trading partner. We expect that relationship to continue once we leave the European Union. I want to touch on the issue of arms sales, which was brought up by a number of Opposition Members. UK arms exports are subject to export controls. Each and every decision to approve licences on exports is considered a on case-by-case basis against consolidated EU and national arms exporting licensing criteria. This approach is, I assure Members, under continual review and based on the best information available at the time. I hope that when we look at the review, full account will be taken of each of the contributions made in this debate.

President Erdoğan's visit last month underlined the closeness of the UK-Turkey relationship and gave us the opportunity, as a candid friend of Turkey, to have some constructive discussions on the widest range of issues. The Prime Minister and President Erdoğan specifically referred to Turkey's forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections and the importance of observing international human rights obligations.

Let me touch on the issue of human rights priority country designation, which was also raised by a number of Members. We do not currently judge that Turkey meets the criterion to be designated as an HRPC. Notwithstanding that, the UK will be active and vocal in trying to promote a restoration of human rights within Turkey through all diplomatic channels, including at the very highest levels and through the support of civil society. We will keep this decision under close review.

A number of hon. Members in all parts of the House have raised great concerns that the elections in Turkey are taking place in an increasingly restrictive environment, against the backdrop of a continuing state of emergency. I share that concern. It is by no means an ideal time to have an election when there is an ongoing state of emergency. As has rightly been pointed out, it is now almost two years since the attempted coup, and we all understood that the state of emergency, understandable as it was at the time, was a temporary rather than a semi-permanent measure. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office shares these concerns. We have urged, and shall

[Mark Field]

continue to urge, that the state of emergency is lifted in order to restore normality. We will also make the case to counterparts in Turkey and to its London-based diplomats that it should ensure that the elections later this month are held in a manner that is as transparent, democratic, fair and orderly as possible.

We have noted the very great concerns expressed by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe about the conduct of the 2017 referendum in Turkey. We have encouraged the Turkish Government to ensure that those concerns are addressed in the conduct of upcoming elections. We welcome the fact that electoral observer missions from the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will be monitoring the elections in Istanbul, Ankara and beyond. The UK is providing practical support to that observer mission. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham is going to be involved in that—pending, of course, the voting arrangements. I very much hope that we will not have anything that is too pressing, although there may be something pressing at some point slightly nearer to 24 June. I hope that she will be able to play a robust role in this. We shall continue to monitor developments with interest as activity gets under way. I agree that it is important that all—I repeat, all—political parties within Turkey have the same opportunity to engage in a fully participatory and fair election campaign.

As I observed earlier, as a candid friend of the state of Turkey—I think we are all candid friends and want to see Turkey succeed for the future—we can and we do regularly raise sensitive subjects such as human rights with Turkish Ministers. In addition to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's discussions with President Erdoğan last month, she and the Foreign Secretary raised specific human rights issues at the highest level when they visited Turkey last year. The Minister for Europe, who has visited Turkey no fewer than six times since the coup in June 2016, has consistently raised the need to uphold human rights and democracy, particularly in the aftermath of that failed coup and in response to the ongoing terrorist threat. That work will, I can assure the House, continue.

We have long encouraged Turkey to work towards the full protection of fundamental rights, particularly in the area of freedom of expression. Turkey's new constitution, very narrowly passed in a referendum last year, comes into force immediately after the forthcoming elections. I accept that, regrettably, it concentrates Executive power into the hands of a single President, abolishes the office of Prime Minister and reduces parliamentary oversight. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will continue to call for Turkey to enact those constitutional changes in a way that sustains democracy, respects the rule of law and protects fundamental freedoms in line with its international commitments, which many Members have referred to, including my hon. Friend the Member for Henley.

We also urge respect for freedom of the media, which is essential to the long-term health of Turkish democracy. I share the deep reservations expressed by Members today about the high number of journalists and social media users currently in detention. The FCO will strongly support protection of the rights of minority groups in

Turkey, including Kurdish and Alevi communities, among others. I call today on the Turkish authorities to safeguard their welfare and respect their human rights.

I think we all accept that PKK terrorism presents a severe challenge to Turkey and its allies in the region. The PKK is a proscribed terrorist group in the EU and the US, and we stand shoulder to shoulder with Turkey in condemning that group's ongoing campaign of violence, which has led to thousands of deaths since the 1980s. While firmly condemning PKK violence, we continue to call for a return to a peace process. The UK Government have supported and will continue to support a number of organisations seeking to build active dialogue between different actors on the Kurdish issue and address related human rights issues. We also maintain keen links with all parties represented in the Turkish Parliament, including the largely Kurdish HDP and a wide variety of civil society organisations. As a consequence, we regard the reports of pre-trial detention of opposition politicians as unacceptable.

We welcome the early steps that Turkey has taken to address some of the human rights concerns internationally by reducing the custody period and creating a commission to review dismissals carried out under the state of emergency, but those are very small steps, and much more needs to be done. I know that I speak for all Members who have contributed to the debate in urging the Turkish Government to empower the commission further to deal effectively with the high volume of cases it faces.

In conclusion, I sympathise with the misgivings expressed by Members, not least the right hon. Member for Enfield North, about the situation in Turkey in the lead-up to the elections. I want to reassure the House that the UK, along with international partners, will be examining and reporting on the conduct of the forthcoming elections very closely indeed.

4.57 pm

Joan Ryan: I thank all Members who have taken part in today's debate. We heard no dissent on either side of the House from the deep concern about what is happening in Turkey—its slide into authoritarianism and the serious doubt that we can see free and fair elections there. I am pleased that the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) will be going there as an election monitor, and I look forward to hearing an account of that.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) for his very clear statement about the view of those on the Labour Front Bench. We heard a stronger statement today from those on the Government Benches than we have heard previously. It is striking that all the contributions were somewhat at odds with the Prime Minister's press statement with President Erdoğan at the end of his visit. I suggest that she thinks again about what she said.

We are true friends to Turkey, but to the Turkish, Kurdish and Alevi communities and all individuals who are being persecuted and oppressed and whose human rights are just being swept aside. We need to do and say more and be stronger about it. I am surprised that the Minister for Europe and the Americas has been to Turkey six times and made the points he has made; clearly he has not been listened to. He dismissed my request that he ask the Turkish embassy to make a

polling station—maybe a mobile one, as we have heard about—available in north London for the Turkish-speaking community to vote. Will the Minister present make those representations for us? I thank him for his response today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered early elections, human rights and the political situation in Turkey.

Secondary Ticketing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

5 pm

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): I am pleased to have the opportunity to discuss secondary ticketing, which is the process of reselling tickets for admission to events such as live music concerts, rock festivals, football matches, other sporting events, exhibitions and so on. The term “secondary ticketing” refers to tickets that have already been sold for the first time by the organiser of the event, and are then sold on by the ticket holder in the secondary marketplace. In the ticketing industry, the original issuers are generally known as “primaries”, and later sellers are known—for obvious reasons—as “secondaries”, or more typically as “secondary websites”, because the secondary ticketing business overwhelmingly takes place on the internet through online transactions paid for by credit cards.

I began to take an interest in this issue because of a constituency case, which was the reason I originally applied for this debate. However, those specific matters have recently been caught under the terms of the House’s sub judice rules—I consulted the House authorities and the Principal Clerk of the Table Office at length about that case, and I regret that I cannot now refer to it directly today. None the less, secondary ticketing is clearly a matter of widespread concern among the public whom we represent, as well as among hon. Members, who have held numerous debates on the subject in the House in recent years. The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) is in the Chamber this evening.

Secondary ticketing is an area of great controversy that raises important questions about consumer protection, business freedom and responsibility, the ethics or legality of certain types of behaviour, and indeed the clarity of the law and whether it is applied correctly. There are also questions about the structures of the entertainment industries that put on events that require tickets. This is an area in which public policy must be got right and implemented properly, and it is fair to say that there is still considerable work to do.

Last year, two hon. Members who were active in the all-party group on ticket abuse—the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West and my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams)—were threatened with arrest when they visited the offices of Viagogo, a notorious secondary ticketing website that was operating from premises at 71 Fenchurch Street in the City of London while claiming that it did not have a proper UK office. That happened simply because they wished, as Members of Parliament, to raise concerns with that company about constituents who had been repeatedly ripped off by Viagogo, after it had repeatedly ignored correspondence and requests for meetings.

Research by the consumer watchdog Which? found that as many as a quarter of tickets to popular concerts and events end up on secondary ticketing websites such as Viagogo. Which? found that 26% of tickets for a show by the comedian Jack Whitehall, and nearly a fifth of tickets to see Lady Gaga at the O2 arena in London, were available on Viagogo and three other resale sites—Get Me In!, Seatwave and StubHub. About 15% of tickets for last year’s first night of the BBC Proms

[Mr Richard Bacon]

at the Royal Albert Hall were found on secondary ticketing sites, including a £38 ticket with a mark-up of 279% on StubHub, and one with a 300% mark-up on Get Me In! Crucially, Which? discovered that 49% of consumers who bought those tickets believed that they were buying from official sellers, and it is clear that proper consumer protection is required in this area.

As well as the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West, who has campaigned on this issue for many years, and my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty, another active campaigner is the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who secured a debate on this subject, to which the Minister responded, only last month. The Minister might be getting rather tired of having to come back to the House of Commons, but that is an index of the concern felt by hon. Members across the House.

There is a wide range of views on what reform is required and what that should look like. One might say that the bookends of the argument could be loosely characterised as ranging from the views of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, an experienced rock musician, to that set out in an Institute of Economic Affairs paper written by Dr Stephen Davies. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire stated his view clearly:

“I question the need for a secondary market at all. Why is there one? If someone cannot go to a concert they have a ticket for, they should give it back to the venue, which can then resell it to someone who can go. What is wrong with a simple arrangement such as that? We usually hear from people—we have seen it in a couple of articles—that this is all about tickets finding their natural value, as if there is a sort of stock market where tickets find their real value at the hands of the touts reselling them.”—[*Official Report*, 2 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 165WH.]

The IEA, as one might expect, takes a different view, stating:

“The fundamental cause of disappointment for many would-be buyers or their having to pay more than a nominated but below-market price is that in these cases”—

that is to say where there is enormous interest in obtaining the tickets—

“(which to repeat, are not the norm) there is a massive excess of demand over supply. Far more people want to go to the event than can physically attend.”

The IEA paper is certainly worth reading, although personally I do not think it places sufficient emphasis on the very serious consumer protection issues that have become apparent.

It is of course true that for any good or service where there is a fashion or fervour to obtain it, the price can be bid up very easily. That happens with Nike, where the manufacturer of very popular training shoes tries to limit supply. It is every supplier, every manufacturer, and every commercial business's dream to have people fighting over their product and bidding up the price. I remember that when the IKEA store opened in north London, there were literally fights outside because so many people wanted to get in. That might have created a small disturbance, with the police having to be called, but the fact that there was now an IKEA store in that part of north London was all over every newspaper in the country.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that in the cases he outlines, with regard to how much the tickets should be sold for and whether face value is below market value, artists such as Ed Sheeran, Adele, Kate Bush and others should be able to set that price on the basis of what they deem their fan base can afford and what would be fair for the majority of their fans?

Mr Bacon: I do agree. Of course, there are a variety of other considerations that also help to set the price. Some artists only do a small number of shows. A Korean boy band is coming over to the UK shortly. I would tell you its name if I could remember it, Madam Deputy Speaker, but to be honest when I was told, I had to admit I had never heard of it and I cannot now remember its name, but apparently the band is very popular—God, I sound like Sir Bufton, don't I? There are people flying in from Korea to hear this boy band and the official ticket price has been set at £165. That is an indication of the importance of this extremely successful sector to the UK economy, given all the flights and hotels, and the tourism that will take place while people are here. It is therefore very important that there is probity and regularity in the sale of tickets, and that the artist and promoter can set the price.

There are other considerations. If the performer is a bloke with a guitar—yes, I have heard of Ed Sheeran—the cost of putting on a simple show may be much lower than that for a very sophisticated show that, while still a rock concert, may be more akin to a west end or Broadway show, with the concomitant costs. That will also influence a promoter's decision about the ticket price, as will how much the artist wishes to get or how much the promoter is willing to pay the artist. The hon. Lady is quite right that those are decisions for the promoter and the artist, but they cannot be taken in isolation.

As for the other issue, this is where people sometimes struggle with the argument from those who think that there should be no secondary market at all. I remember when I first tried to buy an iPad. I knew, because I had been past the shop, that there was a big Apple store on Regent Street. I foolishly thought that by going to the Apple store, I would be able to buy one, only to discover when I got there that the fervour that often occurs was such that there was either the actuality or the illusion of great scarcity. I was told after wandering around the store for some time that there was absolutely no possibility of my buying an iPad from the store, and that I had to do that online and it would take several days before I could possibly get my hands on one. This was of course because of the excessive demand for iPads compared with Apple's ability, even working at full tilt, to manufacture them through its plants. Again, that is a nice problem to have, but when that sort of thing happens, we cannot be surprised that it ends up pushing up prices.

I had the opportunity to discuss some of these issues briefly with the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West yesterday. I pointed out that tickets for the 100 metres final at the London 2012 Olympics were going for £2,000. I do not mean that they were being traded on the secondary market for £2,000. If someone wanted to sit at the finishing tape for the final of the 100 metres—the blue-riband event, which is

watched by billions all over the world—that was the price that LOCOG, the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, was charging them. Of course, people could sit elsewhere in the stadium and still get a reasonable view. I had the pleasure of selling souvenir programmes for the 1978 Commonwealth games, which was an alarmingly long time ago, and had the chance to see some very exciting live athletics. I can understand why people want to do that—it is a very exciting thing to watch—but the point is that many people thought that it was worth paying a lot of money. I am sure that many of the people did not spend the £2,000 personally—perhaps wealthy corporations paid for them—but the fact is that the promoter decided to set the price at that level, and I think that we need to have some regard for that.

Mrs Hodgson: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the organiser set that price for all the reasons that he cited and was confident that tickets would not be touted? The tickets were protected, which was a proviso of the International Olympic Committee, although that was not extended to the Rugby Football Union for the Rugby world cup, for example. Those tickets could probably have gone for £20,000 on the open market, but they were protected at the price that the event organiser decided. Does he agree that that should be the way that this goes forward?

Mr Bacon: I would like to see a regular and orderly market. In a moment, I will say something about the analogy with the stock market made by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, because for different reasons from the ones that I think he meant, it has some interesting things to tell us. The regulation of the stock market is very concerned with an orderly market. I am sure that the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West is right that those tickets could have gone for considerably more, and I do not understand why the provisions that were extended to the Olympics—that was mainly because the contract that our country had to sign with the International Olympic Committee in order to get the Olympics to come here absolutely required us to put in those provisions—were not also extended to the Rugby world cup, particularly when we know that the Rugby Football Union was begging for that to happen. I do not personally understand that at all. I think it was a mistake.

I was talking about the IEA paper and, as it were, the IEA view of the world. Although I do not necessarily subscribe to every jot and tittle of what is in the paper, I found it interesting to read. As I said, it did not necessarily focus on the consumer protection issues as much as I would have wished, but it is certainly true that many consumers have been seriously ripped off by secondary sites and have found huge difficulty in obtaining redress. There is a need for proper consumer protection and the right regulatory environment.

I think it is probably fair to say, as a generality, that I might be a little more interested in the papers produced by the Institute of Economic Affairs than the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, but the reason why I like his stock market analogy is that there are a number of areas of read-across. The stock market of publicly traded securities is subject to very tight regulation and strict rules. Participants in the market must all be treated fairly. Information conveyed to the marketplace

must be conveyed to all participants simultaneously. There are strict rules about how minority shareholders must be treated. For the issuing and trading of Government securities, it is normal to have a primary dealer, or a set of primary dealers, who are allowed to buy Government securities directly from the Government, or Governments, and in return for the Government's conferring these privileges on primary dealers, the dealers also have to agree to specific responsibilities.

When I left university and started work in an investment bank, I had to pass an examination in order to become what was then known as a registered representative. It was binary: either you were a registered representative or you were not, and if you were not, there were certain activities that you could not undertake. I do not want to stretch the analogy too far, but it seems to me that in the area of secondary ticketing, consumers and campaigners are looking for clarity and simplicity. They want strong rules that are fair, enforced, and easy for everyone to understand. I believe it is possible that part of the solution would be registered ticket dealers—a solution that is analogous to what I have just said about the stock market. At the moment it feels like the wild west, and people are getting hurt.

I might add that some who have been in the business of offering tickets to events for many years, and who have great knowledge and experience of the sector, also feel that they are getting hurt. The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 allowed for the freezing and seizure of assets by administrative fiat, without the process of going through a court trial of a prosecution. That legislation, which was designed to deal with international money launderers and drug dealers,

“undermines the very foundation of our freedoms, which is that people are innocent until they are proved guilty, that the state cannot merely seize the property of the individual but must establish that the individual has forfeited his liberties under the rule of law... The new power of civil forfeiture is born of an understandable frustration at our inability to pin things on certain individuals, but it is a sloppy and dangerous short cut to improving our criminal law.”—[*Official Report*, 30 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 814.]

Those are not my words, but the words of George Osborne during the passage of the legislation on 30 October 2001. I believe it is at least possible that that legislation is now being misused and misinterpreted.

Let me return to the question of what a suitable regulatory framework would look like. I think it is obvious that self-regulation through the assorted trade bodies that have cropped up from time to time in recent years has failed, and that the consumer rip-offs have been continuously getting worse—even in recent years, during the very period in which parliamentarians, the Government and the competition authorities have been paying more and more attention to the subject.

We need firm and clear rules, including, where appropriate, adjustments to the statutory framework, as well as vigorous enforcement, for which the required resources could be found quite easily. For example, a 1% levy on all tickets sold on websites for events in the UK would produce tens of millions of pounds to pay for consumer protection. It would not be very difficult. Many industries pay part of the cost of their own regulation: Ofwat is an example of that. The system could be revenue neutral, or—I think my hon. Friend the Minister would like this even more if she were trying to persuade the Chancellor—it might even make a profit.

[Mr Bacon]

A prime area for attention are the massive conflicts of interest that exist within the events industry. One company, Live Nation, is a venue owner, a promoter of events, an artist management company, and an operator in the primary ticketing business through its ownership of Ticketmaster. It also owns two of the leading secondary websites, Get Me In! and Seatwave, which have attracted so much controversy. That is a very obvious source of conflicts of interest.

The most common complaint is that when tickets for a very popular and oversubscribed event such as a rock concert are sold out at their face value within a few minutes of going on sale, the same tickets appear only a few minutes later on the secondary sites at a much higher price. The old question “cui bono?” applies: who benefits? Well, plainly the holders of the tickets purchased at face value, who have now sold those tickets at a much higher price, benefit considerably; but so does the secondary trading website through which the exchange takes place, because the website charges a commission for facilitating the transaction. The commission can easily be 20%, 30% or even 40% of the new sale price. If, say, a £55 ticket is resold at an inflated price of £250, which is perfectly plausible, the commission alone on the resale of the ticket, at just 20%, will be £50, and could easily be £75 or £100—more than the total original face value of the ticket.

If the secondary trading website is owned by the primary providers of the tickets—the concert promoters—they may make more money from the resale of the ticket than by having originally issued it, although in the second transaction they are acting only as brokers; provided, of course, that the secondary trading websites have enough tickets to sell. There is, then, a massive incentive for any primary provider that owns a secondary platform to ensure that the secondary platform has enough tickets. That type of conflict of interest is very clear and should be dealt with firmly. There is also, of course, a massive incentive for secondary platforms to encourage other ticket holders to engage in dubious behaviour to make sure they have enough tickets to sell on the platforms. There should be an investigation into firms such as Live Nation and whether their vertically integrated ownership structure is harming consumers and leading directly to abuse. My personal opinion is that it is.

There is even controversy—the Lord alone knows why—about whether the secondary trading platforms are brokers. They plainly are—they make promises and offer guarantees—and if they were correctly seen as brokers taking money in payments, they would fall under the supervision of the Financial Conduct Authority. As brokers, they routinely lie. They offer for sale tickets that they purport to have access to but which they do not have access to—what are called specs, or speculative tickets—in the hope that they will find the required ticket in time. If they were treated and regulated as brokers, this would be much easier to stop.

I would like to offer the Minister some propositions that I think command widespread consent and which should inform the Government’s thinking as they reform this area. First, the promoter or vendor should have the right to choose to whom it wishes to sell its tickets. Secondly, the promoter of an event should have the

right to decide at what price the tickets should sell and to impose terms and conditions, so long as they are not unreasonable. The prices for those tickets will vary considerably depending on the nature of the event, and it should be perfectly in order for there to be massive price variations that reflect the desirability of the event.

As a constituent told me this morning—he was a Chelsea season ticket holder so had access to the tickets—he paid £140 to go to the FA Cup final, in which Chelsea were victorious. He would expect to pay on average £20 per normal premier league game, having paid £940 for a season ticket. Somebody attending a game against Accrington Stanley would expect to pay considerably less. I mentioned the £2,000 charged for the best seats at the Olympics for the 100-metre final. That price was set by the promoter. There is nothing wrong with such massive variations; it reflects the reality.

Fourthly—this goes back to the first point—it should be entirely in order for the promoter to operate a discriminatory pricing policy for favoured customers for a wide number of different reasons, which may include assisting activists in the sport, as happens often in rugby, assisting supporters clubs or exposing an event to young people, as theatres and opera houses often do. It may, of course, be a more expensive package for corporate clients that helps the event make more money.

If a promoter sold every ticket at £40, it is possible that, in the case of many shows, if they were of the elaborate variety, it would not cover its costs. Promoters need to be able to discriminate in their pricing and to offer packages to favoured customers. A few years ago, Wimbledon had a people’s Sunday—it was not expecting to have games on the Sunday, the rest day, but it did because of rain—for which unreserved seats were readily available at low prices, which allowed those of more limited means to sit on the best show courts and see the best tennis. That sort of thing ought to be within the gift of the promoter to decide.

Fifthly, it should not be possible for a promoter to cancel a ticket because it has been resold, unless it has been acquired unlawfully or in breach of the promoter’s reasonable terms and conditions. Sixthly, one should not be able to oblige a vendor to repurchase a ticket, but equally, and seventhly, a ticket holder who can no longer use a ticket should, at the ticket holder’s own choice, have the clear right in law to sell it either back to the vendor, at the vendor’s discretion, or to another party. From that, it follows that there should be registered ticket dealers that can have different classes of licence—rather like different classes of drivers licences—depending on whether they are operating online or outside venues. Anyone doing business with the public should also have liability insurance, which should be visible to the customer. That is not a complete list, but I hope it is a useful contribution for the Minister.

There is one area of considerable importance that I have not had time to mention so far but would like to touch on before I sit down. Some of the worst offenders in harvesting tickets for immediate resale using sophisticated software are to be found in the organisations with the most up-to-date IT infrastructure—the fastest fibre links and the mainframes with the fastest processing speeds—such as the big banks in the City and big accounting firms, and certain people in the NHS and even in one or two police organisations. I hope the Minister will reflect

on that because sometimes Government investment in IT is assisting this pernicious trade. Members who have read the book “Flash Boys” about high frequency trading will immediately get the point.

I hope my remarks have given the Minister a little food for thought and I look forward to hearing her reply.

5.25 pm

The Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries (Margot James): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) on securing this debate, which is timely given the start of the summer sporting season with many events to which fans will want fair access.

It has become ever more difficult to buy tickets at face value with powerful new technologies being deployed against the interests of consumers. However, as my hon. Friend acknowledged, there is a role for responsible secondary ticketing platforms, if only to give fans the opportunity to resell at a reasonable price tickets for events they are genuinely no longer able to attend. Nevertheless, I am concerned that these genuine fans are being crowded out on these platforms by professional resellers, who harvest hundreds of tickets on the primary market with no intention of using them themselves.

The Government recognise that the process of distributing and buying tickets can often be a cause of public frustration and concern. We are determined to crack down on unacceptable behaviour and have made quite a bit of progress to date, which is not to say that there is not more to do, and I thank my hon. Friend for his suggestions for further consideration.

The Consumer Rights Act 2015 imposed a duty on sellers to provide information to fans including the face value of the ticket, information to enable the buyer to identify the particular seat or standing area at the venue, information about any restriction limiting the use of the ticket to persons of a particular description, and information about the identity of the seller—for example, if they are an operator of a secondary ticketing facility or an event organiser. Section 105 of the Digital Economy Act 2017 introduced an additional requirement for ticket sellers to provide a unique ticket number,

where one has originally been given, when putting a ticket up for resale. This provision is now in force, and I know that some event organisers are beginning to look at how it can be used, along with other measures, to improve access and protections for fans.

Under the secondary legislation, we also introduced the “anti-bot” provision which is well on course to come into force next month. This will make it a criminal offence to purchase more tickets than the maximum permitted for an event where the purchase is made electronically through the use of software designed for the purpose and where the intent is to obtain financial gain. We hope these regulations will significantly improve the current situation.

The legislation is of limited use unless properly enforced, so I welcome the Competition and Markets Authority’s recent announcement that it has secured commitments from three of the four largest secondary platforms on additional information on cost to be provided with tickets being resold through their platforms, and that it has notified the outlier Viagogo of its intention to pursue court action if it does not fall into line and address the CMA’s concerns satisfactorily.

The Government are also now giving approximately £15 million annually to National Trading Standards for national and cross-boundary enforcement. It has committed to take forward investigations against power-sellers from within its annual budget, and I thank trading standards officers across the country for the excellent work they are now doing in this area.

The Advertising Standards Authority has recently taken action against the main four secondary ticketing sites, banning the misleading presentation of pricing information on their websites. Companies will now have to be clear and transparent. In addition, Google has introduced new rules for ticket resellers, requiring certification on the Google platform. To apply for certification, it will require solid information.

I do not have time to tell the House everything the Government are doing but hope I have been able to give a flavour of the majority of our actions.

Question put and agreed to.

5.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 7 June 2018

[SIR DAVID AMESS *in the Chair*]

Airports National Policy Statement

1.30 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Third Report of the Transport Committee, Airports National Policy Statement, HC 548.

It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I begin by thanking the other members of the Select Committee on Transport for their work in quite a long and involved inquiry. I am very pleased to see my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) and for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) here today.

If deciding to build an additional runway at Heathrow airport was easy, it would have been done long before now. It is not, which is why successive Governments, over decades, have dodged and deferred the decision. One reason why the issue is so difficult is that it will affect the lives of many thousands of people—those living in the communities close to the airport, those who work at the airport, and passengers and businesses that rely on the connections that it provides. Our report and much of the debate about the decision focus on the big picture, the economic growth that a new runway will facilitate, the billions of pounds of investment required to build it, the jobs and apprenticeships created and the number of households affected by new noise or air pollution. It is right that we recognise the importance of the decision for the whole of the UK. For Britain to succeed, improved connectivity, both outside our islands and around them, is key.

However, we should also recognise that this is about individuals, be they the family whose house would be demolished to make way for the new runway, the passenger who wants an affordable flight to visit their family abroad or the small business owner who needs to get their goods to markets around the globe. Our decision will change their lives. We must be mindful of the consequences and, where there are adverse impacts, as we know there will be, we must do all we can to mitigate or compensate for them.

Let me explain the process and the Select Committee's approach to our role in it. The airports national policy statement is Parliament's opportunity to vote on the Government's policy to provide additional runway capacity in south-east England through the construction of a north-west runway at Heathrow airport. If approved, the final airports NPS provides the framework and criteria against which a development consent application will be judged.

The airports NPS is different from other transport-related national policy statements considered by our predecessors. It not only identifies a specific site but details a specific scheme. It applies only to a north-west runway at Heathrow airport; it is not applicable to any other scheme to build an additional runway. If for any reason that scheme

fails, through legal or financial difficulties, no other scheme—not even an alternative design on the site at Heathrow airport—can easily fill the void under this NPS.

Under the Planning Act 2008, our Committee was designated to carry out parliamentary scrutiny of the Government's proposal. We did not try to put ourselves in the Government's shoes and consider whether we would have chosen the same option; rather, we scrutinised the decision that they had made. It could be said that we marked their homework. In conducting our inquiry, we had four overarching objectives: to ensure that the Government had adequately explained their case for runway expansion and for choosing the north-west runway scheme at Heathrow; to ensure that the evidence supporting the NPS was robust and was accurately reflected in the final document; to ensure that the conditions of approval in the NPS provided enough safeguards for affected communities and passengers; and to ensure that any risks of a successful legal challenge were minimised.

The Government outlined their case for additional runway capacity in south-east England in chapter 2 of the NPS, and we broadly agreed with the Government's position. Heathrow airport is already full, and other London airports are operating at capacity during peak times. All major airports in south-east England are expected to be full by the mid-2030s, with four out of five full by the mid-2020s. Doing nothing has consequences. If we fail to tackle the demand for extra runway capacity, that will result in less choice, more disruption and higher airfares for passengers. The UK's competitiveness may already have been damaged as other European hub airports have expanded their global networks. Capacity constraints do not impact just on passengers; trade opportunities through air freight may be forgone, and inward investment may be diverted to other European countries with better connectivity.

The Government outlined their case for additional runway capacity at Heathrow through a north-west runway in chapter 3 of the NPS. Maintaining the UK's hub status in Europe is the Government's overriding objective in developing their preference. Heathrow is the UK's only hub airport and it is one of Europe's leading hubs. Some 78 million passengers travelled through Heathrow last year. It is unrivalled in the UK for density of airlines, connections and transfer passengers. That makes it possible to sustain routes that would simply not be viable as point-to-point links. The clear preference of the airlines is to expand at Heathrow, although not at any cost. The connectivity benefits would be greater and realised sooner from the north-west runway scheme than from the other schemes considered—the one involving Gatwick airport and the one for an extended northern runway at Heathrow—although it should be noted that the extent and timing of the benefits of the north-west runway scheme are contingent on its being delivered on time, on budget and to the capacity assumed.

Air freight is also critical to the UK economy. Freight capacity is the other major comparative advantage that the north-west runway scheme offers, compared with the alternatives. Heathrow is already the UK's busiest port by value, handling £360 million-worth of goods each day and accounting for 30% of the UK's non-EU exports.

[*Lilian Greenwood*]

Those are the arguments that have persuaded many businesses and many of our constituents across the country that Heathrow expansion is needed, and that have led our Committee both to conclude that the Government are right to pursue development at Heathrow and to accept the arguments that they have made in favour of their preferred scheme.

We recommended that the planning process moved to the next stage by approving the airports NPS, provided—this is important—that the concerns identified in our report were addressed by the Government in the final NPS that they laid before Parliament. Our conclusion could be described as “Yes, but”. My contribution today will spend more time on the “but” than the “yes”, primarily because I am conscious that few colleagues will have escaped Heathrow’s very effective campaign setting out the benefits of expansion. Anyone who walked through the tube station here at Westminster will have seen posters showing some of the arguments.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): The hon. Lady is making an important point. Of course, all those Heathrow teams will be getting massive bonuses personally if they are able to persuade this place to vote for the NPS.

Lilian Greenwood: I cannot comment on the pay and benefits for staff who work at Heathrow. Undoubtedly, both Heathrow and Gatwick airport have sought to influence the decision made by hon. Members here today. The Select Committee’s role is important in ensuring that people have independent and objective information that enables them to make a decision.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a good case, and I look forward to hearing the “buts”. It is correct that for a brief moment Gatwick was in the frame, but for many years before that, Gatwick was simply a satellite of Heathrow and controlled and silenced by it. Now that the Government have been so partial and so partisan, again the only name in the frame is Heathrow, so my hon. Friend is making exactly the right point, which is that Heathrow is the dominant voice, but does she agree that it is perhaps much more so than she has said so far?

Lilian Greenwood: I think Heathrow is the dominant voice, but in part that is because it is our only hub airport. Many of the arguments that the Government have put forward are predicated on the importance of that hub status, although I will address some of the other points, which I am sure my hon. Friend will want to hear.

Right hon. and hon. Members will have seen the Department for Transport’s latest summary, which rehearses some of these arguments with some very nice graphics, so I need not say more about it than that. Our inquiry sought to get into the detail of the scheme and how valid concerns about the Government’s approach might be addressed in a final NPS before Parliament was asked to approve it. I confess that when we sought this debate, we did not anticipate that the Government would have already laid their final version of the airports NPS, which happened two days ago. I commend them for their speedy actions. I welcome the Secretary of

State’s remarks in the Chamber on Tuesday in which he thanked the Committee for the scrutiny we completed. I also recognised the shadow Secretary of State’s acknowledgement that we “left no stone unturned” in our report.

Conducting detailed scrutiny is absolutely critical, and I am immensely proud of the detailed work that our Committee completed within the time available. The Heathrow plans have been more than 20 years in the making. The implications of Parliament’s decision will last even longer. It is important that we get this right.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend and her colleagues on the Transport Committee for their work. Given the depth and rigour that her Committee went into on the detailed elements of the case, does she agree that the Secretary of State has come up with a remarkably brief response in a very short time and could not possibly have had the time to answer all the detailed questions that her Committee’s report quite rightly put?

Lilian Greenwood: The Secretary of State responded within approximately two months to our report. We are looking at the detail of the final report and what has made its way into the final NPS.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): For many of us who are still to decide which side of the argument to take, the devil will be in the detail. Does my hon. Friend agree that those who are impacted the most should be the ones compensated the most in terms of the mitigation? I allude in particular to my Slough constituency, where the third runway will be built. The mitigation, in terms not only of air and noise but of training and skills colleges, and other logistics and jobs facilities, should be sited more in Slough than in other constituencies.

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend is a great advocate for his constituency and rightly so. It is important that, if the proposal goes ahead, the impact on local communities is carefully considered. I am also mindful, however, that this scheme is intended to benefit the whole of the UK. It is vital that, if it goes ahead, the whole of the UK is seen to benefit, including from the opportunities for jobs and apprenticeships that it would bring.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): I also pay serious tribute to the hon. Lady for having conducted the first proper scrutiny by her Select Committee into the Heathrow case. As we saw, as that scrutiny was applied, the Heathrow case evaporated. A number of people on the Committee who began in favour of Heathrow expansion are now implacably opposed to it, because of the scrutiny that she applied as Chair of that Committee. I am grateful to her for doing that. Was there a single independent voice to give evidence—other than Heathrow—who believed that it is possible to reconcile Heathrow expansion with air quality limits, which we are legally obliged to adhere to?

Lilian Greenwood: The hon. Gentleman is requiring me to remember all the evidence we heard over many months from many voices. Air quality is undoubtedly one of the key challenges that the Government face in

bringing forward these proposals. That is why it formed one of the most important areas in our report; we wanted to have some certainty that the UK could indeed meet its air quality targets at the same time as addressing the need for people to travel by air.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Lilian Greenwood: I will have to continue at some point, but yes.

Daniel Zeichner: The element of risk in this whole process is an important point. The Committee identified many risks. In the event of a delay or the project not going forward, would it not make sense for the Government to consider using alternative provision where there is capacity at other airports, such as Gatwick and Stansted? There is a real risk with this project and we cannot end up in a situation in which nothing happens.

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend made a fantastic contribution to the work of the Committee in developing this report. He is right. There are two issues in relation to his point. First, the NPS is scheme-specific, so if for any reason it does not go ahead, that limits the Government's options. Having said that, even if it does go ahead in the best possible scenario, it would not be open until 2026. That is why one of our recommendations—I will come to this later—is about the better use we make of all our regional airports and what needs to be put in place.

We welcome the overall tone of the Government's response to our report, which was published on Tuesday. It is clear that they have, in principle, taken on board much of our report and clearly acknowledged what we were trying to achieve. The Committee still needs to do more detailed analysis of the Government's response—we want to be sure that the substance matches the rhetoric. I do not believe that accepting our recommendations in principle is enough. Hon. Members need to decide whether we can just rely on the planning process to provide these necessary safeguards and guarantees, to protect communities and passengers. The parliamentary approval stage of the planning process is designed specifically to set the criteria for approval. It should then be up to Heathrow to meet those requirements.

I want to take this opportunity to explain why the Committee made our recommendations. First, we wanted to ensure that the supporting evidence was robust and accurately reflected in the NPS. We wanted to ensure that MPs are well informed. It is impossible to know with absolute certainty what the exact impacts of this scheme will be but, given the political gravity of the issue, we wanted to ensure that MPs were fully informed of the potential scale of costs and benefits.

Although we accepted the Government's high-level arguments in favour of their preferred scheme, our investigations revealed that the north-west runway's advantage over the other schemes considered was not perhaps as wide as was set out. In some cases, the comparative advantage to not expanding at all was small. The strategic case for the north-west runway rests primarily on it delivering more routes to a greater number of destinations, and at greater frequencies, than the other schemes. Our detailed analysis of the Department

for Transport's forecasts revealed that the future passenger growth, destination and route offering at the UK level is broadly similar over the longer term, compared with the other schemes. Most of the passenger growth generated from the north-west runway scheme will be accounted for by outbound leisure passengers and transfer passengers, who offer fewer direct economic benefits to the UK economy. The Government's own forecasts show that business passenger growth is negligible compared with no expansion.

The anticipated growth in connections to Heathrow is a key reason why the north-west runway scheme has garnered considerable support from regions away from London and the south-east, but there is a concern that the Government do not have the policy levers to guarantee that a proportion of the new slots created will be allocated to domestic routes into Heathrow. Given the costs currently anticipated for the north-west runway scheme, there is a possibility that domestic routes from Heathrow would not be commercially viable. It should also be acknowledged that an expanded Heathrow would abstract growth from non-London regions, with over 160,000 fewer direct international flights each year compared with a no-expansion scenario. This is a nationally significant infrastructure project. It must work for the whole nation and not just for London.

Justine Greening: Is the hon. Lady's point that allowing Heathrow to expand will mean fewer flights for airports outside of the south-east?

Lilian Greenwood: Our analysis shows that there would be fewer direct international flights from other airports if Heathrow expansion goes ahead, because there is a clear demand from airlines for slots at Heathrow—a demand that cannot be met because it is currently operating at capacity.

The benefits and costs in the economic case for the north-west runway are finely balanced, and we uncovered some shortcomings in the way the Department for Transport had completed its analysis. Although there are wider economic benefits that are not captured as part of the case, there are also environmental and social costs that are not monetised.

More significantly, the case rests on the scheme being delivered by 2026, and at capacity by 2028. We heard evidence of factors that might prevent delivery of the scheme. We also heard that the Department's assumption that capacity would be filled within two years of opening was implausible and inconsistent with Heathrow's own plans. In the Minister's reply, I would be grateful if he confirmed whether the Government updated the airport's NPS to reflect the relatively small difference in strategic and economic benefits of the schemes considered, and whether they have fully corrected the shortcomings we identified in how they completed their appraisal.

According to the Government's analysis, the financial and delivery risks of the north-west runway are the highest of the schemes considered. One of the main delivery risks that our inquiry identified was airspace change. The airspace change required to facilitate the north-west runway is significant, and although it may be deliverable from a technical or safety point of view, the reality is that such change has proved extremely difficult to implement because of its impact on populations beneath routes.

[*Lilian Greenwood*]

The Civil Aviation Authority is of the view that more substantive reform is required if the change needed to accompany the north-west runway can be delivered in full. We therefore recommended that the Government outline their intended policy approach to delivering airspace change for their preferred scheme as a priority. Is the Minister confident that the airspace change required for the scheme can be delivered in full? What specific reforms do the Government intend to implement to ensure that occurs?

The environmental and community impacts of the north-west runway are by far the greatest of the schemes considered. Our Committee was concerned that the numbers presented by the Government in the draft NPS and the supporting documents did not present the full picture of those possible impacts. Arguably, the future noise impacts present the greatest area of uncertainty for the scheme. Although modern planes are undoubtedly quieter, noise is a key concern for communities, and high exposure to noise can have a serious impact on people's health.

The Department's approach to presenting noise exposure nets out the winners and losers from noise changes, but the reality is that community acceptability is more often shaped by the losers who experience new or increased noise. The evidence shows that more than 300,000 people could be newly affected by significant noise annoyance from an expanded Heathrow.

The analysis presented also uses a higher threshold for noise annoyance than is consistent with the Department's guidance. Using the lower threshold takes the total number of people in the noise annoyance footprint to more than 1.15 million. Our investigation found that the Department's estimates are likely to be towards the lower end of the scale of potential impacts, and called for greater clarity in presentation.

Noise has real effects on people's daily lives. It is essential that MPs are fully informed about the scale of the impacts from the scheme when reaching their decisions. I would be grateful if the Minister could explain why the Department has not included those numbers in the latest iteration of its sustainability appraisal.

During our inquiry, a great deal of attention focused on the surface access needs of the airport now and in the future. We commend the Government for expressing policy support for the southern and western rail access, as per recommendation seven in our report. Those schemes are important to achieve modal shift for the two-runway airport and are critical if the north-west runway scheme is to be delivered without having a perverse knock-on effect on other parts of the surface access network.

However, the eventual impact of a north-west runway on road congestion and rail capacity is still highly uncertain, because no comprehensive surface access assessment was published alongside the draft NPS to understand what it would be. We welcome the Government's publication of figures on the impact that an expanded Heathrow would have in terms of the number of cars on the road, although they have still not published a full assessment. Those figures show that by 2030, if unmitigated, there will be a 33% increase in the number of vehicles on the road with a new runway. Can the Minister explain what surface access schemes are included when

modelling those figures, and whether the Department has assessed the surface access schemes that are required to ensure that there will be no more cars on the road, as pledged by Heathrow airport?

Mr Dhesi: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Does she agree that the Minister needs to acknowledge that the western rail link to Heathrow is not incumbent on whether we have a third runway? That scheme needs to happen forthwith regardless. More than 20% of the UK population will be within one interchange of our busiest airport. The Government committed to the scheme six years ago, but it has still not seen the light of day. It is imperative, and I hope that she and the Minister will confirm that.

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend has been a real campaigner for western rail access, and he was well represented on the Committee by other hon. Members who share that view, including my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport.

Our Committee also called for the sections of the draft NPS that deal with air quality to be revised before the final NPS was tabled. The air quality impact on nearby populations had been estimated only within the immediate 2 km vicinity of Heathrow airport, and had not been updated since 2015. The population impact assessments still do not appear to be updated in the final version of the NPS, and I would be grateful if the Minister could explain why.

It will be for hon. Members to judge whether the balance of potential benefits and costs of the proposed north-west runway is sufficient to approve the NPS. If they are to make an informed judgment, they need the full suite of facts to be on the table. That is why we recommended that the Government comprehensively update the evidence base and the final version of the NPS to accurately reflect the balance of evidence.

We also wanted to ensure that the conditions of approval in the NPS provided enough safeguards for the environment and for affected communities. Air quality was recently described by four Select Committees as a "national health emergency". It is therefore vital to demonstrate that airport expansion is compatible with tackling that emergency. The NPS states that the north-west runway scheme will be legally compliant on opening, but it does not say that the UK's legal air quality obligations are at a high risk of being breached between 2026 and 2029.

Legal air quality compliance for the scheme rests on national air quality measures being implemented in full. Three consecutive successful legal challenges do not instil a great deal of confidence in the Government's ability to deal with air quality effectively. We recommended that the Government adopt a more stringent interpretation of legal compliance in the NPS to protect against the inherent uncertainty of modelling future air quality compliance. Are the Government confident that their interpretation of air quality compliance will be the same as that of the courts, given that there will almost certainly be a judicial review?

On noise impacts, we recommended that the Government define an acceptable noise limit that reflects a maximum acceptable number of people newly exposed to noise due to the north-west runway scheme. The Government have not done so, and I hope the Minister will explain

how he can be confident that the noise impacts of the scheme can be effectively mitigated without clear targets in place. What safeguards will there be for communities that are concerned about the potential scale of noise impacts?

Zac Goldsmith: Noise is a key issue for my local constituents. Does the hon. Lady share my concern that hundreds of thousands of people will be brought under the Heathrow noise footprint who have no idea that that will happen, because neither the Government nor Heathrow have been honest with the communities that will be affected? The flight paths have not been published and we have no idea who will be affected. We simply know that many hundreds of thousands of people will be affected and that they will not be given a chance to make their views known before the decision is taken. Does that not strike her as fundamentally immoral, unethical and wrong?

Lilian Greenwood: The hon. Gentleman is of course concerned about the impact on his constituents. I think that he is right, and the Committee identified that only one set of flightpaths was used in the NPS. Of course it is important that people understand who might be affected and how they might be affected before we reach a decision. That was precisely why we asked for more evidence to be presented on the scale of noise impacts.

On surface access, we recommended that a condition be included in the NPS that ensures approval can be granted only if the target for no more airport-related traffic can be met. Heathrow has ambitious targets for modal shift, as it aims to increase the proportion of passengers and staff travelling to the airport by public transport. While there is a plan for significant investment in London's transport network, whether that will be sufficient to cope with the extra demand remains uncertain. Without the condition recommended by our Committee, what incentive or enforcement mechanism will be in place to ensure that Heathrow meets its pledge?

Andy Slaughter: Unlike the Government, Transport for London has done a lot of work on this issue. The substantial improvements to public transport—Crossrail and the upgrade of the Piccadilly line—will be made to deal with additional pressures in London that are already priced in. Not only is there this huge bill for £10 billion to £15 billion that ultimately the public will have to pick up, but London is losing out by losing that additional capacity, and neither of those absolutely vital factors appear to have been taken into account by the Government; I hope that they have been by the Committee.

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend is right that the Committee will look closely at what the surface access needs are. It is fair to say that in the evidence we have heard there was considerable disagreement between the Government and Heathrow Ltd, and Transport for London. However, it is clear that if additional investment is needed the airport would be required to make a contribution to cover the costs of those improvements that would impact on their passengers and workers.

Our support was premised on suitable mitigations being in place to offset impacts on local communities affected by noise, health and social impacts. Now is the time to set the criteria and the limits of environmental

impacts that Parliament deems necessary for the scheme to go ahead. That will enable the planning directorate to do its job and ensure that Heathrow's detailed plans can be judged against the criteria set by Parliament.

Our Committee also wanted to ensure that the conditions of approval in the NPS provided enough safeguards for passengers. People will rightly say that this is a privately funded scheme, but investors expect a return on their capital. It is airlines and their passengers who will pay for that return and ultimately bear the financial risk of this scheme. The CAA has done some preliminary work on the scheme's ability to be financed, but questions remain over whether it can be paid for without increasing charges for passengers. Heathrow is already the most expensive airport in the world, and the evidence we received suggests that if airport charges were to increase significantly the benefits of expansion would be diluted. Fewer passengers would use the airport and Heathrow's competitiveness as a hub, particularly in comparison with its European counterparts, would be undermined.

The Secretary of State expressed his desire to keep charges flat, but desire is not enough; we recommend that it be translated into a firm condition of approval in the NPS. Every single airline that we heard from reiterated this view. The Government are relying on the CAA to meet their ambition to keep charges flat, but can the Minister give us confidence that that ambition will be achieved, given that history suggests that Heathrow's charges have increased each time it has made a significant investment in infrastructure?

Our support was also premised on suitable measures being in place to guarantee benefits for regional passengers. There is a risk that domestic routes will be priced out of an expanded Heathrow and that the non-London regions and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be left with fewer direct connections from their own airports and potentially no new domestic slots into Heathrow. We recommended that the Government outline more clearly how they intend to secure 15% of new slots for domestic connections, including the policy levers they will use to achieve that target.

The Government have said that they believe most routes will be commercially viable and that public service obligations will be their main policy lever to secure domestic routes. Can the Minister explain how PSOs can be used to secure domestic slots, because I believe that they could be used only on a city-to-city basis, provided there is an overriding social need? What other mechanisms are available to secure slots for the regions and nations?

The final objective of our scrutiny was to ensure that any risks of a successful legal challenge were minimised. The north-west runway scheme can be legally challenged at two stages of the approvals process, the first of which is the immediate period after the NPS is designated by Parliament. A legal challenge can be mounted, not on the contents of the NPS document but on the way in which the consultation was conducted. We recommended that the evidence base be comprehensively updated and that its robustness be improved, to ensure that the consultation has been completed in a comprehensive manner and to avoid a successful legal challenge at the first hurdle. Is the Minister confident that he has done enough to address our concerns?

The scale of this project and the grounds upon which a legal challenge can be mounted suggest that there are still more hurdles for this scheme to overcome if it

[*Lilian Greenwood*]

obtains Parliamentary approval. Even in a best-case scenario, a scheme is not going to be delivered until 2026. It is therefore essential that we make best use of the UK's existing airport capacity in the interim, and our Committee has recommended that the Government develop a strategy to do so. Can the Minister tell us whether the Government intend to develop and implement such a strategy, so that aviation growth can continue across the country while the Heathrow scheme is being developed?

In conclusion, the Committee's support for the north-west runway was conditional on the concerns that we identified in our report being addressed by the Government in the final NPS laid before Parliament. The Committee has not yet had the opportunity to discuss whether we believe our conditions have been met. Ultimately, it is for every Member to form their own judgment on the Government's proposal. I hope that our report has provided Members with a strong foundation upon which to make that judgment.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): Order. If colleagues could confine their remarks to about eight or nine minutes each, no one should feel short-changed at the end of our proceedings.

2.7 pm

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): Sir David, it is a particular pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, on the eve of the 35th anniversary of our election to Parliament. It strikes me that we have been discussing this subject for most of those 35 years.

Sir David, you represent a constituency on one side of the Thames estuary and I represent a constituency on the other side. You and I are both fully aware of the discussions in the mists of time relating to Maplin Sands, and more recently those relating to Boris Island. I think it is fair to say that we could probably agree, although I would not wish to drag you into the argument, that neither of those proposals was worth the back-end of the envelope that they were written on.

I am concerned about much of this matter. I pay huge tribute to the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Nottingham South (*Lilian Greenwood*), and indeed to her predecessor, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (*Mrs Ellman*). Together with their Committees, they have put an enormous amount of hard work into diligently scrutinising the proposals that we are considering this afternoon. I am extremely grateful to them for the work they have done, as I am sure all colleagues are.

This morning, colleagues who have opened their emails will have received a letter from Sir Howard Davies, the former chairman of the Airports Commission, and Sir John Armitt, a former commissioner at the Airports Commission and is now the Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission. In that letter, Sir Howard and Sir John say:

“The UK benefits from the third largest international aviation network in the world after the US and China; London has the largest origin and destination market of any city in the world; and Heathrow until 2013 served more international passengers than

any other airport and even now is surpassed only by Dubai...the continuation of this success cannot be taken for granted, and the rise of Dubai is only one indicator of the risks that the UK faces. ... As other hub airports in Europe and beyond continue to expand, the impression created is one of the UK being increasingly inward-facing and having limited ambition to expand its reach, even as it navigates the uncertainty caused by its impending departure from the European Union. Now should be the time to build on our strengths, not to diminish them, but preventing expansion at Heathrow would achieve only the latter.”

I am not remotely unsympathetic to the concerns expressed by colleagues representing seats in west and south London. My daughter has a home in Chiswick under the flightpath to Heathrow. I am a sufficiently infrequent overnight stayer not to have become acclimatised to the air traffic, so I understand what it means, and I also have considerable concern for the quality of the air that my six-year-old grandson, Soren, will breathe during the course of his young life.

That said, I support the proposals that the Government laid before the House on Tuesday, although two issues have to be addressed. Curiously, the Select Committee to some extent skated over them. The first issue is the timescale. Eight years seems wildly optimistic to me. I am not a betting man, but if I were, I would bet a gold sovereign that there will not be wheels on tarmac at any new runway at Heathrow inside 15 years. The other issue is freight, which was not mentioned to any degree in either the Secretary of State's remarks on Tuesday or the Select Committee report. I will touch on both those points in the context of another airfield that is and should be available to us.

On Tuesday, the Secretary of State said that “a new operational runway at Heathrow is still a number of years away.”

He says eight years; I have said 15. He continued:

“The Airports Commission recommended that there would also be a need for other airports to make more intensive use of their existing infrastructure”.

He went on to say that

“the Government support other airports making best use of their existing runways.”—[*Official Report*, 5 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 171.] Heathrow handles more freight than any other port in the country, but Heathrow is full. Even allowing for a growth in belly cargo, the capacity to handle more at Heathrow is non-existent. Gatwick is largely but not exclusively a holiday airport. It does not handle much belly cargo and has little freight capacity. Stansted has the capacity to some extent, but the turnaround time is eight hours, which is unacceptable for perishable goods. There is one airport in the south-east—Manston, in Kent—that is capable of turning around a freight aircraft in an hour and a half, has the capacity, has the runway and could bridge the gap. I want to direct attention to that this afternoon, very briefly.

Manston airport was operational until 2013. In November 2013, it was obtained for £1 by Mrs Ann Gloag, one of the shareholders in Stagecoach. She rang me on 30 November and told me in terms, “I am going to invest millions of pounds in Manston, and I will give it two years to turn things around.” Within three months, she was closing it. It is absolutely obvious that she and her successors—actually, the airport was acquired on a 100% mortgage, so effectively she still controls it—always had the intention to try to smother Manston in housing. As an aside, Manston airport is smack on top of the Thanet aquifer. If housing was put on it, the aquifer would dry up and Thanet would run out of water.

That is one of the many minor details that the proposed developers have sought to overlook. That, however, is not the point of my case this afternoon.

The point of my case this afternoon is that we have a gap that we have to bridge. Today, we are losing business—not tomorrow, next week, next month or next year, but today—to Frankfurt, Schiphol, Charles de Gaulle and Dubai, as Sir Howard said in his letter.

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): I am impressed by my hon. Friend's passion for Manston, despite some of the challenges. He talks about competitiveness and how we are losing business to other European countries and further afield, including Dubai, but does he accept that if landing charges per passenger go up to £31, £32 or possibly even £40 from their already very high level of £22 to £23, the third runway at Heathrow will drive even more business away from this country?

Sir Roger Gale: For the sake of argument, I will accept the point my hon. Friend is making, but it is safe to say that my argument is that I am concerned about UK Ltd and post-Brexit freight. As a country, we will have to develop markets in the middle east, Asia, the far east, Africa and South America if we are going to survive in a post-Brexit modern economy. We will have to have air freight capacity to handle high-value goods coming in and going out. There is nowhere within striking distance of London for those goods to go.

I freely concede that regional airports can and will play some part in helping to solve the problem, but the problem is massive, and if we do not solve it now and we lose Manston airport as a potential freight hub, we will live to regret it. Once it is gone, it can never be retrieved. It is a national asset, not a local asset, and it has to be regarded as such. I hope and expect that when a development consent order goes in for Manston airport, the Planning Inspectorate will have cognisance of the Secretary of State's remarks on Tuesday that we must use the available runway capacity. We have to hang on to Manston. If we can do that and use the capacity of our regional airports, we can stem the flow of business to other countries and bridge the gap, but that gap will be a large one.

I support the proposal for Heathrow. I think it is necessary, although I suspect that in fairly short order we may find that we need another runway at Gatwick as well as Heathrow, not instead of. In the interim, we have to make the best use of what we have, and what we have right on our doorstep and available is Manston airport.

2.17 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I, too, congratulate the Transport Committee and its Chair on an excellent piece of work unpicking the details of the case for the third runway. I may not agree with the overall conclusion to support a third runway, but that conclusion was heavily caveated. I support the detailed work that was done. It is impartial and well-evidenced, and the 25 recommendations are spot on.

On Tuesday, the Secretary of State released the final airports national policy statement. He is telling Members that he agreed with the Transport Committee on 24 of its 25 recommendations, but he did not. Answering demands for specific detailed information with a fudge,

or a “wait and see”, is not agreeing with recommendations. The Government have decided to go ahead despite the evidence to the contrary, much of it embedded in the Committee's report.

I want to bring the debate back to my constituency and the many other constituencies around Heathrow. The third runway will be bad news for the communities affected. It is not a few hundred people or a few hundred homes; up to 2 million people and more than 1 million homes will experience more noise than they do at present. A third runway means locally that tens of thousands of homes that do not currently experience significant noise—noise at the level that the daughter of the hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) experiences in Chiswick—will have planes overhead.

Many people in Heston, Osterley, Brentford, the north side of Chiswick and through into the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and on into Kensington do not have planes overhead on their final approach every 60 to 90 seconds for much of the day, but they will. Most of those people, as has already been said, do not know that the approach path will be over their heads or that the planes are locked into their final approach from six to 30 nautical miles out. There cannot be any variation on the approach 70% of the time when the planes are operating on a westerly approach.

Mr Dhesi: My hon. Friend is making an excellent point about the unpredictability of the flight paths, which as yet NATS has not disclosed. Does she agree that before we proceed with any third runway we need to have cast-iron guarantees, particularly on a 6.5-hour ban on night flights, and stringent application of air quality control and noise limits?

Ruth Cadbury: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and so does the Transport Committee. The Government seem to be softening their previous commitment to an absolute night flight ban of 6.5 hours. That really concerns me—it is one of a number of commitments on which the Government appear to be renegeing.

Justine Greening: The hon. Lady is right to be sceptical. Those of us living close to the airport know that Heathrow Airport Limited recently proposed to start effectively normal operations from 5.30 am, but dressed it up as part of some sort of night flights ban for which we should all be extremely grateful. There is constantly a challenge of doublespeak. When Sydney airport opened its third runway, there was huge controversy around the fact that residents were simply not told how they would be affected by noise. That is exactly the mistake that we are making here.

Ruth Cadbury: The right hon. Lady is right. There is absolutely no reason why the Government and Heathrow airport cannot draw a straight line east and west of the third runway site for at least six to 13 miles. Irrespective of the NATS wider flight path revisions, by the time the planes are overhead in my constituency, they are locked into a final approach and there can be no variation. Therefore, if we know where the runway is, we know where the final approach is. Neither the Government nor the airport have had the courtesy to produce a map to show to people in Heston, Osterley, Brentford, Chiswick and Hammersmith. I really think that they should.

[*Ruth Cadbury*]

Up to 2 million people will experience more noise, and 300,000 more people will experience significantly more noise than they do at the moment. They are looking at planes, but generally not hearing them very loudly at the moment. Those people will start experiencing noise at the level currently experienced in parts of Isleworth, West Hounslow, Kew, Putney and so on.

The expansion will also mean around 50% more traffic movements on an already severely congested network, with the associated air pollution and the economic cost of the delays of that congestion. When we talk about traffic movements, we are not just talking about passengers. Any transport modelling must factor in all the other movements in and out of the airport, including those who work there, flight crew, flight servicing and, of course, cargo. Much of flight servicing and cargo cannot go on any route other than by road. Many of us just laugh at Heathrow's claim that it can increase capacity with a third runway without increasing road travel.

I understand that the Minister told the House this morning—I am sorry I could not be there; I was on constituency business—that he does not recognise the £10 billion figure that was suggested by Transport for London as the cost of essential transport infrastructure. I gather that he then said words to the effect of, “It’ll be all right because the Elizabeth line, or Crossrail, and west and southern rail access will deal with the pressure of expansion.” As my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith rightly said, those routes will deal only with current airport demand and population growth in the region.

Transport for London is very clear that the Elizabeth line, or Crossrail, will provide little modal shift from roads. The other two schemes have been ideas and plans since terminal 5 was constructed, and are still no further forward, particularly because the Government have not committed to putting any public funding into them. All three schemes are needed right now to deal with Heathrow's appallingly low levels of public transport access. When it comes to a cap on the increase in airport-related traffic, the Government cannot get away with referring just to passengers.

The Transport Committee requested a minimum average period of seven hours of respite a night. The national policy statement does not change the initial Government proposal of a 6.5-hour ban. Even this week, the Government are saying that the NPS

“does not preclude consideration of different options.”

We are very worried about that. That sounds to me like going back on the night flight commitment.

I want to address the point about jobs, which trade unions and Labour colleagues often raise with me. There will of course be more jobs created at Heathrow—Heathrow Airport Limited said yesterday that there would be 14,000. I am not denying that there is some unemployment in our region, particularly of young people, but of all areas of the UK, our sub-region around Heathrow airport probably has among the lowest levels of unemployment.

The Transport Committee said that a lot of the new jobs creation promised by runway three will be displaced jobs. If anybody wants to know what the job situation is at Heathrow at the moment, just go on to Heathrow

airport's jobs recruitment site. It is looking for hundreds of people—low skilled, middle skilled and highly skilled—for all sorts of jobs. There is a recruitment crisis in west London and the Thames Valley, which is being exacerbated by Brexit. The jobs problem that we have at the moment, particularly at Heathrow, is one of too many low-skilled, zero-hours, poorly paid jobs with poor conditions. I congratulate Heathrow Airport Ltd on signing a commitment to the London living wage, but it cannot control all the various employers in and around Heathrow. There are regions of the UK that need those jobs far more than London. West London and the Thames Valley have many other growth sectors.

Those of us near Heathrow are used to the record of broken and watered down promises on Heathrow. I have been at this game for 16 years now. This week, the final NPS ignored the detail of many of the Transport Committee's recommendations and has watered down previous commitments on the night flight ban, the cap on total flight numbers, and the cap on the charges to airlines if costs escalate. Runway three and continuing traffic congestion will mean that children and older people will carry on dying of respiratory failure as air pollution continues to escalate—some of that from aeroplanes; a lot of that from traffic.

What of the impact on UK plc? Much of the case for a third runway at Heathrow implies that the future of aviation is in the hub model, linking short-haul routes to long-haul through the hub and spoke model. However, the Transport Committee had very mixed evidence on the hub issue, with many reputable witnesses pointing out that point-to-point travel is growing, and will grow, faster than hub travel, particularly with the relatively recent emergence of the long-haul Dreamliner plane, selling far better than the enormous A380s. Moreover, the Transport Committee identified what the Department for Transport did not: that Gatwick is growing its long-haul destinations, and aims to have 50 long-haul destinations soon, so Gatwick could become a secondary London hub.

We have heard already that all but four domestic routes will struggle without Government protection. That will add to the cost to the public purse of Heathrow expansion. The Secretary of State as good as admitted that when he released the NPS. He said that Birmingham airport will face “greater competitive pressures” as a result of runway three. Furthermore, the Transport Committee found that long-haul international routes from Scotland and northern airports are more likely to survive commercially if there is no additional runway in the south-east.

Despite promises to MPs, the Transport Committee report showed that all the growth in passenger numbers are outbound leisure travellers—that is, yet more Brits taking their holiday pound away from Britain's beautiful places, which would really benefit from more tourists. The Committee said that if the UK is to comply with its commitment to cut carbon dioxide emissions, then if runway three goes ahead, growth will have to be curbed at all other UK airports. Furthermore, other sectors of the economy face serious reductions and restraints to keep UK carbon emissions within the limits.

Why should whole swathes of London and the south-east pay the price of yet more noise, increased congestion, worse pollution, and a greater safety risk? Why should other sectors of the economy have to further curb their

carbon emissions when, according to the Transport Committee report, a third runway at Heathrow shows poor value for money for the UK and no additional international connectivity? It will mean that non-UK regions risk losing their connections to London without subsidy. They will lose direct international connections and their tourist pounds.

Lilian Greenwood: I just wanted to clarify one point. My hon. Friend said that the Transport Committee had said that there would be less international direct connectivity. That is not the case. We said that there was not a huge increase with the expansion of the north-west runway than there would be under other expansion options. It is worth pointing out that direct international connectivity for non-London airports will increase under an expansion scenario, but it will not increase as much as it would have if there was no expansion.

Ruth Cadbury: I apologise to the Committee Chair if I got that wrong; I will double check the facts. I would certainly agree that the growth of direct international connectivity is not dependent on another runway at Heathrow. In fact, I believe that there will be only one additional destination from Heathrow with a third runway. Much of the increased demand will be, as I have said, outbound leisure tourists adding to existing routes that are already heavily used. That is where most of the demand will be and not, as Heathrow keeps saying, to newly emerging destinations. It can say that as much as it likes, but unless the demand is truly there to sustain the new routes, they are not going to happen.

Why risk sucking capital funding that is needed for essential regional transport infrastructure and upgrading into yet another expensive project in London that actually does little for the economy? By pushing for runway three, the Government are just writing a blank cheque on behalf of the UK taxpayer or the passenger, while further undermining an already poor environment for large parts of London and the south-east.

2.31 pm

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I start by paying tribute to the work of the Transport Committee. Having had an interest in this area for many years, I can honestly say that it has delved into the detail behind the proposal more thoroughly than I have seen in the past, and I very much welcome that.

I recognise that what has been said is that there are some conditions that it is yet to be proven can be met in order for the third runway to go ahead. I think that is very much like saying, “Two plus two could potentially equal eight; we haven’t worked out how that will ever be possible, but let’s suspend reality for long enough to be able not to have to take a decision that confronts facts.”

We have a long-standing issue in my constituency of Putney, Roehampton and Southfields, similar to those in the constituencies of many hon. Members who will contribute to this debate today, of noise in particular, and night-time noise especially. The proposed loss of respite—it is already for only half the day and will go down to just a third—will really damage my local community’s quality of life. This is not some minor thing to be disposed of. My constituents, like many other Londoners, are those who head in on the tube every day to keep this city going; to be in those roles

that make this a capital city that generates taxation receipts that help the rest of the country, as well as Londoners, with the public services we all rely on.

Our environmental challenges are much more than noise. Air pollution has become a serious issue in London in recent years. Putney High Street is one of the worst offenders for air pollution. In the 21st century, my community is concerned about the air that we breathe; we have no choice about that when we come out of our doors. Many communities living more immediately around Heathrow and in the M4 vicinity find themselves in a similarly impossible situation, and they rely on government at local level, City Hall level and national level to fix that.

I could make a very long speech but I am going to try to keep it short, in order to demonstrate how utterly bankrupt this proposal is in practice. I yet wait for people to present me with facts that prove that somehow this is a good idea. Even the updated appraisal analysis released by the Department for Transport earlier this week shows that in the long run Gatwick is a better, higher net public value proposal than Heathrow, and it is lower risk. It takes some kind of perverse logic to pick the lower value, higher risk project that is double the cost. I do not understand the logic. When I was a Minister, I always tried to rely on an evidence base, but I simply have never found the evidence to back up Heathrow expansion. Spurious, high-level, strategic points are always made, which fall apart when we get into the detail.

We keep hearing about extra capacity. That fundamentally misses the point that there are diseconomies of scale in building a third runway. Heathrow is already the most expensive airport in the world. For an airport where a third runway would basically double its capacity, the problem of average runway cost gets worse. That is precisely why we are seeing many of our regional links and emerging market links under pressure. Heathrow airport used to have a direct link to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania—it does not any more. We used to have a direct link to Lusaka—we do not any more. That is because those slots are always worth more to companies that want to fly to New York. The same holds for our regional airports, which have seen their slots under pressure. My point is that that would get worse when the next runway to be built is even more expensive and puts pressure all over again on the routes where it is worst.

Adam Afriyie: My right hon. Friend is making a powerful case. She keeps referred to a “third runway,” but it strikes me that actually what Heathrow will be building is half a runway, because it will not operate at night—unless of course the Government breach their original commitment to have no night flights. Not only will it be expensive, but it will be only half a runway, and those costs will be passed on to the passengers and the airlines, who will not want to fly there.

Justine Greening: My understanding, when I looked at the detail previously, was that the runway, because it is inevitably being shoehorned into a small site—even the Government response rules out a fourth runway—cannot actually take the biggest category planes. If that became the mode of transport of the future, they would not be able to use that third runway.

I have real concerns about this project. Heathrow’s plan for a third runway has been knocking around for 20-plus years, which tells us everything we need to know

[*Justine Greening*]

about it. It is a 20th century strategy that has never been reassessed, even though, as the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) pointed out, we are now in the 21st century. The Dreamliner point-to-point will be the aviation transport model of the future, combined with, dare I say it, the entry of low-cost carriers into that market, which will want to fly out of low-cost airports, not the most expensive airport in the world—airports that are close to people at a regional level, to provide connectivity on their doorstep, not an airport that is hundreds of miles from where people live, for example where I grew up just outside Sheffield in south Yorkshire. Why should people in those communities have to travel all the way to London to take advantage of the connections that in the 21st century our country ought to be able to have from other airports?

Zac Goldsmith: My right hon. Friend is making a typically brilliant, forensic speech. It only heaps on the frustrations for those of us who know that the argument is so clear. She and I have together held many public meetings on the issue, and we are often asked, as are colleagues in other parties, why it is that, given that the economic case between Heathrow and Gatwick is more or less the same and the connectivity benefits are more or less the same, the Government have chosen the option that is most polluting, most disruptive, most unpopular, most expensive, most legally complex and therefore hardest to deliver. The only answer I have ever been able to come up with, because there is no logical answer, is crony capitalism. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that going with this absurd off-the-shelf solution that has been hanging around for decades and has been consistently discredited—it is more discredited today than it was 10 years ago—is doing huge harm to the credibility of this Government?

Justine Greening: Unfortunately, there is a risk that my hon. Friend is right. It is impossible not to note that the former Treasury Minister Lord Deighton was in charge of infrastructure, and then within about a year of leaving the Department he popped up at Heathrow Airport Ltd. Why, despite all the evidence, is it never recognised that this project is utterly flawed?

The Airports Commission's work had to be updated by the Government because its passenger numbers were completely wrong. I went to see Sir Howard to tell him that when the Airports Commission published its interim report. It failed to address that issue in the final report, and then the DFT had to update the Gatwick passenger numbers. I have been to see DFT Ministers to tell them that, too.

The Airports Commission changed its definition of what constitutes a new destination after its interim report. In the interim report, it said that a new destination is just a new destination. The problem it had with that definition is that it showed that cheaper Gatwick would have loads more destinations when it expanded than very expensive Heathrow—what a surprise. Of course airlines would use Gatwick if it is so much cheaper, and of course they would try to codeshare. They might try the Lusaka route for Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, and then the Dar es Salaam route for the rest of the week, to see which one makes money. That is called good innovation and product development, but

unfortunately that did not fit the predetermined decision to expand Heathrow. Therefore, by the end of the final Airports Commission report, the definition of connectivity and new destinations had changed. For a destination to be counted as a new destination, planes have to go there seven days a week, but that does not capture emerging market destinations, which inevitably start off as a service of perhaps a couple of days a week. That disadvantaged Gatwick from the word go, and I believe it was changed to push Heathrow's weak case to the top of the list.

This polluting, expensive project does not just affect my local community. Members of Parliament representing northern and Scottish seats should be aware of the pressure it will put on transport infrastructure spend across the whole country. TfL says that it will cost an extra £10 billion to £15 billion. London does not want to spend that transport money on Heathrow airport expansion. We want it to lift the rest of the country, but it will be snaffled up for an infrastructure programme on our doorstep that we do not want.

My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) mentioned public meetings. I have been in public meetings with Heathrow representatives. At the last one they came to, a couple of years ago, they were asked about promises they had made at previous public meetings and in previous expansion proposals but then broken. They were also asked about why they could not simply get on with banning night flights. They told us that those promises should never have been made. My community was staggered to hear a representative of Heathrow Airport Ltd say that they had been cavalier about their promises. They said, "Well, it was a different set of management then. Why should we be beholden to them? Managers come and go."

That private sector company—I spent 15 years working in the private sector—understandably wants a growth plan, but let us be absolutely clear that it comes at the expense of everything and everyone else. It comes at the expense of regional airports, which would not have the number of international flights that they would have done. It comes at the expense of our environment and local communities. It comes at the expense of transport infrastructure investment, which would have been there not only for London but for the rest of the country. There are virtually no upsides.

The plan might also come at the expense of Heathrow's viability. If we cannot meet the air pollution limits, if so many people complain about the noise that the flightpaths have to be reworked, as happened in Sydney, or if the Civil Aviation Authority concludes that the flightpath work makes it hard to fit so many more flights across London's sky safely, and therefore we cannot have as many as we want, the company will have spent £18 billion on a third runway that it will be unable to use fully. That would be a problem for all of us but, as I have shown in recent days, it will land on taxpayers' doorsteps.

I hope that the Minister will finally correct the record and say that the clause on cost recovery—the poison pill clause, as I call it—which Heathrow Airport Ltd put in its statement of principles, is not in the other statements of principles. Heathrow Hub tweeted that out very clearly today. It is beyond me why the Department for Transport would ever have allowed that clause to go into the statement of principles.

This is a 20th-century hub strategy in a 21st-century point-to-point world. It is clear that in a modern Britain the whole of the UK needs an airport strategy. There is nothing national about this national policy statement. It is an out-of-date strategy for an out-of-date airport. We need a proper 21st-century, point-to-point, regional airport-based strategy to really put connectivity on the doorstep of millions of people outside London, including in Scotland. That would really be an exciting prospect for connecting our island to the world. Why should businesspeople doing business in Birmingham, Manchester and Edinburgh have to fly to London and then travel up? It is time we have proper connectivity for people across the country, not just in London. Earlier this year we saw the very first direct flight from Sydney to London. I only hope that Ministers reflect on the fact that this is an old strategy in a new world. It is time to move into the new world and get a new strategy that will be successful in the 21st century.

2.47 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to speak in support of the report of the Transport Committee, of which I am a member. I will keep my comments brief. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) for her leadership of the Committee during this inquiry. I thank all the Clerks and officials who worked so hard in preparing the report. Without their work, it would not be so comprehensive a tome—Members have clearly been wading through it.

I am still reviewing the final national policy statement, which was published earlier this week, so I will confine my remarks to the three areas of concern I majored on in the Committee. The first is surface connectivity. Broadly, my view is, “Yes, but”, but the buts are very important. I do not believe that the NPS sets out a sufficiently ambitious plan for surface connectivity.

During our inquiry, the Government changed their position on western rail access, which I and my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) have been calling for since we entered the House a year ago. The Government’s backtracking and indecisiveness over western rail access is not conducive to getting the result we need for those areas. Especially for people coming from the far south-west, western rail access is absolutely pivotal for a two-runway world, let alone a three-runway world in the future. Building a new rail line from Reading to Heathrow makes good economic and transport sense, and it is hard to find anyone who does not agree with it. That is probably the core reason why it has not happened to date: there is no friction on western rail access to make it an issue that people debate. There is therefore no pressure on Ministers to fund it properly, so it has not happened to date, despite the near-universal agreement about it. That has to be resolved quickly.

Earlier this week, I asked the Secretary of State whether western rail access was fully funded. He replied that he believed that it was. However, I cannot see any pot of money to fund it in CP6; nor can I see the Heathrow contribution being sufficient to fund it; nor does the Secretary of State seem to have squirrelled away an extra pot of money to fund it. I would be grateful if the Minister told us where the fully funded pot of money for western rail access was, because it needs to happen.

I want to see more surface access to Heathrow. At present, the plans barely deal with the challenges of a two-runway world, let alone a three-runway world. That is really important. If we are to believe that the third runway will happen, we need a modal shift to deal with the threats to air pollution and to minimise the car use that we are expecting. That means that we need Ministers and Heathrow Airport Ltd to be more ambitious to achieve the potential of that.

I want to see Heathrow dig further into its pockets to pay for the surface access. I believe that Heathrow has a big pot of money that it should be arm-twisted into spending to improve such access, and that the money is being held back as part of the negotiation strategy, to offset further things during the planning process, especially the development consent order process. That money should clearly be spent on surface access now.

Ruth Cadbury: Does my hon. Friend have any faith in Heathrow shifting funding to surface access, given that the airport spent a lot of its money on a legal challenge to the original proposal for what is now called Crossrail or the Elizabeth line in order to protect Heathrow Express, which is not a lot of use in the modern world?

Luke Pollard: Heathrow Express is the most expensive rail line in the world in terms of ticket price. There is certainly an incentive to ensure that all surface access will be affordable and accessible. If there is to be a congestion charge around Heathrow, personally I would like more money to be spent on ensuring that every single tube station in west London and throughout the entire network is accessible for disabled people, who will find that a congestion charge makes getting to the airport too expensive in the first place.

The Government need to do much more. Furthermore, the rather odd way in which airports are regulated by the Civil Aviation Authority means that there is no incentive on Heathrow to be more efficient, and that needs to be looked at. I would like to see some of that greater efficiency invested back into surface access—through Great Western, Heathrow Southern, improved bus access, the Piccadilly line upgrade, the Chiltern line, High Speed 2 and Crossrail, as well as much more besides—so that we genuinely achieve the modal shift necessary. Such a shift is essential if we are to deal with concerns about air quality. Casting our mind back a few years to the start of the Davies commission work, air quality was an issue, but not to the extent that it is today. It was not raised with the same ferocity as it would be today, and it did not have the same science and evidence behind it. Greater surface access should alleviate some concerns about air quality, but not all of them. If we get air quality right, we will probably get surface access right, and if we get surface access right, we will probably get air quality right. They go hand in hand.

The NPS and Heathrow’s own air quality plans need strengthening—the Select Committee dealt with that in our report. We only need to look at the NPS’s curiously out of date costs for oxides of nitrogen, or NOx, to understand why that needs to happen urgently. When the Davies commission first looked at airport expansion, air quality was not as big an issue as it is today, which means that we need different measures from those applied in the past.

[*Luke Pollard*]

The prominence of air quality is only going to increase, in west London, Piccadilly and Plymouth, and that is why it is so important for the Government and Heathrow to be bolder. Banning diesel cars by 2040 is a start but, if I am honest, it is a bit of a wet lettuce attempt at ambition. It should happen much sooner, with the target being brought forward, because the vast majority of concerns about air quality around Heathrow are caused by cars accessing the airport and servicing the individuals who work there.

Electric vehicles need to play a much bigger role. I was warmed and heartened to hear Heathrow talk about introducing more airside electric vehicles—the sheer buying power of that airport means that it could create a new market in airside electric vehicles—and I want to see such a plan drawn up. If Heathrow genuinely believes that, it needs to make that plan a core part of how it addresses air quality, and that needs to start with procurement and not just soundbites—it needs big, bold action now.

I also want to talk about airport charges. The expansion will in truth cost a fortune, and it will ultimately be down to passengers to pay for it. At the heart of this is the fact that people who fly from Heathrow will pay for the expansion. Yes, it may be cost-recovered to the airlines, but passengers will pay for the tickets that include the charges. The Secretary of State is broadly right to want no increase in charges, but the regulatory framework of the CAA is not sufficient to ensure that charges are kept low. The Government need to look at that in future, because I suspect that passengers will be paying more and more.

I found much merit in the idea of competition in terminal operation in the new expanded Heathrow—we are talking about not only a new runway but new terminals. To keep costs down at Heathrow, which will be the largest privately funded infrastructure project in the world, the basic tenets of a market economy need to kick in. Competition—not always welcome on my side of the House—for Heathrow, in the private sector, should be looked at. Competition over terminal operation could keep charges low at the airport. That is something that has been pushed not only by Willie Walsh and Surinder Arora but by many others. We need to keep that option on the table throughout the process.

I mentioned earlier the rather odd way in which Heathrow is regulated. The CAA incentivises expensive builds. It simply loads debt on to the regulated asset base, against which Heathrow can then generate profits to cover the borrowing. There is therefore no incentive to be efficient, creative or innovative, or to deliver schemes faster, better and cheaper. That needs to be addressed in the wider scheme, because although it is privately funded, there is a risk to the public sector if such incentives are not brought back in.

The promise made to the regions and nations by Heathrow is important, and must be delivered in the process. That promise must be delivered. Promises made to airports such as Newquay and Exeter in the far south-west must be delivered. If I am honest, I am still a bit curious about how that 15% of aviation can be allocated to regional airports under international law, but I shall leave that one for the Minister and Heathrow to address. However, we must ensure that we are

safeguarding not only routes for Exeter and Newquay but future routes for the reopened Plymouth airport—routes from Plymouth to Heathrow would help to make Plymouth airport more viable in future.

Those promises made to the regions and nations of the country will be the bedrock of any vote taken by Members of Parliament in favour of Heathrow. However, my main concern when we were drafting the Select Committee report was whether any scheme would survive a legal challenge—unless the recommendations of the Transport Committee are addressed not only in the NPS element but in the DCO process. In fact, a lot of the detail adopted by the Government but shifted into the DCO process needs to be brought forward into the NPS part to provide certainty for people about what their future holds.

2.57 pm

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. Thank you for your generosity in allowing me to speak even though I arrived a couple of minutes later than I should have done at the beginning.

I feel impassioned about this issue, however, in defence not only of my constituents—whom of course I shall defend to the death—but of our national interest. The third runway is not in our national interest, and I shall make a few points about why.

I thank the Chair of the Transport Committee, the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), for a fantastic report—I mean that, from the bottom of my heart. It has the statistics we require, the firm and clear analysis of the Government's position and the national policy statement, and the supporting data necessary to make an informed judgment. I therefore thank the Chair and the Committee overall.

There are many reasons for the third runway not being in the national interest, but I shall mention three or four key ones. First, commissioning a scheme that creates the most expensive airport in the world at which planes can land is not in our national interest—it does not lead to greater competition, but to more business being driven elsewhere across Europe and the world. The idea that landing fees will rise, and that that is somehow a great benefit to our country, is completely misplaced. It is a naive thought and does not come from a business perspective.

[*DAVID HANSON in the Chair*]

The second issue is the viability of Heathrow to finance the scheme in the first place. I would not say that Heathrow Airport Ltd is in difficulty today—I would not wish to cast aspersions on it or its pretty decent profits—but if we look at its financials, the gearing ratio in particular, it is already sitting at about 87%. That is quite worrying. We were deeply disturbed when Thames Water was at, I think, 81%—we got very concerned about it. NATS was restricted by the CAA to just 65% gearing, but in the expansion scheme the Government are suggesting that somehow Heathrow should go all the way to about 91% gearing. That is a bizarre amount of pressure from the Government to create an unstable and financially unviable company or scheme.

That leads me to another point. We all sit here thinking, “Of course Heathrow really wants to develop this runway”—I am sure that is what the Department for Transport has thought all the way through and what lots of Members present think: that it really wants to develop the third runway. However, let me cast a note of doubt on that. Think of the obstacles, the huge legal challenges and the continuing political uncertainty. Heathrow will have to conduct the biggest waste clearance project in the history of Britain, other than after the second world war. That could cost £1 billion. It has to remove the energy-from-waste plant—or buy it, shut it down or do something with it—so that is another £1 billion. When Heathrow goes to its shareholders and investors and says, “We’d quite like about £20 billion to create half a runway, where you can only fly during the day but not at night, and we haven’t got clarity on how the slots will work or be allocated,” it is incredibly unlikely that those shareholders will stump up the money. Capital makes a choice about where it is deployed.

Is Heathrow Airport Ltd serious about building a third runway? I really question whether it is. If it gets the Secretary of State and the Government—a Conservative Government—to support a third runway, it shuts out the competition from other runways around the United Kingdom. Gatwick will not be able to develop its runway and everybody else will be left with uncertainty. There will be no further runway developments if Heathrow is given the go-ahead. If it is given the go-ahead, it may find reasons why it is not possible to raise the finance, do a waste clearance or meet the air quality legislation. Heathrow will be chuckling, because, if it does not build the runway and no one else can build a runway, it basically will have shut down expansion for the next 10 to 15 years. Guess what? Its landing fees will begin to rise, because there will be a capacity issue.

Justine Greening: It is even better than that. If Heathrow happens to end up incurring any costs, it has a ready-made legal case to claim them back from the Government. All the risks have been mitigated for this private sector company.

Adam Afriyie: My right hon. Friend is spot on, as ever. She made that point very clearly in the urgent question today and in the point of order yesterday. I support all her comments in both cases. What on earth is a Conservative Government doing underwriting a private business that is wholly owned by overseas shareholders anyway, on the basis that somehow that is in our national interest, when in fact it is completely against our comparative advantage in the airline sector?

Hon. Members from Scotland, Ireland or the regions may think, “This is a marvellous scheme, because we will have lots more routes open to us. Heathrow has been up to have a chat with us and a cup of coffee and brought us lovely chocolate biscuits and promised all sorts of goodies”—[*Interruption.*] Not chocolate biscuits; okay. Just look at the promises that Heathrow made before. I will not go through them now, but not one of those promises was ever met, even when it came down to the number of people who would be employed at the airport or the number of apprentices. Quite frankly, if I were Scottish or Northern Irish, I would not trust Heathrow as far as I could throw it. We have nothing in writing and nothing that is legally binding—we have less than was ever given for the fourth terminal or all

sorts of other things—so I would be very cautious. Of course, hon. Members may be happy to march through the Lobby to support a Conservative Government—I can understand that.

The graph on page 31 of the report is quite telling about noise. We are talking about 323,000 people who will be hearing 51 dB of noise. They will not have heard that noise before, and yet they do not know who they are. Heathrow came to a meeting in my constituency in Ascot. It was roundly trashed all through the meeting, yet most of the people in the room were there because they were a bit annoyed about the existing noise, and they were not even under the flight path. They did not realise that potentially they will be under the flight path. How on earth can the decision be made when the people affected do not know that they will be affected? It is the wrong way round.

The promises are not worth anything, particularly when it comes to the slots, and I would be very cautious about believing them. If the Government give Heathrow permission to build the runway—I really do not understand their enthusiasm for committing to a single, private sector company that virtually holds a monopoly anyway; it is bizarre behaviour in terms of market economics—what will they do if Heathrow does not then build the runway? Is there a penalty clause for Heathrow? Will we charge it several billion pounds for pretending to want to do something that it then does not complete?

I notice that the recommendation for the Lakeside Energy from Waste plant, which is in my constituency, was the only one that the Government did not accept, giving just a single sentence—“Well, we don’t believe it’s a nationally significant venture.” Will the Minister publish the data on which that decision was based? The Lakeside Energy from Waste plant processes 40% of the hazardous waste in this country and is of enormous strategic importance, so I am surprised that no data was available for the public to see the basis on which the decision was made.

At what point will the Government back away from supporting a third runway at Heathrow? If it becomes clear that the required noise levels cannot be reached, will the Government back away and change their mind? If it becomes clear that the existing air quality legislation cannot be complied with, will they back away? If so, how will they change that decision? If it turns out that the Lakeside Energy from Waste plant will be shut down, causing a regional and possibly national issue, at what point will the Government change their mind?

I am cognisant that if the Government change their mind, possibly beyond the next 17 or 18 days, that may open up an enormous liability for the taxpayer, if Heathrow has been incurring costs from the moment that the national policy statement was published. Will the Minister explain how the Government allowed that clause, which applies only to the Heathrow proposal, not the Gatwick or other proposals, and which contains the very strange proposal to underwrite the cost incurred, whether or not the scheme goes ahead?

3.6 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is real pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Hanson. It has been an enjoyable debate so far—it has cheered me up, as did the report from the Select Committee, ably chaired by

[*Andy Slaughter*]

my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood). It also cheers me up that, with each document we have collected from the Vote Office over the past week, we are further away from having this ridiculous third runway built than we were a week ago.

I share the incredulity of hon. Members on both sides of the House about this Government and successive Governments, but not the Committee, save in respect of its clinging to the conclusion despite its own evidence. I scratch my head and puzzle about why a private company that clearly does not have the interests of the population or the economy of this country at heart is constantly taking in Government after Government, despite the evidence presented to them again and again.

We have another Minister here who will get up and gamely defend the conclusions, which look increasingly threadbare. The Government have not just been an unfair referee biased towards one side; they have joined one team. They have closed their ears to the glaring anomalies, to anything inconvenient and to the negligence in many of these documents.

The right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) mentioned in her urgent question this morning the probity issue of giving indemnities to such a company. Sooner or later that will come to light and people will come to their senses. I hope that will happen in the next two weeks in the course of the vote. I will be interested to hear the comments from the Scottish National party and from colleagues from other regions of the country—not just London and the south-east—that are increasingly waking up to the problem. If we do not win the vote, I suspect we will come to our senses during the course of the very substantial legal proceedings over the next few years.

I hope that it does not take the actual fulfilment of the scheme, or the attempt to fulfil it, to show how misplaced it has been, because then we will have wasted not only huge sums of public money, but a huge opportunity, because there is a need for airport expansion, but in a way that is balanced throughout the UK and, as the right hon. Member for Putney says, is a national airport strategy. I cannot understand, with all the resources that the Department and the Government have, why they are settling for such a scheme.

I shall go back a few years to show how the arguments have changed. Those of us who represent constituencies affected by Heathrow used to be classified as nimbys. I do not think we mind being nimbys when we stand up for our constituents on a significant issue for which there is no justification on the other side. We are talking not about a small inconvenience, but about villages and hundreds of people's homes being destroyed. My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) talked about how air quality has real effects on people's quality of life and actual survival. We must not put additional pressure on an area that already has some of the worst air quality in the country, and additional congestion in one of the most congested parts of the UK.

The M4-M25 junction is constantly the busiest part of the motorway network in the area, risking safety and health. Leaving even terrorism and the airline industry's safety record aside, we will be attempting to fly over the most crowded and densely populated area that any

airport serves. With three runways, there will be little opportunity to avoid a cataclysmic disaster in the event of a crash.

On the issue of noise, I sometimes wonder why we do not stop this farce at a time when the 28% figure is used: 28% of all serious noise caused to people living around airports in Europe is caused to people living around Heathrow, and the Government want to make that significantly worse. According to Transport for London and the Mayor of London, an additional 200,000 people will be seriously affected. I am not sure that would be countenanced in many other civilised countries, but we quite blithely seem to go forward with it. Those are the nimby arguments, and I do not apologise for such important arguments. On balance, they should have meant that we never considered Heathrow because there were alternatives. The obvious alternative, with none of those consequences, would be the expansion of Gatwick, but the argument has moved on, which is why we should be particularly grateful to the Select Committee

Most of the evidence that the Select Committee considered was more about the national situation and the economic case. Heathrow used to be trumpeted as being streets ahead in terms of the economic benefit, but shortly after the Committee reported it turned out that it was barely ahead and now appears to be some way behind Gatwick. That is a significant change. If I were an aviation Minister, I think I might stop and think about that and decide whether I was doing what was in the best interests of the economy of this country.

If we look at the increasing passenger numbers, taking out transfer passengers, the figures are finely balanced, perhaps in favour of Gatwick. If we look at destinations, it is the same thing. I will not repeat the points ably made by the hon. Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) about the effect on regional airports and the fact that not only is there no guarantee that there will not be a loss of direct flights, as the Chair of the Committee has said, but that they will be competing for access into Heathrow with more lucrative flights, and we know the way Heathrow sells those flights. That is a disaster for the regions.

I think the Minister was in the House earlier in the week when the statement was made to hear Birmingham MPs asking why, when Birmingham Airport is going to be 30 minutes away from London and is the UK's second city with one runway, do we want to put a third runway into Heathrow, particularly when most of the Members around that third runway are saying, "We do not want it. It is a ridiculous idea. Do not bring it here." For all those reasons, I entirely endorse the conclusions that the Select Committee came to.

The right hon. Member for Putney raised the issue of risk in the main Chamber this morning. I am sure that the Minister will explain whether Heathrow was given beneficial treatment in that regard, relative to Gatwick, because I understand that is what he said in the main Chamber this morning. He perhaps needs to clarify that point.

I am increasingly annoyed by the way in which, without any evidence at all, the Government dismiss the evidence put forward by the Mayor and Transport for London. They know what they are talking about in relation to London's transport network. They know how much pressure it is under and what the additional costs are likely to be. I have seen nothing to indicate that

the Government have prepared their own robust figures on that. If they accept the TfL figures, or even part of those figures, will the Minister repeat the assurance that I think he gave to me this morning, which is that every single penny of additional cost and opportunity cost arising from the construction of a third runway, and indeed every aspect of risk, will be borne by the private developer and not by the Government? I do not know whether he can give such assurances.

I do not want to take up a huge amount of time, but I do think that the way Heathrow has conducted its case has been misleading. I have seen that for 30 years. We have seen that with the justifications for building additional terminals, the mitigation that does not happen and the promises that are constantly broken, and now we hear that those promises should never have been made in the first place. Well, that is a great comfort to my constituents, as I am sure the Minister can imagine.

On the issue of flight paths, how can the 2 million people who live around the Heathrow catchment area in west London possibly know what to expect? They are being sold a pig in a poke. One thing the Government could do is put pressure on NATS and on Heathrow to produce at least provisional flightpaths to show what the effect will be. Otherwise, the assumption is that things are being done deliberately so that people do not realise until it is too late what the consequences will be.

I entirely agree with what the hon. Member for Windsor said about the energy from waste plants: 450,000 tonnes a year of non-recyclable household and commercial waste, mostly serving NHS trusts. That is an essential facility and there is no provision for its replacement. Such inconveniences are simply ignored.

We got a letter today from the former chair of the Commission, which purported to look at the arguments against Heathrow, about why it dismissed them, but it did not. The arguments are perfectly right. The obsolete nature of a hub model that has been the only possible model for a city such as London, given the changes in aircraft and aviation practice, is not dealt with. The issue of detriment to regional airports is not dealt with, and the issue of carbon emissions is not dealt with. We know what the arguments are and what the evidence is. We are constantly amazed by how the Government will not properly address those issues. I know that the Minister will have another go today, but we will see where we get to on that.

I will end by repeating what other Members have said. The Select Committee has done us a real favour, because it can be seen, particularly in the light of its conclusions, to be independent and rigorous and to have put forward many caveats. Rather than the inadequate response we have had so far, we would like to see, before we are called on to vote on this in a few days' time, robust responses to the points that have been made. If not, it is difficult to see how any Member—I hope the Government will allow its own Members a free vote—could in conscience vote for a proposal that, however much they might see the advantages, has not satisfied any of the points of mitigation that were put forward and has not dealt with the evidence that there are better and less damaging alternatives.

3.19 pm

John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), who gave a typically thoughtful and

forensic speech. I will try to cheer him up even more if I can. On a day when no fewer than seven England squad players born in Yorkshire are to play at Elland Road, in their last match before the World cup, I intend to try to give the perspective from God's own county; but I will not be able to do it nearly as well as the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) did. She may have left Rotherham a while ago, but she retains a love of the north of England and Yorkshire, and a real passion. If I may say so, the hon. Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) spoke with such knowledge of the north of England—he spoke, indeed, for the nation—that, by the powers invested in me, I make him an honorary Yorkshireman for the day.

Like many hon. Members present for the debate, I want to praise the Select Committee report for its thoroughness. However, just as the Committee Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), inserted a few caveats and “buts” in her remarks, I want to express a “but” in my praise. Reading the report was, to me, like watching a 12-round boxing match. Each round came and went, and I thought there was only one boxer in it, as I read all the criticisms of the Heathrow case in the 150 pages, including appendices. I was rather surprised. It was like watching all 12 rounds when there was only one possible verdict, and then finding that the bout went to the other boxer. I felt all the evidence in the report led to one conclusion—to say, on the precautionary principle at the very least, no to Heathrow.

I want particularly to direct some remarks to someone who will be giving the third speech that we can look forward to today from a Yorkshire-born Member: I mean my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner), who will speak from the Opposition Front Bench. I want to talk about the impact of the Heathrow announcement on Humberside airport. I hope that we shall soon hear from the Labour Transport Front-Bench team that they will follow the lead given over many years by the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who has been in strong opposition to the expansion of Heathrow. At one stage such voices were lonely ones. There is a gentleman called, I think, Len McCluskey, who is putting a little pressure on our leaders, which I hope will be resisted. Particularly given all the criticisms we have heard from the Conservative Benches of crony capitalism, I hope that the shadow Transport team will before long put a three-line Whip on the Labour party to go through the Lobby to oppose the proposal. I will be proud to be in the Opposition Lobby on that occasion.

I want to concentrate my remarks on regional connectivity and the economies of the north of England, which is what I am best able to do. We have heard a lot about that already, and I shall not repeat what has been said, but I will express some doubts about the promises that have been heard and examined about connectivity. As I understand it, there is a promise of up to 15%. I am not sure whether there is a floor: could it be 7%, 2% or 11%? If the Minister knows of a floor, I would be glad to hear about it. I would also be interested in publication of the Government's legal advice that it would be legal to subsidise airport-to-airport connections. It is not clear, as various hon. Members have mentioned, that that would be legal. I listened to Baroness Sugg, the

[John Grogan]

Under-Secretary, in the other place yesterday, and at column 1331 she made it clear, as other Ministers have, that most of the flights in relation to regional connectivity are expected to happen on a commercial basis.

My local airport is Leeds Bradford—an engine of the northern powerhouse. If flights to Heathrow cannot be made commercial from Leeds Bradford, where can they? Yet in the past 20 to 25 years there has been a continual story of someone getting a route to Heathrow for a few months or years, which is then cut. “Bmi cuts routes between Heathrow and the North” was the headline about 10 years ago. Just a few months ago it was “Leeds Bradford airport ‘disappointed’ as British Airways announces flight cuts to and from Heathrow”—halving the number of flights. It would be good to hear which airports Ministers consider to have a commercial case for running more slots into Heathrow.

For the north of England and for us in Yorkshire, Amsterdam is the main business connection if people want to go to a hub—although we prefer to go point to point. I think that is true for Scotland as well. I try to follow Scottish politics, and there is an awful lot of talk about connections with the Baltic states, the low countries and so on. As I look towards my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull East, I think that it is true for Humberside as well. Flights from there are frequent, whereas from Leeds Bradford they will be down to one a day. The northern powerhouse really wants point-to-point travel. We do not want to be reliant on changing at other airports if we do not need to.

The Select Committee Chair drew attention to an extremely important sentence on page 26 of the report:

“While direct international connectivity from the regions will continue to grow in any eventuality”—

I acknowledge that—

“the DfT’s forecasts show that direct international connectivity from the regions would be lower with a NWR than without expansion.”

It is lower with the north-west runway by a big factor. There would be 74,000 fewer direct international flights per year to and from airports in the non-London regions in 2030, which I think is about 10% of the total. That increases to 161,000 fewer flights from areas outside London in 2050. That is remarkable, and how any northern MP can vote for it I am not sure.

I commend the information in the Select Committee report to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull East. It is all based on Government figures, by the way; it is not the Select Committee’s imaginings, but the churning of Government figures. They have been broken down now, and perhaps—I do not know—the Committee Chair could do the House a favour and have them put in the Library of the House, as they say. I do not know how that is done, but I am sure that, like Ministers, she has the power to do it. The Committee report has the figures broken down for individual airports. I will not read them all, but will give a couple of examples. Without Heathrow expansion, Birmingham would have roughly 124,000 international flights in 2030. That number goes down to 107,000 in 2030 if Heathrow expands. For Leeds Bradford, the figure is 39,000 without expansion and roughly 35,000 with expansion, over the same period. For Manchester, the figure is 179,000 if Heathrow does not expand and

159,000—20,000 fewer international flights—by 2030 if it does. Projecting through to 2060 for Glasgow, there would still be fewer flights: there would be 64,970 without Heathrow expansion and 62,874 with it.

The impact—the chilling factor—will be felt throughout the United Kingdom. As the hon. Member for Windsor said, there will be a lot of legal uncertainty, and the effect will be to put the mockers on the growth plans of all those airports around the country. I call on the airports of Birmingham and Manchester, and all the great airports, to stand up and be counted. After talking privately to their representatives, I think that the Department for Transport has had a word with some of them and pointed out that they are hoping for extra rail links and a period of silence would be appreciated. I think that is the message that is received when they are asked about it privately. Paul Kehoe, who was the chief executive of Birmingham airport, but has now gone, was vocal about the case for Birmingham. If it gets high-speed rail, Birmingham will be closer to London than Stansted. Equally, Manchester has gone suspiciously quiet in recent times. I think this is a matter on which the political representatives of those great cities should be called on. I hope that the Mayors of Manchester and Birmingham will lead the clamour against the expansion of Heathrow, in the interest of their regional economies.

I have high hopes of the Scottish National party. I do not think that the issue is yet fixed. I think the SNP is thoughtfully thinking about whether it truly sees itself going into the Lobby with some Conservatives, rather than joining what I hope will be the Labour party and the Green party—otherwise what will it say about anyone’s green credentials? I know that the environment in question is that of London, but it is important to us all in the United Kingdom. I hope that the SNP will reflect on that.

Justine Greening: I know the SNP are all for Scottish independence, but I am worried that they will get it by losing every single flight out of the country. I am not sure that is the kind of independence Scotland really wants. I would have thought that the SNP would be better off seizing the opportunity to develop a genuine Scottish airports strategy. One of the other airport CEOs who is concerned about Heathrow expansion is the CEO of Edinburgh airport.

John Grogan: It is almost like the right hon. Lady, who is a fellow Yorkshire-born Member, and I co-operated, because I have a quote from said gentleman—Gordon Dewar. Admittedly, Edinburgh has associations with Gatwick, which has gone suspiciously quiet in recent months. I do not know how it has been silenced, but Gordon Dewar has not been—he has been speaking for Scotland and the United Kingdom. He said:

“Heathrow expansion risks a monopolised market which is bad for passengers.”

He argues that Scottish airports are less dependent on London than ever before, and that

“our passengers tell us that they want to fly directly.”

I have high hopes that, despite Mr Len McCluskey, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull East will lead us into the Lobby against the Government. I have equal hopes that our Scottish nationalist comrades will reflect on this issue and that they, too, will be in the Opposition Lobby when the vote comes.

3.31 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) on her sterling work on the report. I have a slight sense of déjà vu, because in this slot a couple of weeks ago we debated the Transport Committee's excellent report on community transport. It felt then like the Government were not listening. The same Minister responded to that debate, and he seemed to have closed his ears. I hope that we do better today.

My opposition to the expansion of Heathrow is of long standing—it predates my election to this place and comes from 46 years of living under the flightpath. In 2016, I asked David Cameron whether his, “No ifs, no buts,” no third runway statement applied and when we would get a decision. We all know what happened to him—I think the week after, he was a goner.

The report is thorough, deliberative and thoughtful, and people have called it forensic, but the Government are not behaving in that way on this issue. They seem to have decided, with indecent haste, to rush to expand without properly answering the points in the report, let alone Labour's four tests. The decision on Tuesday, which overtook the report, and the stuff that we have heard since was a long time coming, but the wrong decision has been made and the way it was reached seems highly questionable.

The Committee calls for assurances on noise, air quality and compensation. A lot of people have outlined the diminishing economic benefits of expansion. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) is no longer in his place—I do not think he is resigning this time, but who knows—but the voices of Government Members have been some of the most powerful in the debate. That shows that this is a question not of left and right but of right and wrong. Even within our parties, on the left and the right, there are subdivisions.

The stuff we heard on the Floor of the House on Tuesday was very flimsy. There seemed to be an attitude that, “It'll be all right on the night,” and that everything would be paid for by the private sector. Nobody believes those fantastical promises. We had an urgent question this morning from the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) about the financial basis of the decision. In its report, the Select Committee states that it would approve the NPS only if there was

“evidence to demonstrate that the...scheme is both affordable and deliverable”

before any parliamentary vote, yet we are told that we will be rushed into that vote very soon.

Many of my constituents are deeply concerned. The two things that trouble them most are the environmental and social impacts, and increased air traffic. We already have illegal air pollution levels around Heathrow airport—not just from airborne traffic but from idling taxis, which cause NO₂ emissions at surface level. People are born with deformed lungs in our city. How will an extra runway make that any better?

There are other ways to do this. Even if we accept the need for airport capacity in the south-east to be expanded, there are other ways to do that. Could we not decouple the number of flights permitted from decisions on a

runway? There are other ways of doing this. We could build up Gatwick and have better rail connectivity between Gatwick and Heathrow.

Frankly, Heathrow is in the wrong place for expansion. If we were building an airport from scratch, we would not put it in what is already one of the most built-up urban areas. Schiphol and many other airports are in the middle of fields. Heathrow is in the wrong place, and this is the wrong time for expansion. As was pointed out, we should be looking at the point-to-point model, not the hub model. The Select Committee states that it accepts the national policy statement

“on the premise that any expansion is sustainable, consistent with legal obligations and that suitable mitigations will be in place to offset impacts on local communities affected by noise, health and social impacts.”

That is a pretty big caveat. What we have been told by the Government and Heathrow does not offer my constituents confidence that any of that has been done.

Many voters, in good faith, believed the Conservatives when they said they were their saviours from the third runway that our party promised under the Brown Government, long before my time in this place. I think voters will start wondering, “Does this mean that they're casting it all off? Were these some sort of short-lived green halcyon days, when it was time to hug a husky?” We have since seen the Conservatives embrace nuclear power at Hinkley Point, fracking, and now this. I think people will wonder. David Cameron—remember him?—said something about cutting the green stuff. Well, he actually used a word that I do not think is parliamentary, Mr Hanson. Perhaps you can guess what it is—it rhymes with “nap” and begins with the letters c and r. I will not say any more than that, but people will wonder.

The Foreign Secretary promised to lie down in front of the bulldozers. I cannot see that happening, but even if they do not do that, the Government surely should stand up for our constituents' health. Air pollution is already appallingly high in our city, and the NPS fails to show how a third runway and all the emissions it will bring will improve that. As it is, 9,000 Londoners a year die prematurely from our toxic air. How is an extra runway going to help that? The current Mayor of London is acting on the issue. He has brought forward things such as the ultra-low emission zone, which the previous Mayor dragged his feet on a bit. All that will be undone, so will the Minister tell us exactly how our climate change obligations will be satisfied following this decision?

I restate that it seems the decision has been made with indecent haste. If it has been 20 years or whatever in the making, we cannot just rush into it. It is important that we get it right. Other Members mentioned the underhand way that Heathrow airport can operate. I found that from its surrogate, Back Heathrow, a mysterious so-called grassroots operation that somehow sent hundreds of postcards. The way it briefed against my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) and me was highly unprofessional. It is no wonder that Heathrow's promises are not worth the paper they are written on, given that it operates through such shady surrogate operations.

The proposal is beset by problems. The level of opposition is demonstrated not just by Government Members but by the fact that the Mayor of London, who used to be a Transport Minister and I think was one of the original proponents of a third runway, has completely changed

[*Dr Rupa Huq*]

his mind. The Mayor's office has done a lot of modelling, which cannot just be ignored. Willie Walsh, the CEO of International Airlines Group, said that it is unlikely that all the promises made by Heathrow can ever be delivered. It almost feels like we are in an early series of "Mad Men", when the characters did a campaign for cigarettes—they knew they were bad for people, but they sold them anyway and said they were great. Look, I use Heathrow and understand its strategic importance to the west London economy and to the whole nation, but enough is enough. Put the extra capacity elsewhere and build the links to that.

Sir Roger Gale: I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady and indeed to everyone else. It strikes me that, other than my modest contribution in terms of bridging a gap, not a single person has come up with any solution to the passenger and—currently much more important—freight needs of the United Kingdom. We need an answer. Just saying "we don't want this" is no answer.

Dr Huq: One of the Labour party's promises is about delivering benefits to the whole nation, which is what the hon. Gentleman was talking about, but this proposal, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth and the right hon. Member for Putney said, will suck the life out of regional airports. They will have fewer flights. It is a bad idea that is the worst of all worlds.

There are significant environmental, financial, political and legal considerations. We see divisions in the Cabinet. There will be a legal challenge, and the Government risk losing that unless all the conditions are met. It is riddled with difficulties. It is vital that before we make a decision all required mitigations are in place, but they are not at the moment. There are other impacts—one could go on and on—including community impacts; resource and waste management; air quality; surface access; connectivity; and costs and landing charges. Actually, it will be more expensive to fly from what is already a very expensive airport. I did not really get into Labour's four tests, but we do not need to go into those in great detail. I revert to an old slogan of the London Borough of Ealing. What we want is a better Heathrow, not a bigger Heathrow.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

David Hanson (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), the Scottish National party spokesperson, and subsequently the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner), the Labour party spokesperson, given the time we have I suggest that they may have 15 minutes each, maximum. They may not need 15 minutes, but that is their maximum.

3.42 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I rise to speak with a little trepidation—I have never heard so many MPs call for what the SNP will say; it was absolutely curious. It is good that for once they will all be listening, rather than staring at their iPads.

Andy Slaughter: While we have been here, a constituent sent me a letter that had been sent to *The Scotsman*, the end of which reads:

"Scottish airports not pursuing a more independent approach will fail to break a dependency that could be vital for an independent nation. Surely a better approach to accepting Heathrow offering breadcrumbs is to build vibrant international capacity... By using modern point-to-point aircraft this will create air passenger-friendly economic activity independently of the mores of the south-east and the outdated hub-and-spoke."

Does he not regard that as a call to arms?

Alan Brown: I agree with the call for independence, and it was great to hear the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) giving advice on what an independent Scotland would look like. However, even if Scotland becomes independent, we can still have the same connectivity, as that is separate from being independent. We want to be an independent country with connectivity all over the world. However, the truth of the matter is that, with regard to the expansion of Scottish airports, many of the chief executives of Scottish airports I have spoken to want Heathrow expansion. Truth be told, they would accept Gatwick expansion, but they all say that they need that extra connectivity into the main London airport. That is the reality; it is not a factor of independence. In an ideal world we would have a major international hub in Scotland, but we do not have the critical mass.

People either support Heathrow expansion, support it with a "but", or outright oppose it. Those who oppose it are more likely to be here on a Thursday afternoon to make their contributions heard. It has been a really good debate. Every Member, no matter their viewpoint, has complimented the excellent work done by the Transport Committee. It has published an excellent report, and I must pay tribute to the Committee's Chair for the thorough way in which she presented it.

I am pleased that a briefing was provided for MPs. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend, but the briefing notes were excellent, giving a concise summary of some of the issues that still need to be teased out. It will be good to hear the Minister's response. Like others, I pay tribute to the work the Clerks have done. Although I have not been involved, I know how the Clerks work, and it is great to see the report and information presented concisely.

The Committee Chair highlighted fairly that this issue is not just about connectivity; it is also about the individual people who will be affected. I am conscious that I am a Scottish MP who will be asked to vote on a decision that affects people who are not my constituents. I accept that and understand that some local people affected might be a wee bit angry about that, but unfortunately the reality of a major infrastructure project is that some people will be affected. We must look at the pros and cons, and these people should be adequately compensated and looked after. That is the flipside of a dynamic—other MPs are now advising me as a SNP and Scottish MP on what view I should take—so it works both ways.

The Committee Chair also importantly outlined the risks of inaction—decisions not taken and no further expansion of a hub airport—in terms of the potential loss of business to other European airports. She and others highlighted the risk of the project not being

delivered in Heathrow's timescale by 2026. A pertinent point is that it could be built by 2026 and operating at full capacity by 2028—it seems counter-intuitive that it could be at full capacity just two years after its projected opening. That suggests that it is not a forward-thinking business plan. It would be good to hear comments on that.

The Chair and other Members highlighted surface access issues, particularly road traffic, the required air quality updates and the fact that there are openings for legal challenges. Again, the Minister's response must cover that in detail. The Chair concluded by saying that the Committee's support is conditional. It clearly has yet to meet to discuss further the Government's response, but it is a fair comment that the report must surely have helped other Members decide how they will vote when the time comes to make this big decision. I again pay tribute to the Committee for the work it has done.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) on his 35 years in Parliament. He highlighted the success of and threats from competing airports. He touched on the personal aspect of understanding how Heathrow can affect constituents but still laid out his support for the plan. I commend him for shoehorning in a connection to Manston airport and for suggesting that it could be used as a stopgap for freight transport.

We then heard from the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), who has been campaigning against Heathrow expansion for a long time. I respect her view. She correctly highlighted flightpath concerns, and I agree that there should be more transparency on flightpaths so that people fully understand the implications. She also highlighted issues about other traffic movements.

The right hon. Member for Putney has been dogged on this issue. I commend her for securing an urgent question today. She highlighted what she sees as the financial considerations and risk to the Government in having to underwrite the project. We need further clarity. I am well aware that the Government say that there is no financial risk involved because it will be fully by the private sector, but we need absolute clarity on that. She touched on massive concerns for Scotland relating to infrastructure and growth. I welcome her conversion to Scottish independence. I appreciate what she said about Transport for London's commitments to surface expansion potentially drawing away further investment, but the reality is that Transport for London has a different borrowing model, so that will not directly affect infrastructure spend in Scotland. That is a bit of a red herring, to be honest.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), having analysed this and being a member of the Transport Committee, was another "Yes, but." He highlighted the real importance of western rail access not just for Heathrow, but for wider western connectivity. It seems that that project should have gone ahead sooner rather than later.

The hon. Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) came at this from the national interest approach. He made the argument that it is not in the national interests, and as a Tory he argued about the financial implications. Interestingly—this is almost a conspiracy theory—he believes that Heathrow is not going to develop and that this is just a mechanism to control competition. Depending on what happens with the vote and how we go forward,

we will see whether those chickens come home to roost, but I suggest that Heathrow seems to have spent a lot of money and effort so far, and to do so for a scheme it does not intend to progress with would be quite surprising.

Adam Afriyie: In terms of the financial interest and the money that has been spent so far, I would say that it would be a pretty wise investment to spend several tens of millions if it looked as though Heathrow could increase its landing fees, increase its take and stop the competition growing for a period of 10, 20 or 30 years. That is a wise investment on its part.

Alan Brown: I take the hon. Gentleman's point that there is a financial benefit to spending the money if it eliminates the competition, but clearly if Heathrow stymies routes and development going forward, it opens up some of the other opportunities that at the moment we are saying do not exist. I am not sure it would be in its long-term interests to be able to do that.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) said that this debate has cheered him up. I presume that is because quite a few people spoke in opposition—I am not sure that I will cheer him up as I continue. He highlighted concerns about flightpath and cost. As a flippant aside, I must commend him for the coherent speech he has made from the scribbles he makes on his paper. I do not know how he manages to do that, and I commend him for it.

Andy Slaughter: It is not me; it is *Hansard*.

Alan Brown: We all have to thank *Hansard* for making us seem more coherent.

The hon. Member for Keighley (John Grogan) gave us a Yorkshire perspective. To cheer him up, one of my grandparents was from Yorkshire, so I am one quarter Yorkshire—maybe I am an honorary Yorkshireman. He suggested that there should be a three-line Labour Whip against this. It will be interesting to see what the shadow Minister says about that recommendation; maybe he can give us some guidance in his summing-up speech. The hon. Member for Keighley was another one giving advice to the other SNP MPs and me on what is in Scotland's interests. I take his point about the possible risk to direct, point-to-point, long-haul connections and some of the threats predicted for regional airports. I also have concerns and would want some protection. I want to hear what the Minister says about that.

The final Back-Bench speech was from the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), who again highlighted the environmental and social impacts and how traffic can affect air quality. I was trying to follow her logic. It seems that she wants the Tories to U-turn on their decision not to overturn the previous Labour decision. That seems to highlight how long this has been kicking around, how much prevarication there has been and, if nothing else, why we need to get to a decision.

Dr Huq: Following the logic that people can change their minds, would the hon. Gentleman not agree that this Government should also now change their mind on Brexit—something else that sounded good but is now unravelling?

Alan Brown: I think we should leave Brexit for another day, because I am running out of time as it is.

I will give a few thoughts on some of the Transport Committee's key recommendations and the Government's response—I have had the chance to skim through it quickly, since time has been limited. Recommendation 1 asks for the national policy statement to be redrafted to meet the Committee's recommendations and the concerns it has highlighted. The Government response suggests that they have done that, but looking at the Government responses on an individual basis, it seems that they have paid platitudes to the recommendations rather than wholeheartedly taking them on board and changing the national policy statement. I would like to hear what the Minister has to say about that, since it will clearly be critical in bringing other hon. Members on board with the decision they want.

Recommendations 3 to 6 are about the Secretary of State granting development consent only on condition of satisfaction on air quality, health and safety, and environmental grounds. What will be the transparency and accountability aspects of these considerations if the vote is in favour? Why do the Government not just publish the air quality monetisation modelling? Stating that new, greener planes will help with air quality and environmental concerns is a bit of a cop-out as well. We need a wee bit more clarity on that.

Recommendations 7 to 9 relate to the surface access upgrades. Other hon. Members have raised concerns about those and we need transparency on them. We need to be sure that the upgrades will be privately financed and not underwritten by the Government, and that there are clear business models there that can be developed. There seems to be some division over whether some of the proposed rail schemes will tackle the expansion of Heathrow or are based only on existing usage. The Government need to be clear on that, and we need clear information on the M25.

Recommendation 10, from my perspective, is critical for MPs who represent regional airports. How will the 15% of slots for domestic routes be protected? The Secretary of State suggested in his statement the other day that a legal mechanism could be developed, possibly in a public service obligation, but how will that protect the number of airports that have been promised opportunities? How will the PSO work? Other hon. Members have raised the point that it might not be applicable to some of the airports that are looking for those connections. We need absolute clarity on that before the vote. If my SNP colleagues and I are voting on the basis of increased connectivity to the Heathrow international hub, we need assurances that those slots will remain in place and that Scotland will get the connectivity it has been promised.

Recommendation 11 is about affordability and deliverability. The Government response states that HAL "appears in principle to be able to privately finance" this, and paragraph 1.70 states:

"The Government will continue to monitor the financeability and affordability of the scheme as the design develops and as the economic regulatory framework for expansion matures."

I ask the Minister to explain that to me, as a layman.

On recommendation 12, which relates to charges, the Government response states:

"The Government agrees that expansion cannot come at any cost."

Again, what are the Government going to do to ensure that future costs do not rise exponentially, and how will they control and monitor that? I accept that there is a role for the CAA, but that still potentially leaves the door open for increased charges justified by x, y or z, where the CAA says that is completely justified.

Recommendation 25 is all about the policy consultation and ways to maximise other runway capacity across the UK. That is crucial, and the Government seem to have ignored it, apart from saying that they recognise the recommendation. I want to know what the Government will do about UK-wide airport strategy and maximising the other airports across the UK.

It is quite clear that to date the SNP, including myself, has spoken in support of Heathrow expansion. For the benefit of hon. Members, the reason is that airports in Scotland have told us that they want that connectivity. The airlines support it. There is a possibility of 16,000 jobs. The chambers of commerce in Scotland support it, as do all Scottish airports except Edinburgh, which has the Gatwick connection. That is the case at the moment. It is a "Yes, but" position, and the Government must take due cognisance of those concerns and the work of the Transport Committee.

3.58 pm

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): It is always an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I start by paying tribute to the Transport Committee, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), for the comprehensive work it has done in thoroughly scrutinising the Government's draft airport national policy statement. I also commend right hon. and hon. Members across the House who have spoken in the debate, many of whom have long-standing views for or against expansion.

I reiterate Labour's view. We have consistently maintained that we approach the issue pragmatically and in terms of our four tests. In our 2017 manifesto, we stated:

"Labour recognises the need for additional airport capacity in the South East. We welcome the work done by the Airports Commission, and we will guarantee that any airport expansion adheres to our tests that require noise issues to be addressed, air quality to be protected, the UK's climate change obligations met and growth across the country supported."

We could not be any clearer that any decision must be based on hard evidence with full transparency.

The Transport Committee completed its scrutiny just over two months ago and agreed that the draft NPS was not fit for purpose. It made 25 recommendations. The Committee's support for expansion very much depends on the Government's addressing its concerns in the final NPS. I do not believe that the Government have done that yet. The Secretary of State said that he had acted on 24 of the 25 recommendations, but the NPS document is largely unchanged and the majority of the Committee's recommendations will be left for the Secretary of State to decide on at the development consent order—DCO—stage of the process.

We are effectively being asked to take the Secretary of State's word for it. This is one of the biggest infrastructure projects in the country, and given his calamitous handling of the railways, I and many of my hon. Friends do not have confidence in him to carry this out. Will the

Minister explain why the Government have not done what the Transport Committee asked and revised the NPS to include its 25 recommendations?

A little over four months ago, I stated from this very position that the Government's draft NPS, published in October last year, and the responses to it raised more questions than they answered. I am sorry to say that not much has changed. The Government's response does nothing to address the Committee's concerns on air quality; they have not amended their outdated air quality population figures or adopted a more stringent interpretation of air quality compliance. On noise, they have not updated the 2013 baseline figure or defined an acceptable noise level target. They have also failed to define a minimum level of noise respite or to set out how they intend to regulate any noise envelope. Given that air quality and noise are the two biggest concerns for people living around the airport, it beggars belief that the Government have not addressed these important issues.

On surface access, the NPS still does not give any details on what costs may fall on the taxpayer, or on the proposed changes to the M25. Will the Minister shed some more light on these issues? The Committee recommended that approval should be granted only if the target of no more airport-related traffic could be met. Rather than giving a commitment, the Government will only say that it is their "expectation" that that would be a requirement of a DCO. Will the Minister explain why that is not a firm commitment?

On domestic routes, again the Government have failed to give any detail on how they will secure slots for the regions. Given that slots are owned by airlines and not airports, it is unclear how the Government can guarantee that slots will be used for domestic routes. I hope that the Minister will give the detail that the NPS lacks in that regard.

The Committee also pointed out that there was no mention of potential costs and investment risks. The Government have not provided evidence that the scheme is affordable or deliverable. Again, they seem to have ignored the Committee's recommendations on this important issue. The Committee recommended that airport charges be held flat in real terms, but the Government have not given that commitment. In fact, they say that

"an increase in charges may ultimately be in the interest of consumers".

Does that mean that passengers will be expected to foot the bill?

The Government have done nothing to address the Committee's concerns about respite at night, ignoring its recommendation to increase the flight ban from six and a half hours to seven hours. The Committee made recommendations about the compensation scheme, which the Government have also ignored and left unchanged in the NPS. The Committee suggested that there should be a strategy outlining how the Government will support local communities after the planning process is finished, but the Government have not included anything in the NPS on this absolutely critical issue. There is nothing new on airspace modernisation in the Government's response to the Committee.

I have covered the areas that the Secretary of State claims to have addressed, so I will briefly mention the area on which he admitted that he has done nothing. The Committee concluded that the updated NPS should

give the Lakeside Energy from Waste plant the same recognition as the immigration removal centres, and that the replacement of its facilities should be part of the DCO. Given that not replacing the plant will have an enormously harmful effect locally, regionally and nationally, due to the inability to process the levels of waste that the plant is contracted to process, will the Minister explain why it will not form part of the DCO?

The Secretary of State stood at the Dispatch Box on Tuesday and said that he had acted on 24 of the Committee's 25 recommendations. It is difficult to trust a word that the Secretary of State says, yet we are expected to put our trust in him to deliver this huge infrastructure project. The Opposition are not prepared to do that. The Opposition will consider the proposed expansion through our four tests and will follow the evidence across the Committee's comprehensive recommendations. I look forward very much to hearing the Minister's response to the concerns we have raised.

4.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): It is a delight to see you in the Chair, Mr Hanson. It has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate. I start by putting on the record my gratitude to the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) for her detailed, thoughtful and statesmanlike speech, which absolutely flagged the way in which the Transport Committee had approached the process, the thoroughness and care with which it engaged with the issues and the unanimity of the report, subject, as she made clear, to its serious concerns being addressed. She is absolutely right about that.

Many more concerns have been raised during the debate, and I will try to cover them all individually during the course of my speech. If hon. Members feel that I have not covered any, they are absolutely welcome to write to me or to the Secretary of State, who has already said in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening), and as is already happening, that the Department will respond with urgency and diligence to questions put to it because of the tightness of the timetable, which is not under the control of the Government but is decided by the Planning Act 2008.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Nottingham South and also to the Committee for securing the debate. We have had a wide-ranging conversation, and I will focus on what has been said, but particularly on the Committee's report and the Government's response to it. As hon. Members are aware, there will be ample opportunity to address the NPS more broadly in the debate on the Floor of the House before the vote, and I have no doubt that there will be other parliamentary occasions to do so as well. I thank the Committee for that on both of those fronts.

The Committee's report is clear that airport expansion in the south-east is vital. It supported the strategic argument that the Heathrow north-west runway scheme is the best option, subject, as we have discussed, to the caveats described. Importantly, it does not shirk the "do nothing" option. It is aware that doing nothing is not an option—I do not think some hon. Members have quite been aware of that—given the constraints on capacity in this country, particularly in the south-east. That was an important recognition of the seriousness of the issue on both sides.

[*Jesse Norman*]

To answer a question put earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie), the Government are clear on our side that expansion will proceed only if the proposed scheme meets strict environmental obligations and offers a world-class package of compensation and mitigations for local communities. If those are not in place, the scheme will not proceed, so genuine questions as to whether it will proceed are raised by those issues.

Having given the report careful consideration, we have welcomed and acted on all but one of the 25 recommendations, which I shall discuss in detail. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner) said that we had only paid lip service to them, but that is not true; in fact, we have engaged very seriously with them. One can see that not just in the changes that have been made to the NPS itself but in the very detailed response in the back of our report, to which I direct hon. Members. The last 20 pages of the Government response are a very detailed analysis of the additional points raised in the Transport Committee's report. This is an eight to 10-point detailed discussion and analysis, and it shows the depth of our engagement with the report. As the hon. Member for Nottingham South says, the report was received on 23 March, so we have had it for two and a half months. There was no precipitate behaviour; we have not rushed to our conclusions. We have sought to digest with care and attention the Committee's thoughts and analysis.

Some of the issues raised by the Committee will be addressed, as our response makes clear, at a later stage in the development of the scheme, as is appropriate. It is important to say that what we are discussing is a framework document setting out the overall planning approach in relation to this very substantial national infrastructure project—it is of national significance. Therefore, it is appropriate that many of the more detailed issues that need to be solved are addressed later in the planning process.

Justine Greening: Will the Minister give way?

Jesse Norman: I am happy to give way, but even with 19 or 18 minutes left, I do not have a lot of time, given the many issues that have been raised already.

Justine Greening: I understand the point that my hon. Friend is making, but some of the detailed questions, as he has just called them, are actually questions about the feasibility of this project more broadly, and that is why they should be answered sooner and not later.

Jesse Norman: I absolutely understand the concern that my right hon. Friend expresses and I will come on to some of the aspects covered by that later in my remarks.

Let me pick out the one recommendation that we were not able to support, which was raised by several hon. Members. This is the question whether we can give the Lakeside Energy from Waste plant equivalent recognition to that accorded to the immigration removal centres. In response to similar concerns raised during the first public consultation, we strengthened the language in the NPS. Although we recognise the important role of the plant for local waste management, it is not—this has been verified in analysis by both the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—

a strategic asset and its loss would not affect the UK's ability to meet environmental targets, so it would not be appropriate for us to set it apart from other large, privately owned business facilities.

The Committee rightly highlighted the impact that additional noise from a larger airport could have on local communities. I very much recognise, as my colleagues do, that noise is a major concern. The airports national policy statement sets out a clear policy for addressing the scheme's noise impacts. It makes it evident that the Government expect noise mitigation measures to limit and, where possible, reduce the impact of aircraft noise. In response to the Committee's recommendations, we have improved the clarity of the NPS—for example, over the expectation that the scheme promoter will provide more predictable periods of relief from noise through a runway alternation programme.

The NPS also sets an expectation of a six and a half-hour scheduled night flight ban. I think that there was potentially some confusion in colleagues' minds on this issue. We have not reneged on any claim that has been made. There is an important distinction to be made between respite and a ban. In many ways, the Government's proposal goes beyond claims that were made by others previously, because it sets an expectation for a six and a half-hour scheduled night flight ban, in addition to other forms of respite, which may come, for example, from alternation of runways. Along with the Government's expected ban, there is scope for additional periods of respite to be provided at night, which means that we expect some communities to receive up to eight hours of noise relief at night.

It is important to say that the noise mitigation measures that we would expect to accompany any expansion at Heathrow would be determined in consultation with local communities and relevant stakeholders. Of course, we now have in place a local community forum, designed to enable the closest possible discussion of these issues with local—

Justine Greening: Will the Minister give way again, just briefly?

Jesse Norman: I will of course, but I am running out of time already.

Justine Greening: Again, we have had a million consultations over the years. The problem is that we are never listened to.

Jesse Norman: I do not think that is true, if I may say so. It has already been shown that the Department and the Government's position has moved in reaction to concerns expressed about this issue. That is why I have described the changes that we are making to predictable periods of relief from noise through a runway programme.

It has been suggested at different times in the debate by some that the Government are rushing headlong, pell-mell into a sudden decision, and by others that we have become immured and mired in consultation and delay. The truth is that we are making fairly steady and stately progress towards a set of decisions, which may go one way or the other, depending on the merits of the case, and we are doing so with previous Governments, certainly on the Labour side, having supported this proposal, so we are rather hoping that many Labour Members will continue to support it.

New technology is already making aircraft quieter. By the time a third runway is operational at Heathrow, we would expect airlines to be making much greater use of quieter, more efficient aircraft, which would also help reduce noise.

I want to respond to the Committee's concerns about the potential effect of pollution on our air quality. Again, we have made changes. We have made the national policy statement clearer that delivering according to air quality obligations will provide protections for health and the environment. We have also made it very clear that the third runway will be allowed to go ahead only if it can be delivered in compliance with the UK's air quality obligations. The environmental assessment and mitigations proposed by the airport will be very carefully scrutinised, I need hardly say, before any development consent is granted. Measures including a potential emissions-based access charge, the use of zero or low-emissions vehicles and an increase in public transport mode share use by passengers and employees would all contribute towards mitigating the impacts of an expanded airport.

I have touched already on community compensation. This is another issue that we take extremely seriously. On the issue of the compensation package for local communities, we share the Committee's view that that is a fundamental component of the package of measures that accompany the north-west runway scheme. Heathrow Airport Holdings Ltd has committed to paying homeowners who will need to move considerably more than is required in statute—125% of market value should the developer secure development consent. It has also committed to an extensive programme of noise insulation for homes and schools. A community compensation fund will be developed by an applicant to mitigate still further any environmental impacts and, as I have suggested, a community engagement board has already been set up, with Rachel Cerfontyne appointed as the independent chair. We agree with the Committee that details of the proposals must be worked up through consultation with local communities.

Ruth Cadbury: Will the mitigation package and, in particular, the noise insulation be subject to an absolute cap, or will it be subject to the actual noise that people experience, and if they experience the higher level of noise that generates the need for insulation, will it be delivered irrespective of the monetary cap? Also, will it be delivered in advance of the new flights coming in, or will residents, as at present, have to wait up to 10 years for the noise insulation to which they are entitled?

Jesse Norman: The answer to that question is, of course, that the package will be developed in consultation with local communities and, wherever possible, with an attempt to respond to the concerns that people have had.

The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), who is not in his place, asked whether compensation would be targeted to those most affected. The answer is that we are talking about what appears at the moment to be £2.6 billion in commitments, which is ten times bigger than the previous compensation offer made, including £700 million for noise insulation for homes and £40 million to insulate schools and community buildings. Those will be developed in a way that recognises the impacts, and the greatest impacts will be those most affected.

With regard to surface access, we know that Heathrow is already Britain's best-connected airport by road and rail—a position that will be strengthened by future planned improvements to the public transport systems that serve the area. In responding to the Committee's call for a written commitment to southern and western rail access, the Government have amended the NPS—a further change of direction in response to the Committee's work—to set out our clear support for the western rail link and to explain the continuing development of a southern rail access scheme. We are pressing ahead with both, but these are subject, in the usual way, to appropriate planning processes and approvals. Network Rail already has underway a statutory consultation on the development consent order for western rail. The Transport Secretary recently held an event to engage the market more closely on the appetite for a privately funded and financed southern rail scheme. We are not delaying on this.

We also welcome the Committee's focus on managing traffic associated with the airport. The airports national policy statement requires the applicant to set out clearly how it will mitigate any impact on the transport network and support additional demands that may be created by expansion. We have proposed specific mode share targets for passengers and employees at the airport, which we expect to be requirements of any development consent order. We also support the aspiration of Heathrow Airport Ltd to expand the airport without increasing airport-related traffic. Of course, it should be for the airport operator to demonstrate, as part of any development consent application, how it intends to deliver that goal and how it will, in so doing, mitigate any impact on the public transport network.

The Chair of the Committee said, absolutely rightly, that expansion cannot come at any cost, and we concur. It is important to take a calibrated approach to this, as the Committee has done. We have been clear that we expect expansion to be financed by the private sector without Government support. We also expect the industry to work together to deliver the ambition, set by the Secretary of State in 2016, that airport charges should remain close to current levels in real terms. We will continue to test the "financeability" and affordability of the Heathrow third runway scheme, as will the regulator, the CAA, and we have revised the national policy statement to clarify how the regulatory and planning processes work in this regard, with a considerable amount of further information provided in the final proposed national policy statement. Again, we are grateful to the Committee for its input.

I am also aware of the various representations that have been made in the Chamber that the Government would somehow be liable for Heathrow's costs, should they decide to withdraw support for the scheme. That point was raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney this morning and in this debate. To be clear to her, I did not say that those policy statements were the same for all three bidders. I said that they were substantially similar. I made that point because I wanted to show that there was no predilection, as it were, towards one bid over another; they were being treated in an equal way. The language in question creates no obligation on the Government, contingent or otherwise.

Let me be clear that the Government have not entered into any agreement that gives Heathrow the right to recover its losses in the light of any scheme not proceeding,

[*Jesse Norman*]

and nor do we recognise any liability for any of the costs that Heathrow Airports Ltd has incurred or will incur in future. Separately, the Government laid before Parliament yesterday a written ministerial statement and a departmental minute that set out—this makes the point the other way—a contingent liability where one does in fact exist for statutory blight, which would commence if the proposed airports national policy statement is designated. That liability is contingent, because the Government have rightly protected the taxpayer by entering into a binding agreement with Heathrow Airport Ltd, whereby the airport will assume the financial liability for successful blight claims if, and only if, the scheme proceeds, thus protecting the taxpayer.

Many hon. Members have rightly raised the question of connectivity and regional impact. We agree with the Committee that the benefits of Heathrow expansion must be felt nationally. We welcome the Committee's endorsement of our plans for an expanded Heathrow airport to retain existing domestic routes and add new routes. We have made it clear in our response that we will further consider domestic connectivity as part of the aviation strategy, which is in the process of being developed. Colleagues will be aware that consultation on that has recently closed. It will include the Secretary of State's ambition for up to 15% of slots released under expansion to be used for domestic flights. The proposed airports national policy statement makes it clear that the Government require Heathrow Airport Ltd to work with the airlines to protect existing routes and deliver new connections. This will be examined as part of any DCO application. The Government will also hold Heathrow Airport Ltd to account on its public pledges, including the introduction of its £10 million route connectivity fund.

John Grogan: The Minister mentioned "up to 15%". Is there a floor or could it be anything between 0% and 15%?

Jesse Norman: Our expectation is that it will be up to 15%, but we wait to see how far that 15% can be fully utilised. We have made it perfectly clear that, although this is not a matter for Government as such, we expect to see many regional airports come forward with plans, as many have already said they would. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) has already given evidence of the support of Scottish airports.

Alan Brown: The Minister will be aware that the Secretary of State said in his statement on Tuesday that the Government will find a legal mechanism for the protection of slots. How is that going to happen? That seemed to be a rather more vague commitment.

Jesse Norman: That is right. We have taken legal advice on it. We believe that public service obligations are a mechanism that can be used to give legal support for that position. I hope the hon. Gentleman will take a degree of comfort from that.

I want to turn to some of the many points that were raised. I have only about two and a half minutes remaining, so I will be as quick as I can. I apologise if I miss some,

and colleagues are welcome to write to me with these concerns. One suggestion made was that the scheme fails to monetise all the costs. The advice I have had is that we have monetised the air quality impact, which was identified as an omission by the Transport Committee and included in the updated appraisal report. On the question of whether there is a potentially costly risk from a delay in hitting full capacity, our judgment is that this is not specifically geared towards the delivery of a scheme in 2026 exactly, which is immediately being filled up thereafter. Sensitivity testing on this suggests that there might be limited impacts, even if there were some form of delay, which we do not expect.

Let me go through these other points, many of which I have already touched on. As I mentioned, we agree that the conversation on mitigation must focus on the communities most affected. I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale), who highlighted the importance of freight. He also made a powerful case, as many regional airports have done, for wider connectivity within the UK itself. I would not be surprised if I saw a bid coming forward from Manston, in a different incarnation from its current posture. I thank him for that.

We have touched on the question of bans versus mitigation. There is a suggestion that flight paths are somehow locked in place with no ability to vary. To be clear, as we move to a world of digital airspace, the capacity to vary flight paths greatly increases. That will take a number of years and that is why it has to be developed in context with the decision about the flight paths and therefore the noise implications of that, but it is important to bear that in mind.

I am grateful to the Committee. I appreciate that, in addition to the due documents that were laid before Parliament, a whole host of other materials have been subsequently published. I am grateful to hon. Members for looking at that. If they have further comments on that material, we would be happy to hear them.

4.29 pm

Lilian Greenwood: I am pleased to have had the opportunity to debate our Select Committee's report on this vital decision for the future of our national infrastructure. I am grateful to all Members here for reading the 154 pages we produced. In some ways this debate has been a rehearsal for the one we will have in a few weeks' time. I hope we have succeeded in highlighting the issues that hon. Members will want to consider as they examine the case the Government presented in their final NPS. The Select Committee will certainly be reading those documents carefully and discussing whether the 24 recommendations that the Secretary of State has told us he accepted have been adequately reflected in the final proposals. The House needs to weight up the evidence and make the right decision. I hope that this debate makes a contribution to those deliberations.

4.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Thursday 7 June 2018

CABINET OFFICE

Northern Ireland

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): Today we are publishing a document produced by the UK negotiating team for discussion with the EU.

This covers:

Temporary customs arrangement between the UK and the EU

These will be available on gov.uk today and copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS744]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Transport, Telecoms and Energy Council

The Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries (Margot James): The Transport, Telecoms and Energy Council (TTE) will take place in Luxembourg. Lord Ashton of Hyde will represent the UK at the telecoms session of the Council on 8 June.

This Council will begin with a progress report/policy debate on the proposed regulation concerning ePrivacy.

This meeting of the Council will then ask member states to vote on a general approach (GA) on the Cybersecurity Act Regulation. DCMS has deposited clearance/waiver requests with the European Scrutiny Committee (ESC) and European Union Committee (EUC) and will hope to support this GA at Council.

This session of the Council will also hold a policy debate on the directive on the re-use of Public Sector Information (PSI).

Also tabled for this session is information from the presidency on the directive on the European Electronic Communications Code (EECC) [Recast], and the regulation on the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC).

In addition, information will be provided from the Commission on the state of play of the Digital Single Market (DSM).

To conclude this session of the Council, there will be information from the Austrian delegation, setting out their work programme as the incoming presidency for the second half of 2018.

[HCWS743]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

Leaving the EU

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): Today we are publishing two documents produced by the UK negotiating team for discussion with the EU.

These cover:

Data

Transport

These will be available on gov.uk today and copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS746]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Security Industry Authority

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): I am pleased to announce that the review of the Security Industry Authority is today being published on www.gov.uk. This is part of a programme of regular reviews of public bodies to provide assurance and challenge for good governance and efficiency. A copy of the review will also be placed in the Library of the House.

I welcome publication of the review of the Security Industry Authority. The Government are committed to ensuring the integrity of the private security industry. I am pleased the review concludes that regulation of the industry remains relevant and that the Security Industry Authority has performed its role to a satisfactory standard.

The review makes a number of recommendations about the future of the regulatory regime. These require further consideration and analysis, in particular of the balance between improving public protection and the need to support and not overburden the private security industry, including the smaller organisations.

The Home Office will support the Security Industry Authority as it works to continue to improve its performance and risk-based approach and to realise efficiencies, with the aim of achieving regulatory best practice and showing leadership in taking the industry forward.

[HCWS742]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Foreign Affairs Council (Trade): 22 May 2018

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): The EU Foreign Affairs Informal Council (Trade) took place in Brussels on 22 May 2018. I represented the UK at the meeting. A summary of the discussions follows:

Commissioner Malmström provided an update on her latest contact with Wilbur Ross on US tariffs on steel imports. A further temporary exemption was not expected. I supported the outcome of the leaders' discussion the previous week and emphasised active UK engagement with the US in support of the EU position.

Ministers adopted the conclusions on the negotiation and conclusion of EU trade agreements. These follow the CJEU decision on competence boundaries in May 2017. They note the Commission's proposal to pursue EU-only trade agreements, with the option of separate mixed investment protection agreements, and assert the role of the Council in deciding on a case-by-case basis whether to open negotiations in this manner (or to split existing agreements which are yet to be signed). The conclusions make clear that investment protection agreements and association agreements containing

provisions of shared competence will remain mixed agreements and will continue to require ratification at the national level. Among other things, the Council conclusions also state that member state Parliaments, civil society and other interested stakeholders should be kept duly informed from the beginning of the trade agreement negotiation process, and that member states should continue to involve their Parliaments in line with their respective national procedures.

Ministers thanked the Commission for its work on the EU-Japan economic partnership agreement along with the EU-Singapore free trade agreement and the EU-Singapore investment protection agreement (IPA). Commissioner Malmström confirmed the IPA would not be provisionally applied, coming into force only when all member states had ratified.

Ministers adopted mandates for negotiations with Australia and New Zealand, which would be launched during Commissioner Malmström's visit to the region in June.

Commissioner Malmström debriefed Ministers on her recent engagement in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Ministers agreed that the EU should continue engaging with the US and discussed the extent to which significant WTO reforms should be considered. I cautioned against portraying the WTO as being in "crisis" and urged maximising the opportunities including the "joint statement initiative" on e-commerce and encouraged further consideration of WTO reform.

[HCWS741]

TRANSPORT

East Midlands Invitation to Tender

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): I am pleased to inform the House that this morning the Department for Transport published the invitation to tender (ITT) for the east midlands rail franchise and the consultation document for the cross-country franchise signalling the start of a 12-week public consultation.

East midlands rail franchise

The ITT for the east midlands franchise sets out an exciting future that will deliver a brand new fleet of trains, more seats for passengers, reduced peak journey times between Nottingham, Sheffield and London and a dedicated, high-quality, express service between Corby and London. These improvements will mean more comfortable journeys for both long distance and commuting passengers at the busiest times of the day.

We have listened to what improvements passengers want to see and will be requiring the next operator to deliver a wide range of improvements across the network including improved compensation for delays, smart ticketing, high-quality wi-fi connection, more frequent and increased capacity on local services and services that start earlier and finish later.

As the Secretary of State set out in the Government's strategic vision for rail in November 2017, we are now fixing the operational divide between track and train so that both Network Rail and train companies share one imperative: putting the passenger first. Better performance and reliability on the east midlands franchise will be delivered through a new collaborative partnership between the next operator and Network Rail.

Cross-country rail franchise

The current cross-country franchise, operated by Arriva Cross Country is due to end late 2019 (though it can be extended by up to a year). I am therefore pleased to launch today a public consultation which will run for 12 weeks and will help to inform and develop the franchise specification for inclusion in the ITT. We will encourage responses to the consultation through meetings around the network with formal stakeholders; promoting it directly to passengers on cross-country trains; and one or more webinars to reach out to people across this extensive franchise.

[HCWS740]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Universal Credit

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): Today we publish a summary of the universal credit full business case, signed off by HM Treasury, which shows that when fully rolled out, universal credit is forecast to incentivise 200,000 more people to take employment than would have under the previous system and deliver £8 billion of benefits to the UK economy per year.

Universal credit is the biggest change of the welfare system since it was created. It is a modern, flexible, personalised benefit reflecting the rapidly changing world of work.

It has brought together the six main benefits, including tax credits, providing support in and out of work and assisting career progression. The Government have used a "test and learn" approach as it rolls out across the country.

The Government have already made a commitment that anyone who is moved to universal credit without a change of circumstance will not lose out in cash terms. Transitional protection will be provided to eligible claimants to safeguard their existing benefit entitlement until their circumstances change.

Today I am announcing four additions to these rules to ensure that universal credit supports people into work, protects vulnerable claimants and is targeted at those who need it.

First, in order to support the transition for those individuals who live alone with substantial care needs and receive the severe disability premium, we are changing the system so that these claimants will not be moved to universal credit until they qualify for transitional protection. In addition, we will provide both an ongoing payment to claimants who have already lost this premium as a consequence of moving to universal credit and an additional payment to cover the period since they moved.

Secondly, we will increase the incentives for parents to take short-term or temporary work and increase their earnings by ensuring that the award of, or increase in, support for childcare costs will not erode transitional protection.

Thirdly, we propose to re-award claimants' transitional protection that has ceased owing to short-term increases in earnings within an assessment period, if they make a new claim to UC within three months of when they received the additional payment.

Finally, individuals with capital in excess of £16,000 are not eligible for universal credit. However, for tax credit claimants in this situation, we will now disregard any capital in excess of £16,000 for 12 months from the point at which they are moved to universal credit. Normal benefit rules apply after this time in order to strike the right balance between keeping incentives for saving and asking people to support themselves.

The process of migrating claimants on legacy benefits will begin in July 2019 as previously announced. In order to make the changes to the system it will be

necessary to extend the completion of UC to March 2023. As throughout UC roll out, we will keep the exact timetable under review to do what is sensible from a delivery and fiscal perspective.

These changes will form part of the universal credit managed migration and transitional protection regulations which we intend to bring forward in the autumn.

This Government are committed to delivering a welfare system that supports claimants and is fair to taxpayers.

[HCWS745]

Petitions

Thursday 7 June 2018

OBSERVATIONS

TREASURY

Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Kilbirnie

The petition of residents of North Ayrshire & Arran,

Declares that proposed closure of the 3 branches of the publicly-owned Royal Bank of Scotland in the areas of Kilbirnie, Kilwinning & Saltcoats will have a detrimental effect on local communities and the local economy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Royal Bank of Scotland to take into account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of these branches.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Patricia Gibson, *Official Report*, 24 April 2018; Vol. 639, c. 848.]

[P002135]

Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Kilwinning

The petition of residents of North Ayrshire & Arran,

Declares that proposed closure of the 3 branches of the publicly-owned Royal Bank of Scotland in the areas of Kilbirnie, Kilwinning & Saltcoats will have a detrimental effect on local communities and the local economy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Royal Bank of Scotland to take into account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of these branches.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Patricia Gibson, *Official Report*, 1 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 280.]

[P002136]

Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Saltcoats

The petition of residents of North Ayrshire & Arran,

Declares that proposed closure of the 3 branches of the publicly-owned Royal Bank of Scotland in the areas of Kilbirnie, Kilwinning & Saltcoats will have a detrimental effect on local communities and the local economy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Royal Bank of Scotland to take into account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of these branches.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Patricia Gibson, *Official Report*, 8 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 651.]

[P002137]

Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Isle of Barra

The petition of residents of Na h-Eileanan an Iar,

Declares that the proposed closure of the Castlebay branch of the publicly-owned Royal Bank of Scotland on the Isle of Barra will have a detrimental effect on local communities and the local economy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Royal Bank of Scotland to take into account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of these branches.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Angus Brendan MacNeil, *Official Report*, 26 April 2018; Vol. 639, c. 1132.]

[P002140]

Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Airdrie

The petition of residents of Airdrie and its surrounding area,

Declares that the closure of the town's Royal Bank of Scotland branch will have a detrimental effect on both the people of Airdrie and the town centre itself.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons asks the Royal Bank of Scotland board to revisit the decision given that the bank is still 70% publicly owned.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Neil Gray, *Official Report*, 1 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 281.]

[P002142]

Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Beaully

The petition of residents of Ross, Skye & Lochaber,

Declares that the proposed closure of the following branches of the publicly-owned Royal Bank of Scotland in the areas of Kyle of Lochalsh, Beaully & Mallaig, will have a detrimental effect on the local communities and the local economy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Royal Bank of Scotland to take into account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of these branches.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Ian Blackford, *Official Report*, 2 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 425.]

[P002144]

Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Kyle of Lochalsh

The petition of residents of Ross, Skye & Lochaber,

Declares that the proposed closure of the following branches of the publicly-owned Royal Bank of Scotland in the areas of Kyle of Lochalsh, Beaully & Mallaig, will have a detrimental effect on the local communities and the local economy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Royal Bank of Scotland to take into account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of these branches.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Ian Blackford, *Official Report*, 15 May 2018; Vol. 641, c. 246.]

[P002145]

Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Nairn, Grantown and Aviemore

The petition of residents of Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey,

Declares that the proposed closure of the branches of the publicly-owned Royal Bank of Scotland in the areas of Nairn, Grantown, Aviemore and Inverness will have a detrimental effect on local communities and the local economy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Royal Bank of Scotland to take into account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of these branches.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Drew Hendry, *Official Report*, 9 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 860.]

[P002147]

NatWest Ferryhill

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that NatWest Ferryhill is due to close on the 4th June 2018 and this will have a detrimental effect to the local community.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take into account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of NatWest Ferryhill branch.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Phil Wilson, *Official Report*, 15 May 2018; Vol. 641, c. 246.]

[P002149]

Observations from the Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

The Treasury has received nine petitions, objecting to the closure of bank branches, from the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) (P002135, P002136, P002137), the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) (P002140), the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) (P002142), the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) (P002144 and P002145), the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), (P002147), and the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) (P002149).

The Government thank all members of Parliament who have recently submitted petitions on bank branch closures on behalf of their constituents.

The Government are sorry to hear about residents' disappointment at the closure of their local bank branches.

All banking service providers will need to balance customer interests, market competition, and other commercial factors when considering their strategies. Decisions on opening and closing branches and agencies are taken by the management team of each bank on a commercial basis, without intervention from Government.

The Government are clear that their stake in RBS Group is managed at arm's length by UK Financial Investments (UKFI). UKFI are wholly owned by the Government and are responsible for managing the Government's stake in the assets acquired during the financial crisis. UKFI are not responsible, however, for managing the assets themselves. RBS retains its own

board, which is responsible for strategic and management decisions and decisions relating to branch closures are solely within the remit of the bank.

However, the Government do believe that banks should act in the best interests of their customers and are committed to increasing competition to deliver better financial products and services for all bank customers. The Government continue to engage actively with the banking industry and consumer groups on these issues on an ongoing basis.

In May 2017, the major high street banks signed up to the Access to Banking Standard, committing to work with customers and communities to minimise the impact of branch closures and put in place alternative banking services. The Standard commits banks to ensure customers are well informed about branch closures, the bank's reasons for closure and options for continued access to banking services. These options should include specialist assistance for customers who need more help. The operation of the Standard is monitored and enforced by the independent Lending Standards Board, ensuring that banks are held accountable for the way they treat their customers when a branch closes.

In addition, in January 2017, the Post Office announced that it had reached an agreement with the banks that will allow more banking customers to access a wider range of services at the Post Office than ever before. The arrangement allows 99% of personal and 95% of business customers to withdraw money, deposit cash and cheques and check balances at more than 11,500 Post Office branches in the UK. While the range of services offered by the Post Office may be more limited than that offered in a traditional bank branch, the services provided through the Post Office's extensive network ensures that essential banking facilities remain available in as many communities as possible. Since 2010, branch numbers have been at their most stable for decades and 99.7% of the national population now live within three miles of a branch. Furthermore, 92.9% of the national population live within one mile of their nearest post office branch. Almost 98.7% of the rural population live within 3 miles of a post office.

Both initiatives have the Government's full support, and banks are aware that the Government expect their involvement to be genuine and unqualified.

Should constituents wish to switch banks, the Government have made it easier to do so than ever before using the Current Account Switch Service (CASS). The switch service is free to use, comes with a guarantee to protect customers from financial loss if something goes wrong, and redirects any payments mistakenly sent to the old account, providing further assurance for customers. This means that customers are more able than ever to hold their banks to account by voting with their feet, and that banks are incentivised to work hard to retain their existing customers and attract new ones. More information about CASS is available at: www.currentaccountswitch.co.uk

The Government cannot reverse the changes in the market and in customer behaviour; nor can they determine firms' commercial strategies in response to those changes. However, the Government will continue to take positive action to maintain access to vital banking services and ensure banks support communities across the UK when their local branches close.

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 7 June 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
CHURCH COMMISSIONERS	436	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS—	
Affordable Housing.....	442	<i>continued</i>	
Bell Ringing.....	439	Deposit Return Scheme	421
Clewer Initiative.....	436	Flood Defences	424
Columba Declaration.....	438	Fracking.....	429
Gay Conversion Therapy	443	Leaving the EU: Agricultural Sector.....	422
LGBTQ Community.....	438	Leaving the EU: Environmental Standards.....	427
Middle East	436	Leaving the EU: Fishing Industry	430
Nigeria: Violence against Christians	440	Producer Responsibility Systems.....	426
Overseas Orphanages.....	441	Topical Questions	432
Religious Literacy Training.....	441	Waste Crime.....	431
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	421	HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION	442
Animal Cruelty	428	Division Lobbies.....	442

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 7 June 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
CABINET OFFICE	15WS	HOME DEPARTMENT	16WS
Northern Ireland.....	15WS	Security Industry Authority	16WS
DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	15WS	INTERNATIONAL TRADE	16WS
Transport, Telecoms and Energy Council	15WS	Foreign Affairs Council (Trade): 22 May 2018	16WS
EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION	15WS	TRANSPORT	17WS
Leaving the EU	15WS	East Midlands Invitation to Tender	17WS
		WORK AND PENSIONS	18WS
		Universal Credit.....	18WS

PETITIONS

Thursday 7 June 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
TREASURY	1P	TREASURY—continued	
NatWest Ferryhill.....	3P	Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Kyle of Lochlash	2P
Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Airdrie.....	2P	Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Nairn, Grantown and Aviemore.....	3P
Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Beauly	2P	Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Saltcoats.....	1P
Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Isle of Barra	1P		
Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Kilbirnie.....	1P		
Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Kilwinning.....	1P		

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Thursday 14 June 2018**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Thursday 7 June 2018

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 421] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Church Commissioners
House of Commons Commission

Heathrow [Col. 445]

Answer to urgent question—(Jesse Norman)

Supreme Court Ruling: Abortion in Northern Ireland [Col. 453]

Answer to urgent question—(Karen Bradley)

Business of the House [Col. 462]

Statement—(Andrea Leadsom)

RBS Branch Closures [Col. 479]

Select Committee Statement—(Pete Wishart)

Greening Finance [Col. 487]

Select Committee Statement—(Mary Creagh)

Violent Crime (Sentences) [Col. 491]

Bill presented, and read the First time

Privilege [Col. 492]

Motion—(Chris Bryant)—agreed to

Backbench Business

Tuberculosis [Col. 502]

Motion—(Nick Herbert)—agreed to

Turkey [Col. 529]

Motion—(Joan Ryan)—agreed to

Secondary Ticketing [Col. 558]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Airports National Policy Statement [Col. 197WH]

General Debate

Written Statements [Col. 15WS]

Petitions [Col. 1P]

Observations

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
