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12 September 2018**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 12 September 2018

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

Intimidation of People in Public Life

2. **Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): What assessment he has made of trends in the level of intimidation experienced by people in public life. [906829]

The Minister without Portfolio (Brandon Lewis): Intimidation can do real damage to our democracy and has no part to play in healthy debate. The Minister with responsibility for the constitution, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), has launched a consultation on a new electoral offence of intimidating candidates and campaigners. I encourage anyone who has experienced this sort of unacceptable intimidation to respond and to take part in that consultation.

Alex Burghart: I thank the Minister for his reply. Does he agree that those who seek to interfere with the course of an election through criminal intimidation should face electoral sanction?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a good point. He is absolutely right. An electoral offence has a higher tariff. It is right that we are clear that our democracy is precious and important. We must do everything we can to protect robust debate with respect.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that more work needs to be done in tackling social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter? Does he think that the Government should not just introduce voluntary charters to govern social media platforms but look at legislation, because too many Members of this House, the devolved institutions and councillors, and indeed candidates and activists, are facing unparalleled levels of abuse through social media platforms? That cannot be allowed to continue.

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Gentleman makes the very good point that this should not be allowed to continue. We must look at all options on how we can ensure that. We have said we want to work with those companies

and platforms to ensure they see proper debate but with respect. I encourage the hon. Gentleman's party to adopt, as the Conservative party has, a respect pledge to behave properly in the social media world.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Earlier this year, all the Conservative councillors on Desborough Town Council resigned in protest at the abuse, harassment and intimidation suffered by the Conservative female chair of the council. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that, when he reviews standards of conduct in public life, that applies not just to elections but to serving councillors during their term of office?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend highlights a worrying problem that we are seeing across public life: people are seeing this kind of abuse. It was raised at last week's Prime Minister's questions. We all have a duty to stand up against this. The criminal bar on this is in place all year around. We are looking at elections as a separate issue in the consultation, but he is right: we all have a duty to call this out to ensure that people can have proper debate and fulfil their public duty with confidence that it will be respected.

Technological Innovation

3. **Trudy Harrison** (Copeland) (Con): What steps he is taking to encourage technological innovation in tackling social challenges and delivering public services. [906830]

4. **Sir David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): What steps he is taking to encourage technological innovation in tackling social challenges and delivering public services. [906831]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden): I am determined that the public sector embraces the huge opportunities for better public services at lower cost provided by technology. That is why last week I announced five new public sector challenges from the GovTech innovation fund and why I am also leading the development of a public services innovation strategy to be published next spring.

Trudy Harrison: I thank the Minister for that answer. Over the summer I wrote to all my 37 care homes and GP practices and visited most of them. They are facing unprecedented challenges with recruitment and retention. How will technology help in that regard?

Oliver Dowden: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I know that she is committed to this issue. We, too, are committed to using emerging technologies to improve the quality of care for patients and to empower staff. Under one of the GovTech challenges last week, we are working with a healthcare trust to ensure prescriptions are not interrupted when people move between care providers and, as Members will have seen, my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary is also very much committed to this agenda.

Sir David Evennett: I welcome what my hon. Friend is doing in this area, but what steps are the Government taking to harness the power of technology to help to tackle the problem of loneliness, which the Jo Cox

Commission on Loneliness, the Prime Minister and Members across this House have done so much to highlight?

Oliver Dowden: My right hon. Friend raises an important point. Under the GovTech innovation fund, in collaboration with Monmouthshire County Council, we are working to investigate a solution to identify vehicles with spare capacity to tackle loneliness and rural isolation. That is another example of the great potential of technology to help to alleviate loneliness across society and to support people in having meaningful social relationships.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): At the weekend, I visited the Clipper, a converted pub on Union Street in Plymouth that is using crowdfunding technology in conjunction with the local authority, Plymouth City Council, to raise money for a refit. What support is the Minister giving to local authorities and communities to use new technologies to raise funds, especially in a time of austerity?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and I would be happy to discuss the example that he has raised. Local authorities have frequently bid for these GovTech funds. As I said, Monmouthshire County Council has been successful, as have local authorities in Northern Ireland, and I encourage others to make a bid when the next round opens shortly.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): What progress is being made to ensure that my constituents can claim universal credit online through the medium of Welsh?

Oliver Dowden: The Government Digital Service is committed to ensuring full accessibility to all public services, including in our home nation languages, and it will certainly look into that point.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): My hon. Friend will be aware that, across the public service, appointments are being missed with experts including general practitioners, consultants, nurses and employment advisers. Is there a role for technology in prompting members of the public to attend these expensive and important appointments?

Oliver Dowden: My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely correct, and this is a perfect example of how we can use technology. Indeed, in my experience many GP surgeries already use methods such as text messages to prompt people not to miss their appointments. He will have seen from recent announcements that the Health Secretary is genuinely committed, as are the Government, to investing large sums in the greater use of technology in healthcare.

Jo Platt (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): The Government's record on technical and digital innovation is appalling. Their flagship Verify system is so flawed that the NHS and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs have both rejected it. Having spent six years and £130 million of public money developing the system, the Government cannot even convince their own Departments to register. Judging by this dismal record, does the Minister agree that the only technological innovation this Government can stimulate will be overdue, over budget and under-performing?

Oliver Dowden: Specifically on Verify, I would urge the hon. Lady not to read everything that is being speculated on in the newspapers. The Government are committed to ensuring secure online digital identities, and Verify has already delivered for 2.7 million people. More broadly, let us take the example of gov.uk, which has had 5.1 billion sessions and 15.2 billion page views. That did not happen when the Labour party was in power. Let us also take the example of Notify, which is used by hundreds of organisations. The Government Digital Service is a genuine innovation of this Government, and it is delivering seamless services across Government Departments.

Leaving the EU: Contingency Plans for No Deal

5. **Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): What contingency plans his Department is making for no deal being reached on the UK leaving the EU. [906832]

8. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What contingency plans his Department is making for no deal being reached on the UK leaving the EU. [906836]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): The Cabinet Office has developed contingency plans for exit-related policy areas that are within our remit, such as public procurement, and we also work with other Government Departments on their plans. These preparations are a sensible precaution in case of the unlikely event that the UK should leave the European Union with no deal.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for that answer. If our country is not ready for a no-deal scenario, we are simply not in a position to credibly negotiate with the EU, so will he ensure that colleagues across Government work as hard as they can to maximise the completeness and credibility of their plans?

Mr Lidington: Yes. A no-deal scenario is not what we expect, and it would certainly be an unwelcome outcome. It is not what we want, but it is right that we should take these sensible precautions. All Ministers around the Cabinet table and their teams are working hard to ensure that those plans are developed and ready.

Jeremy Lefroy: As the chief executive of Jaguar Land Rover has said, a deal is vital for west midlands, and indeed UK, manufacturing. What plans do the Government have to ensure that the funding currently provided by the European Investment Bank to UK manufacturing businesses and infrastructure projects will continue after we leave the EU?

Mr Lidington: We are looking at various proposals, including the creation of a UK prosperity fund, to replace those funds that are currently disbursed via the European Union. My hon. Friend reminds us of the importance, in our negotiations, of seeking to achieve frictionless trade so that the just-in-time delivery systems that cross national frontiers can be sustained to the benefit of business here and in the EU.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the contingency planning that the right hon. Gentleman's Department is doing include warning Departments what they would need to do if Parliament were to vote for a final say on the deal?

Mr Lidington: I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that, in voting for the referendum Bill and supporting the article 50 process, the great majority of Members of this House accepted that the decision of the British people in 2016 should be final. However we campaigned, I think that that remains the case.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the Minister agree that the difficulties of contingency planning should not be added to by this obsession with a mythical hard border, which no one wants, cannot be implemented and could be circumvented with ease by everybody in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic?

Mr Lidington: As the Prime Minister has repeatedly said, ensuring that there is no hard border on the island of Ireland is a fundamental principle of this Government's negotiating strategy, along with ensuring that there is no customs barrier between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what work has been undertaken to ensure that UK-wide frameworks are ready in the event of no deal?

Mr Lidington: We are continuing intense discussions at official level with the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the Northern Ireland civil service. It is in the interests of every part of the United Kingdom that those frameworks are ready, so that the benefits of the UK single market can continue to be felt by consumers and businesses in Scotland and everywhere else in our country.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Following on from that question, what are the implications for the proposed common frameworks of not having a deal on exiting the European Union? No matter how complicated and chaotic the discussions become, will the Minister give an assurance that they will not be used as an excuse to force through arrangements without the consent of the devolved Administrations?

Mr Lidington: On the hon. Gentleman's second point, it remains our intention to do everything that we can to work with the agreement of the devolved Administrations and not to have to use the powers in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 unless necessary. However, whether there is a deal or no deal, there will still be a need for UK-wide frameworks to ensure that the UK single market is preserved when powers have returned to this country from Brussels.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): With just weeks to go until the negotiating deadline, it is clear that the Government are putting more and more focus and effort into planning for a no-deal scenario. Will the Minister therefore tell the House when the Government plan to put the interests of the country ahead of the interests of the Brexit extremists in the European Research Group?

Mr Lidington: Anyone who has worked with this Prime Minister knows that what motivates her every single working day is the interests of the people of every part of the United Kingdom. In publishing the technical notices and the guidance to business on a no-deal

scenario, we are doing exactly what the European Commission and other EU Governments have done. It is the responsible course of action to take.

Voter ID Pilots

6. Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): Whether he has made an assessment of the operation of recent voter ID pilots; and if he will make a statement. [906834]

10. Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Whether he has made an assessment of the operation of recent voter ID pilots; and if he will make a statement. [906838]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): The Cabinet Office and the independent Electoral Commission published their respective findings in July that the pilots worked well. The overwhelming majority of people were able to cast their vote without a problem, and there was no notable adverse effect on turnout. The success of the pilots proves that the measures are reasonable and proportionate.

Sir Henry Bellingham: Can the Minister confirm that concerns about ethnic minority communities being adversely affected did not come to pass during the pilots? Is that not yet another reason why voter ID should be rolled out across the whole country as soon as possible?

Chloe Smith: My hon. Friend is correct. Our surveying alongside the pilots found no indication that the ID requirements changed the reasons for not voting for any specific demographic group across the participating authorities. That is important evidence.

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. Friend knows well that elections are expensive to conduct. Sevenoaks District Council and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council do excellent jobs of conducting elections not just for themselves, but for this place and for the county council. Is she planning to consider ways of speeding up payments to those borough and district councils?

Chloe Smith: Yes, I am working with the Association of Electoral Administrators to see how the process can be improved. I take this opportunity to thank all the electoral staff in my hon. Friend's council and elsewhere, who work so hard. The fact is that they have six months in which to submit an account. These things can sometimes be left to the last minute, which creates a bulge in the process, but we want to improve that.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In terms of this so-called success, the Electoral Reform Society's report says:

"The government must have a strange definition of success."

It confirms that this is a waste of money and that it disenfranchises voters. When will the Government tackle the real electoral fraud issue, which is the spending breaches by the Labour, Lib Dem and Tory parties?

Chloe Smith: The Electoral Reform Society and people who quote from it have a strange definition of mathematics. The number that they put out on polling day was wildly inaccurate and scaremongering about this policy and they have some explaining to do.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Out of 45 million votes cast last year, there has been only one conviction for voter fraud, yet the Government seem determined to pursue voter ID, which stopped hundreds of people voting last year. When faced with real threats to our democracy, in the form of violations of campaign rules and finance laws, the misuse of voters' personal data, and foreign interference in our elections and referendums, the Government have done almost nothing. Will the Minister tell us when the Government will get their priorities right and stop penalising honest voters while turning a blind eye to electoral abuses by the powerful?

Chloe Smith: There is an incredibly important principle at stake here, which seems to be missing from the Labour party. Either you want to stamp out electoral fraud or you do not. This policy is about that. Regardless of the number and the levels of the crime, we should tackle it and ensure it does not rob people of their votes. Furthermore, the hon. Gentleman entirely forgets what his own party did in government by making this policy a fact in Northern Ireland.

Steel Procurement

7. **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Government's steel procurement policies. [906835]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden): The Government are clear that we will do all we can to support our steel industry. The publication of indicative pipelines of Government steel requirements, alongside revised procurement guidance, ensures that United Kingdom steel producers have the best possible chance of competing for major public sector contracts. We will be reporting on our performance later this year.

Nic Dakin: The UK steel industry continues to face challenges. The Government promised in their 2016 guidance on steel procurement that they would publish individual Departments' performance on steel procurement. When will they publish that information and be transparent about this?

Oliver Dowden: I am happy to update the hon. Gentleman on that point. I have consulted the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Richard Harrington). He has written to Departments over the summer reminding them of that duty. We are reiterating our commitment to produce that information before the end of the year.

Hereditary Peer By-elections

9. **David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the merits of the by-election system used to elect hereditary peers in the House of Lords. [906837]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): The Government are clear that comprehensive reform of the House of Lords that requires legislation is not a priority for this Government. We would welcome working with peers on measures that could command consensus, so we welcome the work of the Lord Speaker's Committee, chaired by Lord Burns.

David Hanson: It should be a priority. Forty-three hereditary peers just elected another hereditary peer to a seat in Parliament with 43 votes. That is nonsense on sticks. It should be scrapped and the Government should bring forward proposals.

Chloe Smith: I am not sure there was a question there that I can answer. I say with great respect to the right hon. Gentleman that he assiduously raises this issue at oral questions time after time. I understand his arguments, but the Government's position is as I put it.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is no place for hereditary legislatures and that they should not be supported by a party that claims it wants to build a meritocratic Britain?

Chloe Smith: I respect my hon. Friend's argument just as much as I respect that of the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), but the answer remains the same: there is an enormous amount of work in front of both Houses of Parliament at this time and this is not a priority.

Topical Questions

T1. [906843] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): Over the recess, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), who is Minister for the constitution, announced that the Government have been able to save the taxpayer more than £300 million since 2016 through the national fraud initiative—a record amount. This clampdown on fraud and error in the public sector has helped us to divert more money to frontline public services.

Patrick Grady: Will the Minister join me in welcoming the Scottish Government's proposed electoral franchise Bill, which will protect the voting rights of EU citizens and refugees for Holyrood and local government? Does he agree that we should protect people's rights and extend the Westminster franchise for EU citizens and refugees?

Mr Lidington: The Government have put forward a package of measures that give enhanced rights to EU citizens lawfully resident in the United Kingdom. We believe that that is a fair and generous offer, and it is currently the subject of negotiations.

T2. [906845] **Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): When considering the relocation of civil service jobs outside London, will the Minister please remember that the south-west is a great place to live, work and do business, and that the best place is North Devon?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden): My hon. Friend, as ever, makes a strong case for his region. The Places for Growth programme demonstrates our commitment to rebalancing the economy by moving Government jobs away from London and the south-east, and the One Public Estate programme is

supporting this collaboration. I am pleased to say specifically that the Devon and Torbay partnership expects to deliver 288 jobs and land for 201 homes by 2020.

T3. [906846] **Anna McMorris** (Cardiff North) (Lab): We know that the Cabinet Office is preparing for the very real threat of no deal, with secret Cobra meetings and civil contingency planning. Business leaders are warning of the disaster of a no deal or a bad deal. Is it not about time that we put this decision—the biggest facing our generation—back to the people for a people's vote?

Mr Lidington: There was a people's vote in 2016 that, at the time, both the hon. Lady's party and mine said would be the decisive moment. It is perfectly right that the civil contingencies secretariat in the Cabinet Office takes an active part in contingency planning for all eventualities.

T4. [906847] **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): The Government have identified £1 billion that could be saved through procurement by hospitals. What work is the Cabinet Office doing to support that £1 billion saving so that we can release £200 million of it to scrap hospital car parking charges?

Oliver Dowden: I know my hon. Friend's long-standing commitment to this cause. We are committed to delivering value for money for the taxpayer by extending best procurement practice into the wider public sector. The Crown Commercial Service, which manages procurement of common goods and services for both central Government and the wider public sector, including the NHS, has already delivered more than £600 million of savings this year.

T5. [906848] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Minister chairs the cross-departmental homelessness reduction taskforce. Rough sleeping is a huge concern to my constituents in Sheffield, but the voluntary and statutory sector tells me that it is held back from tackling it by disproportionate cuts to local government. The recent Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government strategy provided no new money, so will his taskforce look at the issues so that we can actually do something?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. The homelessness and rough sleeping implementation taskforce, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and on which I serve, supports the Government's cross-Government strategy, which was announced earlier this summer. The taskforce is also monitoring the implementation of the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the proposals he raises directly.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), I am pleased to advise the House that we are joined today by the former Speaker of the Canadian Parliament, the longest serving Speaker in his country's history, Peter Milliken. Welcome, Peter, to the House of Commons.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): Recent figures show that almost £200 million of taxpayers' money was spent on trade union activists last year. Would not Transport for London, for example, be better advised to spend the £5 million that it spent on trade union activities on transport for London?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Although trade unions of course play an important role in the modern workplace, facility time in the public sector must represent value for money, which is why we have taken a transparent approach to it. We estimate that more than £120 million is being spent on it. Departments and Government agencies must seek to reduce that spending, as I am pleased to say the Cabinet Office has done; we are spending less than 0.01% of our budget on it.

T6. [906849] **Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): Will the Minister tell the House what steps he has taken to tackle the gender pay gap in the civil service?

Mr Lidington: The Government have required all public bodies and large private sector employers to make public their gender pay gap, so that action can then be taken to ensure that that gap is reduced and closed. We are determined that the public sector will set an example.

T7. [906850] **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, thanks to his efforts and those of the Department of Health and Social Care and of Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust after the collapse of Carillion, work on the Midland Metropolitan Hospital will resume later this year, and the west midlands will get another world-class hospital?

Mr Lidington: I am pleased to confirm that the Government and the local trust have reached agreement that the Midland Metropolitan Hospital will be completed by 2022. It will be equipped with state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment, 15 operating theatres and at least 669 new beds. That is a further demonstration of the Government's commitment to investment in our national health service.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Since 2010, the central civil service has been cut by 20%, which has severely reduced overall effectiveness and specialist knowledge. In the light of the demands placed on Departments by Brexit, do the Government agree that they are paying the price for that short-sightedness?

Oliver Dowden: The Government remain strongly committed to having an effective civil service. Thanks to funds provided by the Government, we now employ 7,000 more civil servants to deal with Brexit. With the pay settlements that we are reaching on a Department-by-Department basis, we are ensuring that civil servants are properly rewarded.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Ministers were right to listen and act on public sector steel procurement. How are the new procurement regulations bedding down, what is their effect and what benefit are they bringing to the UK steel industry?

Oliver Dowden: We are clear that we will do everything that we can to support our precious steel industry. All central Government Departments are now required to evaluate the social and economic benefits of procurement decisions, alongside price. That has meant that the UK's steel producers are now in the best possible position to compete for Government work, and UK steel suppliers are able to compete effectively with international suppliers.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [906851] **David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 12 September.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I am sure that Members across the House will wish to join me in congratulating Alastair Cook on his fantastic service to English cricket. As England's highest-ever-scoring batsman, his incredible career had many highlights, including the magnificent 147 in his last innings, against India. We wish him the very best for his future.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

David Duguid: I know that the Prime Minister appreciates the significance of fishing communities around the UK, not least my own constituency of Banff and Buchan. What steps will my right hon. Friend take to support our fishing communities during the implementation period? Will she look into ways to support the expansion of the catching fleet, infrastructure, processing capacity and other businesses that are reliant on the sector?

The Prime Minister: I fully recognise the importance of the fishing industry to my hon. Friend's constituency and to other constituencies represented in this House. I reassure him that we want to secure a sustainable and profitable fishing industry that will regenerate coastal communities and support future generations of UK fishermen. Leaving the EU means taking back control of our waters, setting our own fisheries rules and exclusively determining who fishes what in our seas. It is a priority of the Government to make sure that we have an innovative, productive and competitive food supply chain. Work is under way to consider the long-term future of all funding programmes that are currently managed by the EU.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I, too, join the Prime Minister in congratulating Alastair Cook on a fantastic achievement and both teams on what has been an absolutely brilliant series, which I really enjoyed.

The National Farmers Union, the Federation of Small Businesses, the National Audit Office, the National Housing Federation, Gingerbread and the Royal Society of Arts—does the Prime Minister know what these organisations have in common?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that what those organisations all have in common is that, across a variety of areas of activity, they give excellent service, they promote the interests of those whom they represent, and they are bodies with which this Government interact and to which this Government listen.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am truly grateful to the Prime Minister for that answer, the first part of which I wholly agree with. What they also have—[*Interruption.*] It's all right. What they also have in common is that they are telling this Government that their flagship benefits policy, universal credit, is flawed and failing hundreds of thousands of people both in work and out of work. In 2010, the Government declared that universal credit would lift 350,000 children out of poverty. Does the Prime Minister stand by that figure?

The Prime Minister: We introduced universal credit because we needed a system of welfare in this country that encouraged rather than discouraged people into work, that made sure that work always pays and that was a simpler system than the legacy system that we were left by the Labour party—remember the legacy system of the Labour party. It meant that we had individuals being paid £100,000 a year on benefits—all paid for by hard-working taxpayers earning a fraction of that sum.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Child Poverty Action Group says that, far from taking children out of poverty, universal credit will now increase the number of children in poverty. Since 2010, half a million more children have gone into poverty relative to that time. The Government know that this policy is flawed and failing. Their own survey on universal credit found that many were in debt, a third were in arrears with their rent and half had fallen behind with their bills. Does the Prime Minister dispute her own Government's survey, or dispute the experience of the claimants?

The Prime Minister: Let us look at the experience of some of the claimants. Roberta said, "My work coach helped turn my life around. He tailored his support to my situation and thanks to him I have found my dream job." Ryan said, "I am happy with the new universal credit. My work coach has been great—I didn't expect to have a job so soon." Nayim said, "Universal credit gave me the flexibility to take on additional hours without the stress of thinking that this might stop my benefits straight away." We have gone from a situation under the Labour party where 1.4 million people spent most of a decade trapped on benefits. We are helping to get people into work, which is why, earlier this week, we saw unemployment yet again at a record low.

Jeremy Corbyn: We are all constituency MPs, and I think that most of us are well aware of the pain that universal credit is causing when people come into our advice bureaux. Some 60% of families facing cuts owing to the two-child policy are in work. Universal credit is not making work pay; it is taking money away from families and putting more children into poverty. The National Audit Office report found that universal credit is creating hardship, forcing people to use food banks

and could end up costing the system even more. Does the Prime Minister dispute the National Audit Office findings?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talked about constituency cases. I remember—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. We are at a very early stage of the proceedings. We have got a long way to go, but questions must be heard and the answers must be heard, and as usual I want to get through the Order Paper.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman started his question by talking about constituency cases. I remember the single mother who came to see me as her Member of Parliament when Labour was in government who told me that she wanted to get into the workplace and provide a good example to her child, but the jobcentre had told her that she would be better off on benefits. That is the legacy of the Labour party.

Jeremy Corbyn: My question was about the National Audit Office. The Trussell Trust backs the NAO. It says that food bank usage in areas where universal credit has been rolled out is four times higher than in areas where it has not been introduced. But, without resolving any of those failings in the next year, the Government propose to inflict this on another 2 million people. As part of that transfer, hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities and on employment and support allowance, jobseeker's allowance and tax credits will receive a letter telling them that their support will be stopped. They will have to make an application for universal credit. Does the Prime Minister think it is the responsibility of the Government who are changing the system to ensure that people retain the support that they need, or is it down to the individual, many of whom are very vulnerable people who need help and support?

The Prime Minister: What the Government are doing is delivering a system that does give support to vulnerable people, but encourages people to get into the workplace, because we know that work is the best route out of poverty. However, if the right hon. Gentleman believes that universal credit needed some change, why, when we made changes such as reducing the waiting days for payment and bringing in a housing benefit overlap to help people, did Labour vote against those changes?

Jeremy Corbyn: It is Labour that has been speaking up for the poorest in this country. It is Labour that has been challenging this Government. It is Labour that wants a decency within our society that this Government are incapable of delivering. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Spencer, I always thought you were a good natured, laid-back farmer. You seem to be a very over-excitable denizen of the House today. Calm yourself, man.

Jeremy Corbyn: The mental health charity Mind says that there is a real possibility

“that many people with mental health problems could see their benefits stopped entirely”.

It is outrageous that vulnerable people risk losing out because of these botched changes.

The Government's Brexit negotiations are an abject failure. I can see that by the sullen faces behind the Prime Minister—and that is not just the European Research Group; it is the whole lot of them. But everywhere you look, Mr Speaker, this Government are failing—1 million families using food banks; 1 million workers on zero-hours contracts; 4 million children in poverty; wages lower today than 10 years ago; and on top of that there is the flawed and failing universal credit. Disabled people at risk of losing their homes and vital support; children forced to use food banks—and the Prime Minister wants to put 2 million more people on to this. The Prime Minister is not challenging the burning injustices in our society. She is pouring petrol on the crisis. When will she stop inflicting misery on the people of this country?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talks about challenging the burning injustices. That is about setting up the race disparity audit, which says what public services do and how people from different communities in our country are treated by them. It means saying that nobody in this country should be stopped and searched on our streets because of the colour of their skin—that was me as Home Secretary, never the Labour party. We are seeing 3.3 million more people in jobs as a result of our balanced approach to the economy.

And what have we seen from Labour over the past few days? Iranian state TV broadcasting no-confidence votes against Labour Members of Parliament; police investigating anonymous and threatening letters about the deselection of Labour MPs sent to Labour offices; and, most shamefully of all, the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) saying that the Labour party is now an institutionally racist party. That is what the Leader of the Opposition has done to Labour—just think what he would do to this country.

Hon. Members: More!

Mr Speaker: Order.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con) *rose—*
[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. No gesticulation is required, Mr Brake—calm yourself. You are a former Deputy Leader of the House—behave in a statesmanlike manner. *[Interruption.]* Order. Let us hear the questions and the answers.

Q3. [906853] **Nigel Huddleston:** We quite rightly spend quite a lot of time in this place talking about crime, criminals and prisons, but perhaps we do not spend enough time talking about the victims of crime. So I warmly welcome the Government's announcement this week of a victims strategy. Can the Prime Minister assure me that this will not be some kind of dry document but a genuine effort to boost support for the victims?

The Prime Minister: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. We know that nothing can take away the trauma and distress of being a victim of crime, but we need to ensure that people get the support they need as

they rebuild their lives. This is absolutely vital. It is our duty to keep people safe but it is also our duty to ensure that victims are properly protected and listened to. That is why we are taking steps to enshrine their entitlements in law—to strengthen the victims code. This first ever cross-Government victims strategy will ensure that victims of crime receive the care and support they deserve at every stage of their interaction with the justice system. I commend my right hon. Friend the Justice Secretary, and also the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), for the work they have put into the victims strategy.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): A decade on from the financial crisis, the poorest in our society are still paying a price. The bankers were bailed out, but ordinary people paid the bill. Institute for Fiscal Studies analysis shows that real wages are, on average, £800 lower. A decade on and people are poorer: a damning indictment of the UK Government's leadership. Tell us, Prime Minister: why have you abandoned millions of families—those just about managing?

The Prime Minister: What we have done is created an economic environment where 3.3 million people are in work. We now see the number of children in workless households at the lowest level ever. We now also see, through what we have done, an increase in the national living wage. We have ensured that we have taken 4 million people out of paying income tax altogether. Over 30 million people have received a tax cut. That is what this Government have been able to do through a balanced approach to the economy, keeping taxes low, putting money into public services, and reducing our debt.

Ian Blackford: That, I am afraid, simply ignores the reality that people are poorer. It has been the worst decade for wage growth in over 200 years. Households are struggling, and it is reported that a no-deal Brexit will increase the annual cost of living for low-income households by hundreds of pounds. Yet this Prime Minister still wants to walk off the Brexit cliff edge. The Prime Minister is unfit to govern. She is incapable of leadership. We know it, her Back Benchers know it, and the country knows it. Ten years after the economic crash, the poorest are still bearing the brunt. It is as simple as this: the Prime Minister should end her austerity programme or admit that her party is unfit for government.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman mentions Brexit. Of course, we are working to get a good Brexit deal for the whole United Kingdom, including Scotland. I suggest that he might listen to the views of the Scottish National Farmers Union, which said this week that the plan the Government have put forward is one that

“certainly the agriculture and food and drinks sectors can work with”,

and that politicians from

“all sorts of parliaments and assemblies”

should get behind it.

Q5. [906855] **Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): My constituency is a mere 69 miles from London, as I am sure my right hon. Friend remembers from her visit a few years ago. You are lucky to cover that tiny journey in an hour and 40 minutes, and that is if you avoid the

Network Rail works. Our sunshine coast has a lot to offer economically, a lot of which remains untapped. We could attract new homeowners, doctors and businesses to the area. Can my right hon. Friend tell me what this Government are doing to improve our rail services and speed up the journey to Clacton?

The Prime Minister: I do indeed remember the visit that I made to Clacton in 2014, where I was very pleased to meet Caroline Shearer and hear about the anti-knife crime work she had done and the charity she had set up in memory of her murdered son, Jay Whiston.

On the issue of rail, Greater Anglia will indeed be introducing a whole new fleet of trains, which will be delivered from the middle of next year. They will be state of the art, with much improved acceleration, my hon. Friend will be pleased to hear. Greater Anglia needs to work with Network Rail to ensure that it can deliver those improved journey times. There are infrastructure constraints on the line, but we will engage with Network Rail to understand what plans it has to renew the infrastructure, so that we can see the improvement on the Clacton branch that my hon. Friend wants to see.

Q2. [906852] **Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): The Prime Minister just said that work is the best route out of poverty. Without repeating the response that she gave to the leader of the SNP, can she explain why, after eight years of a Conservative Government, the Living Wage Foundation reports that 40% of people in Grimsby do not earn enough to live on?

The Prime Minister: The figures show that the proportion of the workforce on low pay is actually at its lowest level. That is a result of the changes we have made in relation to the economy and the balanced approach we have taken. If the hon. Lady if worried about people living in Grimsby, the answer is not a Labour Government, with £500 billion of extra borrowing, fewer jobs, higher taxes and people suffering the cost.

Q6. [906856] **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Given what we know about the Russian state's involvement in the Salisbury poisoning, does the Prime Minister think it appropriate when parliamentarians, both current and former, appear on Russian state television?

The Prime Minister: I am sure we all have doubts about the objectivity of the reporting on Russia Today, which remains a tool of propaganda for the Russian state. Decisions about appearing on Russia Today are a matter of judgment for each individual, but they should be clear that they risk being used as propaganda tools by the Russian state. I know that that view is shared by other Members of this House, including the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), who has made clear that he does not think people should appear on that station. The same also applies to Press TV, which has had its licence to broadcast revoked in the UK by Ofcom.

Q4. [906854] **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Prime Minister refused to answer my written question about AggregateIQ visiting Downing Street, so I will ask her here. Why did Jeff Silvester and Zack Massingham of AggregateIQ visit No. 10 last

autumn? Who did they meet? Who invited them? What was the purpose of the meeting and, most importantly, why was the meeting not recorded in the transparency data?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady's letter has not been drawn to my attention. I do not have—*[Interruption.]* Following her question, I will ensure that she receives a reply in writing.

Q7. [906857] Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): When it comes to Brexit, the joint statement of 8 December last year said that

“nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”.

Does the Prime Minister agree that this means that the payment of the £39 billion exit payment and the Northern Irish backstop are dependent on agreeing satisfactory final-state trade arrangements? Does she also agree that payment of that money should be locked into the legally binding withdrawal agreement, which also requires those final-state trade agreements to be fully agreed and implemented by 31 December 2020 in a form acceptable to this House?

The Prime Minister: We are very clear that we need to have a link between the future relationship and the withdrawal agreement, but we are a country that honours our obligations. We believe in the rule of law, and therefore we believe in abiding by our legal obligations. However, my hon. Friend is right that the specific offer was made in the spirit of our desire to reach a deal with the European Union and on the basis, as the EU itself has said, that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. Without a deal, the position changes.

Q9. [906859] Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Prime Minister was right yesterday to be promoting electric vehicles, but she also needs to focus on electricity production. Investment in renewable energy has halved as a result of the Government's policies. Instead of encouraging carbon-emitting technologies such as fracking, which is deeply unpopular in Sheffield and across the country, will she recognise that our future depends on serious investment in wind, solar, tidal and other renewables?

The Prime Minister: I believe that in the provision of energy across the United Kingdom we need to have a diverse range of supplies. That is why, yes, we do support, we have supported and we will continue to support renewable energy, but it is also why we are ensuring, for example, that we have a supply of energy in the future from nuclear and that we look across other forms of energy as well—for example, ensuring that we see an increase in the number of interconnectors with Europe. A diverse supply is what we need in our energy sector.

Q8. [906858] Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): Jean-Claude Juncker this morning accepted that Britain will always be a close trade and security partner for the EU. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this means that giving Britain a good deal is in the interests of both sides?

The Prime Minister: I have always said to this House that I believe a deal that is right for the UK will be a deal that is right for the European Union. I note not

only that President Juncker said what my hon. Friend has commented on, but that he went on to say that

“after 29 March 2019, the United Kingdom will never be an ordinary third country for us...I welcome Prime Minister May's proposal to develop an ambitious new partnership for the future, after Brexit. We agree with the statement made in Chequers that the starting point for such a partnership should be a free trade area between the United Kingdom and the European Union.”

Let me be very clear: when we leave the European Union, we will be an independent sovereign state—we will have control of our money, our borders and our laws—but I want to say to our closest allies in Europe, “You will also never be an ordinary third party for us.”

Q10. [906860] Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): There is huge concern over proposals to take decisions on fracking away from local councils. This concern is seemingly shared by a prominent Conservative MP, who has a number of statements on her website, including that

“local planning decisions should be returned to locally elected councillors”,

and

“local councils need the power to stop unsuitable developments”.

The Prime Minister will I hope recognise these comments. She made them. Does she still agree with them?

The Prime Minister: It has always been the case, across the planning structure that we have here in the United Kingdom, that there are decisions taken at local level, but there are also decisions—sometimes those local decisions are referred—at a national level.

Strength of the Economy: West Midlands

Q12. [906862] Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the strength of the economy in the west midlands; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I was indeed very pleased to be in the west midlands yesterday at the world's first zero-emission vehicle summit, where I made clear my determination to put our manufacturers in the west midlands and across the UK at the forefront of the design and manufacture of zero-emission vehicles. The midlands has a very strong automotive industry. The growth of high-tech manufacturing across the region continues to drive investment: it is creating high-skilled jobs; it is boosting economic growth. The latest employment statistics, released yesterday, show there are now over 320,000 more people in work in the west midlands than in 2010.

Michael Fabricant: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Also based in the west midlands is silicon canal. Silicon canal is like silicon valley, but without the sunshine. It employs some 40,000 people working in computer science and there are some 6,000 different companies—the second largest cluster of its kind in the whole of Europe. With the announcement last week of 5G being based in the west midlands as a test bed, what more will the Prime Minister do to promote high-tech in the west midlands?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the silicon canal. I am sure that, like me, he was delighted that the west midlands bid, which was pulled together by the Conservative metro Mayor Andy Street, was chosen as the winning location of the Urban Connected Communities project. As my hon. Friend mentioned, that will see the development of a large-scale 5G pilot across the region.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is also working closely with the West Midlands combined authority to develop and deliver a region-wide digital skills partnership, which will bring together key sectors in the region, working on improving the digital skills of individuals, small businesses and charities. Ensuring strong Government engagement and support for these sectors will be critical to the success of the Government's industrial strategy.

Engagements

Q11. [906861] **Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): The Secretary of State for Education announced a pay award for teachers recently, which, as the Prime Minister will know, is not yet a devolved responsibility. The Government have outlined how they will fund the award for teachers in England, but as yet they have not done so for Wales. Will the Prime Minister intervene to put right this oversight and ensure that Welsh teachers and Welsh pupils are not the ones left to foot the bill?

The Prime Minister: To reassure the hon. Gentleman, I should say that the Treasury will be setting that out shortly.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Back in July, in Prime Minister's questions, I pressed the Prime Minister on the possible publication of Sir Alex Allan's report on the Windrush affair and she confirmed that the Home Secretary of the time was considering publication very carefully. Two months later, nothing has come from the Home Secretary or the Home Office. Could she as Prime Minister, in the interests of transparency and accountability, which I know she believes in, now personally authorise the publication of this long-awaited report?

The Prime Minister: I reassure my right hon. Friend that the Home Secretary has been looking at this issue, and the Cabinet Secretary is looking at this. We are committed to publication, but the form of that is currently being considered.

Q13. [906863] **Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Yesterday, Her Majesty's inspectorate of probation issued a devastating report on its findings relating to the murder two years ago of my constituent Lisa Skidmore. The report sets out catastrophic failures on the part of the probation service to act on warnings about the behaviour of her killer, Leroy Campbell—a lifelong violent sex offender—and concludes that Lisa's murder was entirely preventable.

Lisa Skidmore was a young woman with her whole life in front of her. Her family have been left completely heartbroken by her loss. She was let down in the most appalling way by a service that is there to monitor offenders and protect the public. In this case, it failed to do so, with the most devastating consequences. Can I

ask the Prime Minister what she and the Ministry of Justice can do in response to this report, to prevent something like this from happening again?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has raised what was an absolutely devastating case—it was a horrific crime, and devastating for Lisa's family. I understand that my hon. Friend the prisons Minister has met the family of Lisa Skidmore and apologised for the failings in this case. But as the right hon. Gentleman says, this should not have happened.

I understand that some action has already been taken and that two members of the probation service have been suspended. While nothing can be done to bring back Lisa or minimise the impact that this has had on her family, Dame Glenys Stacey has been asked to conduct an independent review to look at what can be done to prevent such tragedies from happening again—to do as the right hon. Gentleman has said: make sure that this never happens to anybody else.

Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con): Cumbria and the Lake district are among the most beautiful parts of the UK, and our farmers play such a unique role in maintaining the landscape. On Back British Farming Day, will my right hon. Friend ensure that our Cumbrian farmers will be able to export their world-class meat after we leave the European Union?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to recognise the beauty of the area she represents, Cumbria and the Lake District, and the important role farmers play in that part of the country, as indeed our farmers do elsewhere. When we leave the European Union, we are looking to ensure we have trade deals that enable our farmers to continue to be able to export their very important product, which is enjoyed by people elsewhere. By leaving the European Union, we are able to do something else: come out of the common agricultural policy and develop a policy for farming in this country that is right for our farmers, not for others'.

Q14. [906864] **Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): Last year, 183 people were returned to this country to face justice because of the European arrest warrant. If we leave the EU without a deal, the European arrest warrant will not be available to us. Would the Prime Minister be happy with that?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will know full well that as Home Secretary I stood at this Dispatch Box and led a debate in which we ensured that when we exercised the powers available under protocol 36 we went back into the European arrest warrant. The European arrest warrant is one of those instruments that we have identified in our Chequers plan as one that we wish to discuss with the European Union, with a view to being able to continue to use it.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Leah Aldridge was killed by her father in 2002. After the coroner and Greater Manchester police finished their investigation, the body was returned to the family for the funeral. Last year, the police discovered that they had retained some of Leah's body parts, and these were returned to the family for a second funeral. Only a few weeks ago, yet more body parts were discovered by the police and the

family had to go through the ordeal of a third funeral. They have no confidence that Greater Manchester police or the police and crime commissioner, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, now have finally allowed the family to lay their daughter Leah to rest. Will the Prime Minister hold an inquiry into this matter for the sake of Leah's family and for other families across Greater Manchester?

The Prime Minister: This is an absolutely terrible case. I am sure, as my hon. Friend will have felt from the reaction of Members across the House when they heard him set out the details, that we all want to express our deepest sympathy to Leah's family for the prolonged trauma they have had to endure as a result of the way that this has been handled.

I understand that the deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester has been in touch with the Human Tissue Authority about the case. The authority is advising on ensuring that the establishment concerned does the necessary work to evaluate what went wrong in this case and puts in place measures to minimise the chance that this can ever happen again. Officials in the Home Office will meet both the Greater Manchester police and the National Police Chiefs' Council to further address the issue of historically held human tissue. I will ensure that the relevant Home Office Minister updates my hon. Friend on the outcome of those meetings.

Q15. [906865] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The Windrush scandal continues to affect my constituent who, despite receiving his British passport, has been told he is ineligible for employment and support allowance as he has not made enough national insurance contributions over the past two years—an impossible task, since he has been prevented from working by the Home Office. Will the Prime Minister take responsibility for ensuring that the Department for Work and Pensions has special measures in place to deal with Windrush applicants, and will she confirm that my constituent will now get the support he deserves?

The Prime Minister: The Home Office, of course, set up a special taskforce to deal with the Windrush cases to provide help and support to the individuals—*[Interruption.]* Yes, I know the shadow Foreign Secretary is mentioning the DWP. I am coming on to the DWP. What is important for the individuals concerned is that they are able to interact with one Government body that is then able to give them support and take on the issues for them. I believe that the individual concerned should get in touch with the taskforce, and the Home Secretary will make sure that the necessary inquiries are made.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Will the Prime Minister visit my constituency to open Airbus's new wing integration centre in Filton, which is a £40 million investment that will secure hundreds of jobs and good-quality apprenticeships for the future? Will she join me in thanking and paying tribute to Airbus for its strong and enduring commitment to the UK?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has issued a very interesting invitation. I cannot give him an instant response from the Dispatch Box, because I will need to look at diary commitments. It is absolutely right that we thank and congratulate Airbus on the commitment it

has made to the United Kingdom and the high-quality jobs it provides here. When I went to the Farnborough airshow, I was very pleased to meet Airbus executives to look at and talk about some of their latest products.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): In a meeting on Monday, the aluminium and steel industry told leaders of Opposition parties—with the exception of the leader of the Labour party, who refused to attend—that thousands of jobs are to be put at risk by the British Government's Brexit policies and threadbare industrial strategy. Is it not the case that the Prime Minister is prepared to dole out P45s to manufacturing workers simply in order to appease the Brexit extremists in her own party?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady's portrayal of the situation could not be further from the case. What we have put forward in the Chequers plan is a plan that delivers on the result of the referendum and ensures that we take control of our money, borders and laws, but that does so in a way that protects jobs and livelihoods across the United Kingdom. The Government have given support to the steel industry in a number of ways, and the industrial strategy is about ensuring that we have a healthy manufacturing industry in this country, but also a manufacturing industry for the future, providing the high-skilled jobs and skills for people for the future.

Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware of not only my feelings but those of pretty much everyone in this House and the vast majority of this country when it comes to seeing our veterans dragged through the courts in Northern Ireland to appease political differences. What is she as Prime Minister personally doing—how is she personally investing of herself in this process—to bring to an end something that the vast majority of her country find completely abhorrent?

The Prime Minister: I am well aware of the degree of concern about this issue, which is why I have held a number of discussions about it with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We owe a vast debt of gratitude to the heroism and bravery of the soldiers and police officers who upheld the rule of law and were themselves accountable to it. That is something that has always set them apart from the terrorists, who during the troubles were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of members of the security forces. But as I have made clear, the current system in Northern Ireland is flawed. It is not working; it is not working for soldiers, for police officers or for victims—a group, in fact, that includes many soldiers and police officers as well. Although a number of terrorist murders from the troubles are actively under investigation by the Police Service of Northern Ireland and other police forces, under the current mechanism for investigating the past there is a disproportionate focus on former members of the armed forces and the police. We want to ensure that all outstanding deaths in Northern Ireland are investigated in ways that are fair, balanced and proportionate.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Since the life-changing spinal muscular atrophy treatment Spinraza was rejected by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence in its first guidance last month, families affected, including that of young Sam Mckie in North

Tyneside, have been left heartbroken. Will the Prime Minister meet me and Muscular Dystrophy UK to discuss the urgent need to make progress on the managed access agreement so that patients can access Spinraza as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to look at the specific issue in relation to the decision taken by NICE, and I will ensure that Health Ministers look into it and have a meeting with the hon. Lady to discuss the details.

Police: Financial Sustainability

12.44 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the National Audit Office's report, "Financial sustainability of police forces in England and Wales 2018".

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): I thank the right hon. Lady for her question. The NAO does incredibly important work and the Government are very grateful to it for its work on police financial sustainability. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made extremely clear to police superintendents yesterday, we absolutely understand and agree that the police are under pressure, and we are absolutely determined to support them.

I do not recognise the suggestion, however, that Ministers do not understand the pressures on the police. Last year, I spoke personally to all 43 police forces in England and Wales, including frontline officers. I also commissioned analysis to improve our understanding of police demand and resilience, and I explained our findings to the House last year, at the time of the provisional police funding settlement. We recognise the pressures on the police, including from complex crime and the threat of terrorism, and we have provided a funding settlement that is increasing total investment in the police system by more than £460 million in the current financial year. This includes £50 million of additional funding for counter-terrorism, £130 million for national priorities and £280 million in force funding from increases in precept income.

We are not stopping there. I have already indicated that we will afford the police the same precept flexibility in 2019-20 subject to their meeting productivity and efficiency asks. We are also working very closely with the police to jointly build the evidence base on police demand, resilience and capability ahead of the spending review.

The report is, then, valuable in highlighting the pressure on the police, but we do not believe that it gives adequate weight to a number of important issues: first, the strength of the local accountability structure through police and crime commissioners, which were introduced by this Government; secondly, our support to the independent inspectorate in developing force management statements—a key tool in getting better data to identify and manage future demand; thirdly, our public and regular monitoring of service effectiveness through Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services, whose independent authority we have strengthened; and, fourthly, our request to the police that they reform themselves, meaning it is appropriate that the police have their own strategy, which they do, in "Police Vision 2025".

Having said that, we of course take the report extremely seriously, and our permanent secretary has written to the NAO to accept these points. The House should be under no illusion, however: the Government remain extremely committed to ensuring that forces have the resources they need to do the extremely difficult work that they do on behalf of all of us, which the whole House appreciates.

Ms Abbott: The House appreciates that the Minister has met the leaders of all the police forces, but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this National Audit Office report is an indictment of successive Conservative Home Secretaries and their handling of police financial sustainability.

Does the Minister now accept what the NAO sets out—that total funding to police forces, which is a combination of central Government funding and council tax, has fallen by 19% in real terms since 2010-11? Does the Minister accept what the NAO further sets out the: "main way that police forces have managed financial pressure is by reducing the size of their workforces"?

It says that the total workforce across forces fell by 18% between 2010 and March 2018. Does the Minister accept the NAO conclusion that, although crime recorded by the crime survey for England and Wales decreased by 36% between 2011 and 2018, at the same time police forces faced an upsurge in the reporting of low volume and high harm crime—the crimes that alarm the public most?

Most damning of all, the National Audit Office says it has found early indicators that the police are "struggling"—that is the NAO's word—to deliver an effective service. Is the Minister aware of the NAO's conclusion that the Home Office simply does not have a clear picture of what individual forces need to meet local and national demands? Why is that, and what are Ministers going to do about it? Yesterday Commissioner Cressida Dick, the head of the Met police, said that she did not want the Government to wait until the police were struggling like the Prison Service. Can the Minister give the House an assurance that that will not happen?

Mr Hurd: First, I should make it clear that I did not speak just to police leaders. Whenever I visit a force I make a point of speaking to frontline officers, and through those conversations I gained a very clear picture of the stretch and pressure that they are experiencing.

The right hon. Lady asked me to confirm that police budgets had been reduced since 2010, and asked whether we had fewer police officers. The numbers do not lie: the numbers are very clear. They are hardly news. What the right hon. Lady omitted to mention, of course, was the underlying driver of the decisions that were made in 2010. The state of the public finances that we inherited from the previous Government led to the radical action that was needed.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): That is desperate.

Mr Hurd: It is not desperate. Those are the stark economic facts that the coalition Government faced in 2010. There was a need to take radical action to return the public finances to some sort of order. That is an uncomfortable truth about which the Labour party remains in denial.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Rubbish.

Mr Hurd: It is not rubbish. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes, it is."] The state of the public finances is a matter of absolute record.

I welcome the right hon. Lady's recognition that traditional crime continues to decrease. Of course we are all concerned about the clear increase in serious

[Mr Hurd]

violent crime, and we have faced up to it in clear statements of our determination to get on top of it, not just with words but with actions through the Serious Violence Strategy, which has been welcomed by the police and which is supported by funding.

The right hon. Lady said that forces were struggling to manage demand. It is absolutely true that some of them are, but we do not need the National Audit Office to tell us that; the HMIC reports on effectiveness make the point very plainly. We are working with those forces. We should reject any groupthink that suggests that this is just an issue of financial resources, although they are clearly important. Police leaders recognise that there is considerable scope for improvement in the way in which police time and demand are managed. HMIC has made that point very clearly, and has taken an initiative that we support in requiring force management statements in which police forces must explain their view of future demand and how they intend to manage it.

The right hon. Lady asked what the Government were going to do. I will tell her exactly what we are doing, and exactly what the Home Secretary said yesterday to the police superintendents. We will continue to support the police, and we have put more money into the police system. The Home Secretary has made it very clear that police funding is a priority for him, and we are working closely with the police in preparing for the comprehensive spending review. There needs to be a strong evidence base in respect of demand and resilience, and it is exactly that work that we are putting together. The Government attach the highest priority to public safety, and to ensuring that our police system has the support that it needs.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): The Minister is right to mention the vital role that police and crime commissioners play in budgeting and spending. A good and effective police and crime commissioner such as ours in Kent, Matthew Scott—who can husband resources well enough to ensure that over the coming year Kent people will be blessed with up to 200 more police officers—can work well within a budget, and can provide the extra safety in our streets that people demand.

Mr Hurd: My right hon. Friend has made an important point. We introduced police and crime commissioners, and Matthew Scott is an outstanding example of the difference that they make, both through local accountability and through stewardship of police budgets. I am delighted, not least for the people of Kent, that as a result of the measures that we have taken—and we could only do so because of the improvements in the economy—more money is going into Kent policing, which Matthew is using to recruit more officers. I am sure that that is very welcome throughout Kent.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): England's most senior police officer, Cressida Dick, said yesterday that the police were now

“taking up the slack of other public services that are struggling to deliver.”

Will the Home Secretary, ahead of the Budget, argue for not just more cash for the police but extra cash for the NHS so that it can collaborate with them, especially when it comes to people with mental health issues?

Mr Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman has raised an extremely important point. One of the clear messages that I received during my tour of the police system was about the frustration caused by the amount of time that officers spend—in their words—doing other people's jobs, away from core policing work, and a large part of that frustration relates to the amount of time spent supporting people with mental health issues. We are doing a piece of work on this, because evidence must support the initiatives that we take. We need to understand the problem, and think about how we can make local collaboration work more effectively so that time can be freed up to allow police officers to do what the public expect, and focus on core policing.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Policing should always be a spending priority for a Conservative Government. I have voted against cuts in police grants every year since their introduction in 2010. Our police are overstretched, and that is of increasing concern to many of our constituents. Is it not time that the Government broke the habit of a lifetime and did something popular? [Laughter.] Is it not time that they scrapped some of the huge, ridiculous sums that are going into the overseas aid budget, and passed them to our hard-pressed police forces? That would be popular with our local communities.

Does the Minister agree that calls for increases in the police budget—which I consistently make—are not helped by morons such as the police and crime commissioner in South Yorkshire, who seems to think that his force has so much money that it can now start asking people to report non-crimes as well as crimes?

Mr Hurd: My hon. Friend is a great and long-standing champion of the police, and I have great respect for that. However, he should know—because he is good at numbers—that this year the Government are spending, on behalf of the public and the taxpayer, more than £1 billion more on our police system than we were three years ago. I hope he welcomes that, because, as he fully recognises, the police system is stretched, and it is our responsibility to ensure that it has the resources that it needs.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The most expensive way to fund policing is through the mechanism of overtime, which is now at its highest-ever level. Would it not be sensible for the Government, rather than allowing hard-working police officers to work longer hours and cost the taxpayer more, to revisit the issue of police funding and revert to the figures that obtained in 2009-10, when Labour was in office?

Mr Hurd: Like most Labour Members, the right hon. Gentleman remains in complete denial of economic reality and the adjustments that have been needed since 2010 to put our public finances back in order. As I have said very publicly for at least a year, I accept the argument that the police system needs more resources, and that is exactly what we have delivered. This year, as a country, we have put an additional £460 million into the system, over £1 billion more than three years ago. However, it is not just about resources—as a former Minister, the right hon. Gentleman knows that—but about more efficient and effective use of police time.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I pay tribute to the hard-working police force of Avon and Somerset, which is making changes in its operating system. I was in touch with the force recently because it has altered its inquiry opening hours, but that is because it is having to adapt to changing demands. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is right to adapt to such changes, and will he reassure me that he remains committed to working closely with the police on funding following the delivery of a £460 million increase in the overall police budget for 2018-19?

Mr Hurd: I do agree, and that £460 million includes an additional £8 million for Avon and Somerset, which I know my hon. Friend will welcome. She is entirely right: Avon and Somerset is a superb example of a force that has adapted and innovated. I consider it to be best in class in respect of its smart use of data to manage demand, which means that it has some of the best response time statistics in the system. It provides an example to the rest of the system of how demand can be managed better through a more intelligent use of data, and I congratulate it on that.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The former permanent secretary at the Home Office has acknowledged that the funding formula for policing is ineffective. However, as there has been a delay, it now looks like we will be waiting until the spending review before the new formula is agreed and comes into force. On my calculation that means it will not come into force or make a difference until 2020-21. Can the Minister give us any comfort on that and explain when the funding formula will be properly revisited?

Mr Hurd: I say to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, as I have said publicly, that the appropriate point to address this issue—which is very sensitive and which a number of forces and MPs representing forces feel very strongly about—is in the context of the CSR, which is the most important framework for long-term financial planning in the police. I will be very frank: my priority, working with the Home Secretary, is to make an argument to set the size of the total cake. We have made it clear that we will then need to deliver a compelling analysis and plan for how that cake gets divided up in a way that more fairly reflects the demands on the current policing system, which are evolving. We are very serious about that, but we just happen to think that the CSR is the most appropriate framework in which to do this work.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): In God's own town of Lymington a robber was captured but had to be released because there was no police officer available to be sent. We do need more police officers, don't we?

Mr Hurd: We do; I agree and totally accept the argument that we need more resources for the police, which is exactly what we have delivered. That includes an additional £9.7 million for Hampshire police, whom I meet regularly. Across the country forces are using that money to recruit additional officers: 500 more here in London, 200-odd in Kent, 150-odd in Essex, 150-odd in Nottingham, and 100 in West Mercia. Across the

country police forces are using the additional resources we are able to deliver, as a result of our successful stewardship of the economy since 2010, to deliver what the public want, which is more policing. We would not be able to do that under the Labour party's policies.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): With 2,000 police officers cut in West Midlands police, crime is soaring, violent crime by 59%. Communities increasingly live in fear, as Ministers are in denial as to the consequences of their actions. Does the Minister not accept that the first duty of any Government is the safety and security of their citizens, and that it is absolutely wrong that under the existing formula the West Midlands cut is in excess of twice that of Surrey?

Mr Hurd: The hon. Gentleman and I have had many exchanges over the year about West Midlands police and I hope he welcomes—although he voted against it—the funding settlement that will see an additional £9.9 million go into West Midlands policing. David Thompson, the chief, has made many representations to me about fair funding and I refer the hon. Gentleman to my earlier remarks: substantive work needs to be done around fairer funding of the police system and the CSR is the right place to do that.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend has already mentioned the 100 new police officers for West Mercia that John-Paul Campion, our excellent police and crime commissioner, is about to recruit. I would like to see these new officers fighting rural crime, so will my right hon. Friend look again at road traffic offences, especially speeding? Speed awareness courses help the safety of all of us on the roads, but they can only happen once every three years. May we have them on an annual basis, please?

Mr Hurd: I join my hon. Friend in welcoming the initiative of West Mercia's police and crime commissioner to use the additional £4.6 million made available to him to recruit additional officers. I wholly understand the weight my hon. Friend attaches to rural crime, as I have heard that very clearly from other Members representing rural constituencies. It is obviously for the local PCC in his local plan to establish his local priorities, but I will take my hon. Friend's point about road traffic away and come back to him.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): Opposition Members all know the impact of this Government's cuts on police officers—they are having an impact locally—but we also all acknowledge the hard work police officers are doing. Does the Minister agree with Cressida Dick that the pay award offered was like a “punch on the nose”?

Mr Hurd: I wholly agree about the hard work police officers do—[*Interruption.*] They are extremely stretched, and I will go further: I completely understand, as does the Home Secretary, as he said yesterday at the police superintendents' conference, why police officers feel extremely disappointed by the Government's decision. The reality is that, as the Home Secretary said yesterday, the Government have to balance fairness and affordability. We continue to operate in a very constrained environment in terms of the public finances as a direct consequence of the actions of the last Labour Government, and we

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are still navigating our way through those difficulties. The Government took a collective decision based on fairness and affordability and looking at public pay in the round. We completely recognise that police officers are disappointed by that, and our priority going forward is to make the argument to the Treasury about the resources the police need in the future.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): Tomorrow evening there will be a public meeting in Glastonbury at which residents from across the community will air their concerns about antisocial behaviour in the town. Avon and Somerset police hitherto has been limited in the way it has been able to respond to that because of the challenges of delivering policing across a large rural county such as Somerset. Will the Minister of State ensure that, in all future decisions on police funding, the cost of rurality is factored in and that rural areas are therefore well provided for?

Mr Hurd: I thank my hon. Friend for that insight. I completely understand this point as I have had many representations from Members representing rural forces making exactly that point. In our work planning for the CSR, and the application of a fairer funding formula, that is one of the factors that we take fully into account.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): The appalling murder of Nicholas Churton last year in my constituency highlighted deficiencies in both policing and the probation service; at Prime Minister's questions today we heard about deficiencies in Wolverhampton, too. There is a widespread increase in violent crime, which is having a direct impact on the lives of our constituents. Will the Minister ensure that that message is conveyed to the whole Government so that when he secures funding in the CSR, priority is given to policing, which is a massive issue in our constituencies up and down the land?

Mr Hurd: I understand exactly the point the hon. Gentleman makes and I hope he can take some assurance—they are words at this stage; I fully accept that—from the statements by the Home Secretary about the personal priority he attaches to police funding; he states it is clearly his priority. The hon. Gentleman mentions serious violent crime. I think the whole House is united in a determination to bear down on that horrific problem. He talks about policing being at the core of this. He is right, but what is required is a cross-Government response because this is not just about robust law enforcement, although that is essential; it is also about much more effective work on prevention and early intervention, which requires other Departments and the whole system at national and local levels to work more effectively to steer young people away from crime and violence and the devastating consequences it has for them, their families, friends and communities.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): It is pointless having an independent pay panel if its findings are ignored. This summer, I had the pleasure of spending a day with Greater Manchester police in its give a day to policing scheme, as I know many other Members did. Will my right hon. Friend take back the firm message to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to bring forward additional resources for policing in the autumn Budget?

Mr Hurd: I understand the point my hon. Friend makes about the police remuneration board. It is hard not to. I have made very clear—more importantly the Home Secretary has made very clear—the personal priority we attach to police funding. We recognise, in a way the NAO report underestimates, and understand the pressures on the police system. Demand on the police is rising. Crime is changing and becoming more complex. We must respond because public safety is the No. 1 priority of any Government.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): My local police force, Suffolk constabulary, is the third lowest funded police force in England per head of population. About 300 officers have been lost in the last eight years, which is a large proportion for a small force, and about a third of support staff have also been lost. Violent crime, and especially drug-related violent crime, in my constituency of Ipswich has mushroomed and we have seen multiple gang stabbings in the last year. Can the Minister see that there is a connection and will he speak to the Chancellor to secure the funds that the service he is responsible for needs?

Mr Hurd: The hon. Gentleman and I have had a number of exchanges over the last year about Suffolk policing, and I have had many conversations with the Suffolk PCC, which reinforces the point that we feel the NAO report attaches insufficient weight to the local accountability mechanisms that we have in place. There are very few PCCs who have not made representations to me about the pressure on their system and the argument for more resources or fairer allocation of resources, and the Suffolk PCC would be pre-eminent in that. I have made it clear, and the Home Secretary has made it clear, that we are determined and—more than words—that the Home Office, in a way we have never done before, is working closely with the police to build the evidence base that is going to be needed in a very competitive CSR to ensure that our police system has the resources it needs, because public safety is the No. 1 priority of any Government.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): My right hon. Friend is aware of the excellent work being done by Lincolnshire police to keep us safe. I regularly meet our excellent police and crime commissioner, Marc Jones, to discuss the challenges involved in policing such a large rural area. Lincolnshire police has 5,500 miles of road and 2,500 square miles to police. What more can the Minister do to ensure that our dedicated police force has the funds it needs to police this rural area?

Mr Hurd: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and to all those who have been absolutely assiduous in making representations on behalf of Lincolnshire police, which is a stretched force that is facing financial challenges. Marc Jones has also been assiduous as a PCC in making these points, and we have worked closely with him to understand the pressures on that police force. It has received an additional £3.3 million this year, which I hope my hon. Friend welcomes. It has also been the recipient of some special grants through the special grant programme. We will work closely with Marc and other PCCs to make the case in the next CSR for increased resources for our police system, which I hope

Lincolnshire will benefit from. I would add that Lincolnshire is another example of a force that has worked superbly to adapt and harness technology to make more productive use of police time. It is a leader in the use of mobile working technology and I congratulate it on that.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): The Minister talks a lot about seeking evidence, and he has rightly praised Avon and Somerset police for its data and for being best in class, but I am afraid that those words will not serve my constituents properly by protecting them from crime. When will we be getting the money to meet the demand that we have evidenced?

Mr Hurd: The hon. Lady ignores the fact that Avon and Somerset is receiving an additional £8 million this year through the settlement that I think she voted against. I have made it clear that, for 2019-20, we expect to do something similar, and I have also made it clear that, as a ministerial team led by the Home Secretary, we are doing a great deal of work to develop the evidence base and to make the argument about the resources that the police need for the next five years. That includes Avon and Somerset, which does outstanding work on behalf of its residents, not least, as we have agreed, in terms of best practice in demand management.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I know that the Minister cares deeply about these issues. The Chair of the Public Accounts Committee is right when she draws attention to the unfairness of the formula, which has been unfair since damping was brought in in 2004. Four hundred people turned up to a meeting with the police in my constituency just a couple of weeks ago. That should give my right hon. Friend an indication of the level of concern about this issue. We in Bedfordshire cannot wait until the next comprehensive spending review. Because of the unfairness in funding, we do not get what the national formula says we should get, and we have not done so since 2004. That needs action now.

Mr Hurd: I congratulate my hon. Friend on being absolutely assiduous in making representations to me about Bedfordshire policing, about which I know he cares deeply. His passion is shared by Kathryn Holloway, the police and crime commissioner, who is in regular contact with me about these matters. He knows that Bedfordshire has had another £3.2 million this year, and I am sure he knows that the force has put in applications to the special grant programme. He will also know that the long-term solution is through the CSR and the application of a fairer funding formula. He knows from the conversations that we have had that I am personally absolutely committed to this, but I undertake to work closely with him, the PCC and Bedfordshire police over the next two years as they work through the challenges that they face. I completely understand the concern that he has expressed so well on behalf of his constituents.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Over the summer, I spent a day with officers at Stretford police station, and I have to tell the Minister that I was quite shocked when I saw the extent of the pressure they are under. This is arising in part because of new demands on the police, including those relating to radical extremism,

to child criminal exploitation and to additional requirements relating to disclosure. Will the Minister ensure not only that the police are funded adequately to meet their current needs but that there is a real understanding of these new and growing pressures?

Mr Hurd: As ever, the hon. Lady makes an extremely good point. She is absolutely right, and the shadow Home Secretary also understands that demand on the police is changing. Traditional crime rates continue to fall, but demand on the system is coming from new and increasingly complex resource-intensive areas. We understand that, and we have responded to it, but there is more that we need to do in terms of ensuring that the police have the support that they need. We completely get that.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to ensuring that the police have the powers they need. We debated the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill on the Floor of the House yesterday, and the Offensive Weapons Bill will soon come to the House for our consideration. Can he reassure me and my constituents that he understands the pressures being faced by the police, not least those being caused by the use of drugs such as Spice?

Mr Hurd: My hon. Friend has been assiduous in registering his concerns to the House and the Government about the effect of Spice, which I have seen for myself. We have had exchanges on that point, and those concerns are shared by many colleagues. I also thank him for making the point about police powers. For reasons that we all understand, conversations about the police tend to focus on resources and money, but in terms of what the Government can do to support the police, it is not just about money. It is also about new powers such as those in the Offensive Weapons Bill that is going through the House. We are constantly reviewing how we can support the police with the powers they need to counter the changing demands on the system, and how we can work with them to anticipate demand. The one thing we do know about the policing environment at the moment is that it is one of constant change, and we need to work closely with the police to ensure that they are fit for purpose in terms of managing existing demand and getting on top of future demand.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): Further to the answer that the Minister gave to the hon. Member for Wells (James Heap), and acknowledging the need for the funding formula to appreciate the specific needs that rurality creates for forces such as Dyfed-Powys, will the Minister also consider in any forthcoming review the fact that the population in many rural areas increases significantly during the summer months and as such places additional pressures on the local force?

Mr Hurd: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. It is a prime responsibility of the Government to look at how these limited, stretched public resources, which come from the taxpayer, are raised and spent, and it is obviously one of our responsibilities to ensure that decisions are taken that fully reflect and understand the shifts and changes in society and in how this country

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works. That is our responsibility, and it is a serious bit of work, which is why I think that it is best done in the context of the CSR.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for the engagement that he has shown with Lincolnshire police and for the praise that he has given to the force for doing more with less, but does he agree that, however big the funding cake is for the police, Lincolnshire deserves a larger slice of it?

Mr Hurd: I have received assiduous representations on that point from Lincolnshire MPs, the chief constable and the police and crime commissioner. Some work has been done on fair funding and more work needs to be done. I recognise that the Lincolnshire police force is stretched and challenged. We have done what we can to help in the short term. I give my commitment that I will continue to do what I can there, if that is what the evidence shows, but in the context of the CSR, which is the most important event in terms of framing the future of police funding for the next five years, I undertake that we will look again at the fair funding.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): The chief constable of Bedfordshire, Jon Boutcher, told me this morning that in his 35 years as a police officer he had never seen such a high demand on his force, yet he has to deal with this with fewer police officers than he had in 2010 and a £47 million budget cut. He simply cannot find enough officers to attend all the 999 calls. Our police force is at breaking point. When will the Minister's Government admit that their funding formula is broken, understand what forces such as Bedfordshire are dealing with and give them the funding they need to protect the public?

Mr Hurd: I am in regular contact with Bedfordshire's chief constable and the police and crime commissioner. I am extremely aware of their concerns, and we are doing more than listening. We have put an additional £3.2 million into Bedfordshire policing this year, and I have already signalled that we intend again to give PCCs flexibility over precepts in 2019-20. We are engaging with Bedfordshire about applications to the special grant pot, which we increased in the funding settlement that the hon. Gentleman voted against. We are serious about the work that needs to be done for the CSR, both in terms of increasing the resources available to the police and the fair allocation of the cake once it has been established.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): The Minister will know that Derbyshire's police are particularly unfairly treated by the formula, but the force has a practical suggestion relating to the amount of policing it does involving Black Mamba that it says will help it to manage its scarce resources. The force says that it would greatly help if the drug could be reclassified to class A to provide a far better sentencing deterrent to the use of that drug. Is that something that the Minister could do quickly to help forces to manage the issue?

Mr Hurd: I thank Derbyshire for its pragmatic, constructive approach to some of the challenges we face. My hon. Friend will know, not least from sitting next to my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay

(Kevin Foster), that the Government keep the classification of Spice and other synthetic drugs under regular review. We rely on advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, and its position is unchanged, but we are extremely aware of the public concern, and I expect that that advice will be kept under regular scrutiny and refreshment.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): May I pay tribute to the bravery of the police officers in Humberside who ran towards a serious incident in Hull city centre yesterday? Despite the best efforts of our excellent police and crime commissioner, Keith Hunter, to refocus resources to the frontline, we still have fewer officers than in 2010. We have lost equipment, including the force's helicopter, and powers for police officers on antisocial behaviour were weakened under the coalition Government. With rising levels of crime—antisocial behaviour is rising in particular in my constituency—what is the Minister going to do about that?

Mr Hurd: The hon. Lady talks about financial resources. I have already taken steps that have led to an additional £4 million of public money going into Humberside policing. I hope that she will welcome that, although she voted against it, and we intend to do something similar this year. We will work closely with the police, including Humberside, to make the case for additional investment in policing.

The hon. Lady and other Labour MPs continue to talk about the cuts since 2010, but they are in complete denial of the economic reality. The budget reductions were taken for two good reasons. First, we had to take radical action to control the deficit that we inherited from a Government that she sometimes supported. Secondly, everyone agreed at the time that demand on the police was flat. Even the shadow Home Secretary at the time agreed that the police could deliver efficiencies, which is exactly what they have done. However, demand has changed since 2014 and we have to respond to that.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): I will continue to lobby for more funds for West Midlands police, but this is not just about cash. Will the Minister confirm that police forces led by Conservative police and crime commissioners perform better across all measures, according to a report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary?

Mr Hurd: I would be delighted to accept that analysis, and I totally recognise the work that my hon. Friend does to champion West Midlands police, which is an incredibly important police force that does extremely good work. We have put additional resources into the force, and I note that the Labour police and crime commissioner has managed to go about increasing reserves by £26.9 million since 2011—the period in which he has complained about being cash-starved.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Like many of my colleagues, I recently spent a day shadowing Greater Manchester police in my constituency. From trainees to inspectors, they all expressed concerns about underfunding and short-staffing, not to mention having to pick up the pieces from cuts to mental health and ambulance services. What will the Minister do to ensure that the police in my constituency have the resources to do their jobs and that my constituents feel safe?

Mr Hurd: I understand the truth of the messages that the hon. Lady has received, because I have heard exactly the same thing. We are responding to that with the additional money that is going into the system—£10.7 million for Greater Manchester. I have already laboured the point that we see that as a start. We are building the case for additional resources, reflecting the fact that demand on the system has changed and has become increasingly complex. However, this is not just about money; it is also about how demand on the police is managed. I have heard exactly the same frustrations that she heard from officers in her area about how their time is managed. That is based partly on demand from other bits of the system and partly on failings or room for improvement in how their bosses manage their time. We have to press and pursue both those things, which is exactly what I am doing.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Our police forces have never had to work harder. They are working more efficiently than ever in tackling crime, not least in Northamptonshire, where individual police officers do a fantastic job, but they need to be paid properly. It is wrong not to accept the recommendations of the independent pay review body, which should be honoured in full. Conservative Governments always used to prioritise police pay. Please can we get back to doing that?

Mr Hurd: I completely understand my hon. Friend's point. I also fully appreciate the frustration and, in places, anger that police officers feel at the decision. As a representative of the Government—this was a collective decision—I can say that we are still in a difficult position in relation to the public finances, and the Treasury and others have a difficult job to do in terms of balancing fairness and affordability, which is what underlies this decision.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): With a 59% increase in violent crime, a 70% increase in murders and an increase in occasions when police are unable to attend serious disorder events on time, my community in Birmingham and those in the west midlands are being put at risk. Trying to wring more out of the budget towel is not possible, because there is a lack of officers and finances.

Mr Hurd: We have already touched on the west midlands, and the hon. Gentleman and I have had meetings about this matter, as is the case for all west midlands MPs. As a result of those representations, we have taken steps, which I hope he will welcome, to put an additional £9.9 million into west midlands policing. We have regular conversations with the leadership of West Midlands police about the force's needs, which feeds into our demand work, into the 2019-20 settlement and into the CSR.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): When the Minister took the time to attend our special seminar on the long-distance county lines drug-running problem last week, he heard the drive and determination, and the new ideas, of senior officers from forces around the country. Does he accept that that determination will be hamstrung unless he can tackle the issues outlined in the damning National Audit Office report?

Mr Hurd: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on convening that meeting about county lines. The fact that it was so well attended by so many different groups involved in the issue is a great credit to him. It is a classic example of a growing problem that is challenging for the police because it crosses force borders and requires them to co-ordinate their work in ways that they have historically found difficult. That is exactly why the Home Office is playing a role by providing £3 million to support a co-ordination centre to help police forces better co-operate in their work on county lines. I hope the hon. Gentleman welcomes that.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab) rose—

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab) rose—

Mr Speaker: Well—

Chris Elmore: Two Whips, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Indeed. I call Chris Elmore.

Chris Elmore: South Wales police has seen a 30% cut in central Government funding since 2010 and faced a 12% cut overall. Remarkably, that represents only the second smallest set of cuts across the UK, and I am unsure whether the Minister thinks that south Wales MPs should be grateful for that. The reality is that we have a capital city in Cardiff and another large city in Swansea, and major events lead to real-time pressures, but the Government still have not increased budgets. Police and Crime Commissioner Alun Michael has called for additional funding, because undue pressure is being placed on rural policing and the policing of smaller communities, such as Ogmore.

Mr Hurd: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about Cardiff, because he has made it to me before, and I certainly do undertake to speak directly to the police and crime commissioner about it. I ask him to recognise that something has changed in the Government's approach to police funding, which is reflected in the fact that we recognise the increasing demands on the system and the pressures on places such as Cardiff. I hope that he will welcome South Wales police receiving an additional £8.2 million of taxpayers' money this year.

Jeff Smith: Greater Manchester police has lost 2,000 officers—a quarter of its strength—in the past eight years. The Minister is right to refer to the increasing demands, and particularly to the huge and increasing amount of time that the police have to spend dealing with people in mental health crisis, which is a massive problem in south Manchester. If the Government are going to make massive cuts to council services, mental health services, substance abuse services, homelessness support, domestic violence services and youth services, are they not going to have to increase funding to the police disproportionately because it is the police who have to pick up the pieces from all those other cuts?

Mr Hurd: I challenge the hon. Gentleman's premise. I want to see police officers focused on core policing and demand better managed in Greater Manchester and other areas between local partners. He talks about cuts. Actually, the Government are, rightly, investing an

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additional £1 billion a year in mental health. I am determined, as police Minister, to ensure that that money is felt on the ground and that agencies on the ground are supported to take some pressure off our police system.

BILL PRESENTED

AGRICULTURE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Michael Gove, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary David Mundell, Secretary Alun Cairns, Secretary Karen Bradley, Dr Secretary Fox, Secretary Dominic Raab, Elizabeth Truss and George Eustice, presented a Bill to authorise new expenditure for certain agricultural and other purposes; to make provision about direct payments during an agricultural transition period following the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union; to make provision about the acquisition and use of information connected with food supply chains; to confer power to respond to exceptional market conditions affecting agricultural markets; to confer power to modify retained direct EU legislation relating to agricultural and rural development payments and public market intervention and private storage aid; to make provision about marketing standards and the classification of carcasses; to make provision for the recognition of associations of agricultural producers which may benefit from certain exemptions from competition law; to confer power to make regulations about contracts for the purchase of agricultural products from agricultural producers and securing compliance with the WTO Agreement on Agriculture; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 266) with explanatory notes (Bill 266-EN).

Energy Consumption (Innovative Technologies)

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

1.30 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to undertake a public consultation on innovative technologies and energy consumption in households and commercial properties and to report on responses to that consultation and steps to be taken to encourage the development of innovative technologies to reduce energy consumption; and for connected purposes.

I am introducing this Bill because much innovative technology has been developed that can aid the Government in achieving their commendable energy policy objectives, and I am keen to see it recognised and promoted. I know the Minister is interested in this area, so I will explain in more detail how the Bill can help her.

The Bill touches on a number of issues that are close to my heart and affect not just my constituents in Taunton Deane but those across the nation. They relate to harnessing new and innovative carbon-saving technologies to lower energy consumption in our homes and commercial properties, particularly by cutting energy wastage, lowering fuel bills and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, which is very important if we are to achieve our climate change goals.

At the outset, I thank all my hon. Friends and other Members for supporting the Bill—there is a great deal of support—and want to make it clear that I fully support the Government's drive to do as much as possible to reduce the amount of money people pay for their energy, through the recent Domestic Gas and Electricity (Tariff Cap) Act 2018, for example. I was pleased to speak in a number of debates on that Bill, as were some of my hon. Friends who are in the Chamber today. I was delighted that Ofgem announced last week that, on passing that Bill, 11 million households on default tariffs across the UK would save an average of £75.

However, a great deal more can be done by harnessing technology to use energy more efficiently. The industry suggests that consumers could halve their winter energy bills if more attention were paid to that. I attended a workshop here in Parliament that focused on the energy company obligation and fuel poverty which highlighted to me that we have some ingenious minds working on solutions. I know that the Minister has hosted workshops on innovative technology, and that she recently addressed the Sustainable Energy Association, so this issue is definitely on the Government's radar.

The call in the Bill for a public consultation on technologies will enable companies to submit information to illustrate to the Minister how inventions can help us achieve our energy policy objectives. That will, in turn, stimulate investment and development, and lead to even greater innovation. It will be important to cover applications not just for domestic households but for business and commercial use.

Let us look at some examples. First, stored passive flue gas is a UK invention that significantly improves the efficiency and domestic hot water performance of A-rated condensing gas boilers, thereby helping households to save about £100 a year on their gas and water bills because the boiler is much more efficient. If fitted into

every home with a gas boiler, we could see savings of 2.6 million tonnes of carbon dioxide each year, which would clearly be a very useful contribution to our climate change targets.

Another device relating to gas systems is called MARGO. It is nothing to do with ballet or Margot Fonteyn, although it is a very fleet-of-foot device. MARGO stands for metrology for the acoustic recognition of gas-optimised services—it is clear why they shortened it. It is a new smart billing UK invention for more accurately measuring the gas supply to, and therein carbon dioxide produced by, households already installed with mechanical gas meters. If widely installed, it could reduce reported household carbon dioxide emissions by 10% a year, equating to savings on bills of about 4%.

Let us move on to the exciting subject of radiators. They are commonly used to deliver heat in our homes and business spaces, and yet so often they do not work efficiently. I am guilty of that in my home. One unbalanced radiator can add 3.5% to our heating costs. If there are a number of unbalanced radiators, costs could be increased by 8%. Indeed, for a whole-company system, costs could be increased by as much as 27%. That astonishing waste of money could simply be rectified with innovative technologies that enable systems to be balanced quickly for relatively little cost—about £70 to £170. Not balancing systems means that customers are effectively short-changed.

Still on homes, heat pumps are increasing in popularity. NIBE Energy Systems is one of the UK's leading manufacturers of heat pumps, and the market leader in Europe. It has a heat pump that combines an air source heat pump with a ventilation unit to provide renewable heat and hot water to homes. It is also smart grid-ready, and is able to respond to pricing signals, reducing the strain on the grid and saving consumers money.

How often do buildings feel too hot on warm days because the heating system is not flexible and cannot be adjusted? My office in the House of Commons is a good example of that. It often gets so hot that the windows are opened and all the heat disappears outside. That is not a good way of operating, so a whole-system approach to buildings would be very helpful. Demand Logic technology could help to cut costs for businesses and public authorities in that respect. It provides data intelligence on how a building operates, and can ensure that maintenance work is prioritised to where it is most effective. Better comfort levels should encourage us to be more productive in our work, so it is a win-win all round.

In a similar vein, the Zeroth energy system is an inventive community heating network. Its uniquely low operating temperatures mean that much less energy is lost into the communal areas of a building. That addresses the overheating issue, which can cause corridors to be boiling hot—that occurs even in Parliament—which is an utter waste of energy and heat. Sometimes they can be up to 30 °C, which is most uncomfortable. There are

virtually no heat gains from the pipework into corridors in that system. It reduces temperatures, waste, running costs and carbon emissions from heating and hot water by up to 29% using air-source heat pumps and a low-energy loop.

Even insulation comes into some of these ground-breaking methods. A wood fibre insulated building envelope by Pavatex, for example, can control temperature, sound and moisture in a building. It is made from cellulose, so it absorbs large quantities of carbon dioxide—up to 10 tonnes—for every home built. There are many wins with that example.

Hydrogen fuel boilers can also cut carbon enormously. A gadget that Vitovalor has developed is pioneering alternative decentralised power. It generates 5,000 kWh of electricity all year round, and it can be fitted into almost any house. It can cut carbon emissions by an incredible 40% and domestic electricity consumption by an even more impressive 60%. It also provides power generation, but does not emit nitrogen oxide, so it contributes to improved air quality.

Bioenergy is another new technology that can be harnessed to a much greater extent. It is fuelled by waste and biomass residues. There is a great deal that can be done.

In conclusion, such new technologies are being developed all the time, as I believe my examples have demonstrated. They can achieve the aims being discussed today, reducing energy consumption through improved efficiency and cutting waste, with the subsequent lowering of fuel bills and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. However, more can be done and needs to be done not just for domestic properties but for all properties. That is one of the main points of this Bill.

Fortunately, we have a Minister who is very interested in all these issues, and if she will invite companies to contribute to the consultation that I have proposed, highlighting their inventions and all the other new technologies in the pipeline, I am sure that this will do a great deal to stimulate greater innovation, reduce energy consumption and meet this Government's energy needs. Indeed, we could become world leaders. It will benefit us all, not just my constituents in Taunton Deane but everybody everywhere. I hope that the Minister will respond to my Bill by setting in motion the call for just such a consultation.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Rebecca Pow, Ian Austin, Caroline Lucas, John Grogan, John Penrose, Julian Knight, David Warburton, Derek Thomas, Sir David Amess, James Heappey, Alex Sobel and Geraint Davies present the Bill.

Rebecca Pow accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November, and to be printed (Bill 267).

Salisbury Incident

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Before I call the Minister to open the debate, it might be helpful if I remind the House that although the Salisbury incident is not at this stage sub judice, Members should nevertheless exercise discretion and avoid saying anything that might prejudice a future trial. I am sure that Members are well aware of that and will show the customary and appropriate constraint.

1.42 pm

The Minister for Security and Economic Crime (Mr Ben Wallace): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Salisbury incident.

Let me underline your comment, Madam Deputy Speaker, about the ongoing case. This is a very important case, with two suspects who have been named, and you are absolutely right that we must maintain caution throughout our discourse inside and outside the House to ensure that we do not undermine it. I ask colleagues engaging in today's debate to remember that. It is of course a challenge that the individuals we seek are in a difficult jurisdiction, but nevertheless our rule of law is what we set our values by and that is the difference, perhaps, between us and many others.

On 2 March, two individuals, using the aliases Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov, flew into Gatwick airport on flight SU2588 from Moscow. They mingled with other passengers, travelling on business visas and genuine Russian passports. Police have confirmed that the suspects had travelled to the United Kingdom before. The suspects then travelled by train into London and stayed at the City Stay hotel in Bow Road, east London on 2 and 3 March.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I apologise for intervening so early in my right hon. Friend's speech. He mentions Gatwick airport and the rail route the suspects took into central London, which are in my constituency. I appreciate that almost 50 million throughput passengers a year travel through Gatwick airport, but what assurances can be given that passengers and, indeed, my constituents who work at Gatwick airport will be kept safe from this appalling rogue and reckless action of foreign agents?

Mr Wallace: The assurance I can give my hon. Friend about this incident is that, throughout the whole process of the investigation as it has unfolded, we have sought expert scientific and public health advice to ensure that people who could have been at risk were not disregarded, whether or not they were in the threatened area. We felt that at Gatwick, for example, there was no threat to his constituents or the people who work there, but we made our decision by seeking the advice of our world experts in places such as the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory and Public Health England.

This also underlines an important point: when a hostile state is determined to try to use its full resources to penetrate another state, the challenge is much greater. The logistical support of that state in assisting its agents is significant. For example, these two individuals travelled on genuine Russian passports, making them harder to spot. There was clearly some attempt to create a legend to ensure that they circumvented our checks. This is

only speculative, but at the other end of the aeroplane journey the baggage checks were probably not, I should think, as good as they might have been.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Wallace: If I may just set the scene by pressing on a bit, I will happily give way later.

On 3 March, the two individuals travelled to Salisbury before returning to London after a few hours. We believe that the purpose of that was a recce. On 4 March, they returned to Salisbury by train, and they were in the immediate vicinity of the Skripals' house between 11.58 and 13.00 on that day. We believe that it was at that time they sprayed the deadly Novichok nerve agent on to the handle of the front door. That same afternoon, Sergei and Yulia Skripal left the house and travelled by car to the centre of Salisbury. After a meal and a walk around, they were taken ill at the centre and slipped into unconsciousness at 4.15 pm on 4 March.

As hospital staff and paramedics worked to save the lives of the Skripals, the two suspects left London and travelled to Heathrow, flying back to Moscow at 10.30 pm on 4 March on flight SU2585, leaving behind them a deadly trail. We should not forget that only the brave actions of police and NHS staff on that day ensured that the damage to that community was minimal. Because of the actions of the GRU agents, Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey fell gravely ill, and he ultimately bore the consequence of their reckless action. I am convinced that if it was not for the expertise in the hospital and the bravery of those in our blue-light services, who often acted with disregard for their own safety, we would have been reflecting today on a far worse situation.

Novichok is a deadly chemical nerve agent, and it was used in this attack. We believe that it was brought in in a counterfeit perfume bottle, in the packaging of a Nina Ricci bottle. That bottle was then recklessly discarded on the streets of Salisbury and had the potential to kill or injure dozens or hundreds of people. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has recently reported that, having tested it, it is confident that the liquid within the recovered perfume bottle had a very high level of purity.

Since the incident in March, some 250 detectives, led by SO15, have worked around the clock, trawling through 11,000 hours of CCTV and taking more than 1,400 statements. They have worked painstakingly and methodically to identify exactly which individuals are responsible and the methods they used to carry out the attack.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): The Minister, like the Prime Minister a few days ago, has today presented clear evidence linking this incident to the GRU and the Russian state. He has also pointed out how the attack was facilitated by the apparatus of the Russian state. Does he therefore agree that it would be appropriate to ask the Foreign Office to look again at expelling further Russian diplomats beyond those expelled already to degrade their ability to plan and execute such activities on our soil as well as the other espionage activities they conduct?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend makes a point in response to the horrific facts of this case. We of course seek to keep pressure on the malign activity of the Russian

state—to push it back, as the Prime Minister has said—and we will keep all options on the table for doing that. For now, we are working on a number of measures, to which I shall come later, to push back Russia's activities, and we are doing our best to degrade Russia's intelligence services.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): Given the crystal clear evidence of Russian state involvement in these attacks—indeed, in the masterminding of them—why have the Government reached the conclusion that the other deeply suspicious deaths of Russian dissidents and others on British soil should not be reinvestigated?

Mr Wallace: I read the BuzzFeed allegations about the 14 deaths that that report viewed as suspicious. We have re-examined those cases, with other people looking at them—rather than only the officers who initially did the investigations, we have peer-group looked at them—and I have tested the assurances that I have had. In those cases, the investigations themselves did not throw up anything that would currently lead us to be suspicious. At the same time, the investigations and actions were done properly. That does not detract from the fact that Russia clearly uses lethal force where it chooses and that that must be challenged where we find it.

The important thing to tell the House is that, having visited the investigation a number of times, I believe that it is absolutely clear that the United Kingdom is in a unique position to solve this issue. We used a network of expert police officers from the local forces of many Members present today. It was incredibly refreshing to visit the investigation and find police officers from Devon and Cornwall and from all over the country. We have used the counter-terrorism network to share our knowledge and expertise. I met officers who had worked on the Litvinenko case. Britain has a real depth of experience of investigations of this type, and we have some of the best people in the world with some of the best equipment in the world. I can reassure colleagues that, although this attack was horrendous, we should be really proud of what our police and intelligence services have achieved, and that has been built on successive Governments' investment in those organisations and the fact that, fundamentally, we do learn lessons from our past mistakes. Good organisations do that.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): Does the Minister agree that if we are to defend ourselves against threats such as the one we saw in Salisbury, we need to change the record, particularly with some Opposition Members and the scepticism that they have shown towards the work of our security services? It is about time that we realised that our security services are working for our national security. We should take their judgment seriously, not go on social media and rush to dismiss it.

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend is right. When we meet the people who do the job of keeping us safe every day, we find that they are honest, law-abiding, decent people of all backgrounds and all political persuasions who are determined to uphold this country's values, which include the rule of law and the protection of rights. It is unfair to doubt them in the way in which they are sometimes doubted in parts of the political arena, when it is often politicians who have made regretful decisions, rather than it being about the intelligence services' intelligence.

We have heard a number of supportive voices from both sides of the House, including from the Labour party and members of its Front-Bench team. I will say one thing about the leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). He has for many years challenged the Government of the day when our intelligence services have done something that he does not like, and he is allowed to do that. He has a record of that and he is proud of it, and there is nothing wrong with doing that. When the Russian intelligence services have done the same, he has somehow not yet been able to make the same challenge to the Government of Russia as he has historically made to the Government of Britain. That is where I would leave it; I think that is the best way to reflect on it. Apart from that, I do not doubt the Labour Front-Bench team's support of our police and blue-light agencies; nor do I doubt the wishes of Labour Members to support this investigation and to discuss it and the next measures to take, many of which they have supported. Labour should, though, think about calling out the responsibility for this attack. I think that is a fair position to take.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I hope that the Minister will follow my logic. A couple of weeks ago, it was widely reported that the head of MI5 had offered the Leader of the Opposition a detailed briefing on the threats that this country faces. Does the Minister know whether, after the Prime Minister's statement and what she said about the GRU's involvement, the Leader of the Opposition has decided to take up that very sensible offer from the head of MI5?

Mr Wallace: My right hon. Friend will understand that it would be wrong for me to detail conversations between our intelligence services and the Leader of the Opposition, our Prime Minister or anyone else. I regularly give briefs, in an open manner and on Privy Council terms, to some Opposition Members, including the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), and we have a full and honest discussion about things. I have never found the shadow Home Secretary wanting; she has always wanted to know and has always been engaged. I am not going to speculate about the Leader of the Opposition's relationships with the security services or anyone else; I am simply reflecting the fact that the people in our police and intelligence services are good people and they are doing the right thing. That does not mean that we do not hold them to account, because we do. The Intelligence and Security Committee does, along with everything else. The important thing about this event is that it was not an ad hoc, amateur event; it was the state-sanctioned use of a chemical weapon on our soil that led to the death of a British citizen and could have led to the deaths of many more. It is therefore unbelievable that we should have any doubt about calling people out when they are found. It is now in multicolour, and we can see all the presentations.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab) *rose*—

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Wallace: I give way first to the shadow Home Secretary.

Ms Abbott: On a point of information, I have certainly had a meeting with the head of MI5 on Privy Council terms. The Minister will not find us lacking in this debate in laying blame where blame should be laid.

Mr Wallace: I now give way to my right hon. Friend.

Anna Soubry: To go back to the point that my right hon. Friend has made so eloquently, as ever, many would argue—I certainly would—that it is not just about the Leader of the Opposition; it is part of the hard left's long history that they subscribe very quickly and far too easily to that conspiracy theory, which invariable means that they take the default position that all the brave men and women who work in our security forces so admirably, as my right hon. Friend has described, are wrong, and they act in a wrong way.

Mr Wallace: What I take from my right hon. Friend's point is that we should let the message come out from this debate that there is nothing wrong with working in our intelligence services and our police forces and stopping terrorism and espionage on our streets. It is a noble thing to do, and those who do it should not be hounded for it. I must say that her characterisation of the hard left or whatever may have been as it was in the 1980s and 1990s—there are certainly people like that from the Momentum movement in my Twitter feed—but I would add that the rules have changed in the 21st century. We see conspiracy theories among nationalists, peddling all sorts of things. We see the far right in Europe in league with some of Russia's friends and allies. The rules have changed: multimedia and social media have given volume to conspiracy theories. Trust is so important for us on both sides of the House, and we have to maintain that. I trust our judiciary, and I trust our leaders. We have to maintain trust.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): I thank the Minister for giving way. May I simply express the hope, through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we do not have a sectarian debate but recognise that we are facing a real threat to our country, and that that requires us to act collectively? The shadow Home Secretary has made Labour's position clear, and we should go forward from that.

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I am trying to be as pragmatic and as accurate as possible about my view. I made it clear what my view was of the particular statement by the Leader of the Opposition. I have also said that I do not characterise that as the collective view of the Labour party. We will see what the statements are, and they may be different from the response that we heard last week. But I want to move on. I said that that was the only political point I was going to make, because it was important, but I want to move on now to where we have got with the investigation.

Following the work of the police and the intelligence services, which identified these individuals, the Crown Prosecution Service concluded that there was sufficient basis on which to bring charges against the two men for the attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury on that day. The two men identified by police are also the prime suspects in the poisoning of Dawn Sturgess and Charlie Rowley. Our world-class experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at

Porton Down and the OPCW have confirmed that the exact same chemical nerve agent was used in both cases. The two incidents now form a single investigation, and there is no other line of inquiry.

The security and intelligence agencies have carried out their own investigations into the organisation behind the attack. Based on that work, the Government have concluded that the two individuals named by the police and the CPS are officers from the Russian military intelligence service, also known as the GRU, which is a highly disciplined organisation with a clear and effective chain of command.

This was not a rogue operation. The attack was almost certainly approved outside the GRU at a senior level of the Russian state. Although I cannot go into operational detail about the work of our security and intelligence agencies, I can say that this conclusion is based on a clear body of intelligence.

This was a despicable act in which a deadly and illegal nerve agent known as Novichok was used on the streets of Britain. I know the whole House will join me in recognising the remarkable resilience shown by the people of Salisbury in the face of this act. The Government stand ready to assist Salisbury in getting back to normal. We have released £7.5 million to support business and tourism in the town and a further £5 million to support the cost of policing. I know that, throughout this process, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) has been keenly and eagerly active in making sure that Salisbury, along with the county council, gets the resource and support it needs to deal with this.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I want to take the Minister back to how we counter the Russian threat to security in this country and elsewhere. As Secretary of State for Energy in March 2015, I used powers never used before to force the sale by LetterOne of its North sea oil assets. This was in the context of Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia. Following the terrorist outrage in Salisbury, are the Government looking at using powers such as unexplained wealth orders to investigate the cronies of Putin whose presence here brings our country into disrepute and does not help the fight against Russian aggression?

Mr Wallace: I will get to my response later on, but the right hon. Gentleman makes the point that we have to deal with Russian state aggression across a wide front. We have said that we will use all legal powers within the rule of law to push back the malign action of the Russian state. The Criminal Finances Act 2017, which had cross-party support, gives us tools to deal with illicit finance. It is a fact that some of the two biggest flows of illicit finance into this country come from Russia and China. Therefore, it is obvious that we will be looking in those areas and making sure that we deal with such illicit activity, but we also look elsewhere. I cannot comment on individual investigations, but where we see a break in the law, whether it be illicit finance or any other type of malign activity, we will act using those powers and push it back.

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): The Minister is making a very eloquent statement. Will he confirm that some of the most important lessons learned are now

being incorporated in the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill that is currently going through the House of Commons?

Mr Wallace: The Bill went through only yesterday with a large majority. I was disappointed that not all parties could support it. Labour supported it, and I enjoyed our going through the Lobby together. I urge the Liberal Democrats to think again and not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Clearly, there were issues that not everyone agrees with. I do not think that voting entirely against the Bill would have helped our security or indeed the businesses that could have been compensated by Pool Re for loss of trade as a result of terrorism. Nevertheless, it is why, in that Bill, we have the measures against a hostile state. We wanted to mirror what we have in schedule 3 as what we have in schedule 7 to the Terrorism Act 2000 and give our police and ports that power to examine individuals.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Is the Minister aware that the Danish Government recently announced an 11-point plan to deal with malign Russian influence? Many of those points were among the 10 items that I have discussed with him and that I wrote to him about last week. I do not pretend to be a font of all knowledge on this—absolutely not—but I am merely trying to present good ideas to the Minister to use. Will he meet me to discuss them, and can he give me any indication of where any of those points may be of benefit, specifically the one in relation to the standing group or organisation that could look into state subversion in the UK of both official and unofficial, state and non-state, kinds?

Mr Wallace: I have spoken to my hon. Friend. He has not only considerable experience in this area, but some interesting and refreshing ideas that I have discussed with him and that I am happy to discuss further with him. He makes another point, which is that if we are to respond to any hybrid threat, whether that is from Russia or any other hostile state, we need to be as co-ordinated and nimble as the people doing the planning. One of the unfortunate characteristics of some of the hostile states is that they do not really have collective Cabinet responsibility. They are quite able just to decide that they will all do something and everyone is told to do it. At the very least, we must be more nimble and co-ordinated. Our work in that area is ongoing. What I can say to him is that because, over the decades, investment has gone into the intelligence services, our specialist police and, increasingly, the National Economic Crime Centre, we are in a position where we have effectively funded all the actors on the stage. They have the capability, but we now need to make sure that the direction of their work is improved. That is what we work at every single day. I will perhaps be able to say more about it to my hon. Friend at another time as the work is currently in progress.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Wallace: I am sorry, but I really must press on.

Nick Smith: It is on that point about co-ordination.

Mr Wallace: We will get to that in a second.

I wish to express my gratitude to all the emergency services, and also to the staff at Salisbury District Hospital. It must have been very frightening for them suddenly to find on their wards a weapons-grade lethal nerve agent and, at the same time, the world's press—not the local press, not the national press, but the world's press—on their doorstep. They also had to put up with some rather odd behaviour by a Russian television crew who went down there probably to just cause trouble. Those hospital staff had to go to work and to live with not knowing whether they had come into contact with something. It must have been incredibly worrying. They have behaved brilliantly as has the leader of their hospital. I also want to place it on the record that the joint working with the DSTL, which was, by chance, down the road, really made a massive difference. I am sure that it gave confidence to the nurses, the doctors and the other staff at that hospital that they were in good hands and that answers would be reached.

Nick Smith: I want to pursue exactly that point. First, may I support the Minister's remarks on dealing with this Russian state aggression that has brought this terrible nerve agent into our country? Will he tell us a bit more about the public health costs and the extra public health measures that may now need to be introduced to deal with this alarming development?

Mr Wallace: I was going to come to that, and we should also thank the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which basically took over the decontamination of the site when the crime scenes were released and worked continuously with Government scientists and international experts to ensure that we got it right. We will jointly fund the decontamination costs. Part of the support package for the local authority will include that, and obviously there will also be internal money going out, but the work is being funded.

Again, this goes back to the United Kingdom's expertise and knowledge, but from about 2010 we already had in place something called the chemical, biological or radioactive response framework. It was an easy-use, off-the-shelf guide to what to do and where to get scientific advice—Members who have sat on the Science and Technology Committee will know that it held an inquiry about 18 months ago into whether that advice is shared correctly through local government—so the network and the structures were in place. Certainly I have never felt that DEFRA or the local authority wanted for support. There are lessons to be learned. I went down to visit DSTL and the laboratories last Monday. We have seen a nerve agent that we have not seen before—it is not something that I think any of us would have predicted 10 months ago would be on our streets—and that will feed into our ongoing work on decontamination and detection capability. We are confident that DSTL and our aerospace sector have some of the finest minds in detection, and we will continue to invest in ensuring that we keep that.

Following the incident in March, we took action against Russia with one of the toughest packages of measures that the UK has levied against another state in three decades. We have expelled 23 Russian diplomats who have been identified as undeclared Russian intelligence officers. In doing so, we have helped to degrade their capability in the UK for some years to come. Twenty-seven

[Mr Wallace]

other countries, as well as NATO, joined us in collective solidarity and, in recognition of the shared threat that we face, expelled 153 intelligence officers, the largest collective expulsion ever. Mr Putin should be under no illusion: the solidarity shown that day by the international community in response to the actions of the GRU has not waned.

In the United Kingdom, we have introduced schedule 3 to the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill, which had its Third Reading last night and has moved to the other House, to allow examining officers to stop, question, search and detain a person at UK ports and the border area in Northern Ireland to determine whether the person appears to be, or has been, engaged in hostile state activity. I was also pleased that Parliament passed the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018, which was taken through earlier this year by the Foreign Office and gives us powers to sanction individuals or entities for a wide range of purposes, including those who fail to comply with, or are in breach of, international human rights law.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I absolutely join the Minister in welcoming the so-called Magnitsky amendment to the sanctions Act, but in the last few years, five other countries have passed and implemented Magnitsky legislation, which has led to 79 named Russian citizens being sanctioned. Those countries are the USA, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Canada. It has been four months since the Magnitsky amendment was passed in this House, yet the Government have done absolutely nothing to implement the legislation. Will the Minister please explain why the Government are so reluctant to take action and implement the Magnitsky amendment?

Mr Wallace: We are not reluctant, and I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's examples that are European member states, because he will know, with his European background, that sanctions are implemented at a European level. As a member of the European Union, we have always sought to implement our sanctions as the European Union. We stand ready to use the new powers on sanctions after Brexit, where we can.

Stephen Kinnock *rose*—

Mr Wallace: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be able to give me a legal clarification.

Stephen Kinnock: I would respectfully point out to the Minister that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are member states of the European Union.

Mr Wallace: Maybe the hon. Gentleman can explain how together they can lay a sanction, whereas the policy has always been at a European level—

Stephen Kinnock: They are EU member states; they've done it.

Mr Wallace: Well, let's see.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): There are three routes to sanctions, it seems to me. The first is through a collective operation with the European Union—it issues an order in Council that this Government can apply as a regulation the next day. The second is through the

United Nations, which recently named, for example, Burmese generals, who we should be able to sanction quite separately from the European route. The third route is under the new legislation. Will my right hon. Friend at least confirm that work is in train to ensure that everything has been done to allow the Government to unilaterally sanction named individuals under that system on 30 March 2019? That message would go a long way towards discouraging dirty money from coming into this country.

Mr Wallace: We have made it very clear that we will use the powers set out in the Act. I am not going to say that we are about to fire a starting gun or say, "Here's the list." That will be for the Foreign Secretary and the Government collectively. We now have the power to act through our sanctions Act. We will not hesitate to use it, and there is more to come. I am trying to ensure that the legislation coming before the House over the next few months will include serious crime as a factor for laying a sanction, because it is important to see what the Americans have done around cyber-crime and serious organised criminals in that space.

Sir Edward Davey: Will the Minister give way?

Stephen Kinnock: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wallace: No, I am going to move on.

We introduced many provisions in the Criminal Finances Act 2017. They included asset-freezing orders, of which we have used many, and unexplained wealth orders, which we used within six weeks against what I shall describe as an overseas individual—obviously the court decides how much I can tell hon. Members about individuals—and there are more in the pipeline. I know that Members are impatient to know why we cannot just issue lots of unexplained wealth orders. The simple reason is that the provision became law at the beginning of this year. We used it very quickly and we have to work it through the judiciary. At the high end, the oligarchs and their type use lawyers, and lots of them, to test these things. The wheels grind and there are more orders in the pipeline, but we have to ensure that this is tested, that the judiciary gets used to it and that we learn from the first use—which, by the way, has gone well to date.

Sir Edward Davey: The Minister is absolutely right; I found that the legal issues around the use of such orders requires a little bit of time, and I have sympathy with him on that point. However, can he at least reassure the House that the Government are absolutely determined to use unexplained wealth orders and other powers to chase down dirty money and stop Britain being used as a haven for it?

Mr Wallace: There is a reason why my title has changed from Minister of State for Security to Minister for Security and Economic Crime. The Prime Minister said not so long ago in a speech that she is determined to step up the response to illicit finance in this country and target those individuals. We have put some resource behind that. We have put in place the National Economic Crime Centre, and we are absolutely targeting and driving investigations in that area in a much more

aggressive way than in the past. I have been very clear with the National Crime Agency and the other agencies that this is about targeted cases and sending messages, but it is also about going after facilitators—those who allow those crooks to enjoy their money in London. We must ensure that we deal with them all—not just the far-distant crime baron, but the smart, perhaps sharp-suited individuals who think they are just helping and not really engaged, but who in fact are absolutely corrupting our system, littering our streets with dirty money and then allowing those crooks to enjoy it.

Mr Seely: It is just a minor point, but when it comes to all the lawyers facilitating the work of these oligarchs who are testing and playing the system—they are very aggressive in the United States, as well as in London and elsewhere—should we not be gently highlighting the fact that these companies that are taking on significant Russian players are being used to test the law? They have a very ethical basis for doing so, but at the same time they are taking an awful lot of money from our adversaries and enemies to learn how to game the system.

Mr Wallace: Tempting as my hon. Friend's suggestion is, vilifying people who carry out the role of defending plaintiffs is not how we do business in this country. We are not Russia. Reputation is clearly important to some of those companies, and no doubt they will bear that in mind. However, everyone has a right to a defence. It is up to us to make sure that the law is in the right place to deal with this.

I fully expect that in some of these cases we will be successful, while in others we will probably try but not be successful. That is partly because of the myriad facilitators, shell companies, foreign jurisdictions and corrupt jurisdictions that this money comes through. One challenge is that in some cases the money is already cleaned when it comes here. It is not being washed here; it is cleaned, has come into the system, and has bought nice houses and everything else. That is why we squeeze at one end with the unexplained wealth orders and the asset-cleaning orders, which have also been used quite successfully recently, and then, at the other end, we have better regulation through the use of the suspicious activity reports regime. That regime has, for far too long, been in need of reform to make sure that people are making those reports when they see suspicious activities. I see some horrendous stories where people have handed over hundreds of thousands of pounds in cash and people have not thought that it is remotely suspicious, so have not made any report. People have bought houses with cash, and somehow some estate agents have not thought that that is remotely suspicious. There is an obligation—a legal obligation—on them to report these issues. Funnily enough, when we follow up on those cash purchases, they are, more often than not, a dodgy purchase.

Sir Edward Davey: The Minister is describing a situation where the people who wish to do our country harm are very creative and have very expensive advisers to quickly get round the rules. Can he assure this House that the economic crime unit that he described in a previous answer to me will, within the law, be as creative as possible to chase down these people?

Mr Wallace: I can give the right hon. Gentleman that assurance. The key point about the unit being part of the National Crime Agency, within a policing and intelligence-led environment, is that a target-led investigation is often about bringing to bear more than just criminal charges. It is often about disruption and discouragement—using the whole paraphernalia of the state to make life difficult, to recover assets, or to persuade people to go elsewhere. It has to be about everything, partly because of the scale of this. It does not matter how well we fund it—the scale of illicit finance throughout the world is so large that we have to pick our targets well and develop the case around them.

I have no doubt, though, that in dealing with illicit finance, especially illicit finance that has come here from Russia, for example, the National Crime Agency has the right people with the right skill set to deliver, and the right leadership under its director general, Lynne Owens. We have already had arrests and progressed a number of cases, and I think that over the next few months, or maybe years, we will see some results. The message has certainly already gone out in the City that, through the use of the unexplained wealth orders and having them on our statute book, we are stepping up and taking this seriously. In my conversations with the United States Government, I find that they are delighted to engage with us and to help us in finding international money launderers. We are helping each other to make sure that people do not hide in different jurisdictions.

As the Prime Minister said last week, we have repeatedly asked the Russians to account for what happened in Salisbury in March. I am afraid that I have to report that our requests were met with obfuscation and lies. They responded with disinformation on an industrial scale. They tried to blame terrorists, our international partners, and the United Kingdom itself. They have accused “English gentlemen” of killing those whom they consider to be beneath them, as one of the theories of what happened. They have tried to blame the future mother-in-law of Yulia Skripal. They have even tried to blame the Prime Minister herself. This deluge of disinformation merely reinforces their guilt and does them no favours whatsoever.

James Heappey: It is clear from the way in which the Russian Government have responded that they show no remorse whatsoever. Will the Minister therefore suggest to colleagues in the Foreign Office that they encourage Germany and the EU to revisit their enthusiasm for the Nord Stream project, because that would bring with it the dual advantage of diminishing Russian leverage over our friends and allies in eastern Europe while also hitting Putin very hard indeed in his bank account?

Mr Wallace: It is just good energy policy for any country not to be dependent on one single source, either because of political exposure or just because of differences on energy. It is really important that we always make sure that our energy policy is diverse. Obviously, our European partners have tried to do the same, and I would urge them to continue with that.

Sir Edward Davey: As Secretary of State for Energy, working at the EU Energy Council, I helped the European Commission to draft Europe's energy security strategy, which is very much aimed at reducing Europe's dependence

[Sir Edward Davey]

on imports of Russian fossil fuels. That is good for climate change and good for security. Can the Minister assure the House that after Brexit, that level of influence on Europe's energy policy will be there in some other way, because by being at the table we were able to hit Putin in the pocket very effectively?

Mr Wallace: I think that, in the middle of the negotiations, that is what we are trying to do. Our relationship with Europe post Brexit is not just about taking or giving—it is still going to be a partnership. Our security will be a partnership. Our relationships with NATO and many of the countries in NATO will be a partnership. On strategic issues like energy, it is in the interests of both the European continent, as it will be then, and us to have that strategic dialogue. We will need each other for energy policy whether we are in or out of the European Union. I would certainly share the right hon. Gentleman's view that we must continue to work at delivering that.

This was a chemical weapons attack that left four people fighting for their lives and one innocent woman dead. I know that the thoughts of the House will be with the friends and family of Dawn Sturgess, in particular. We will never stop pursuing justice for Dawn Sturgess and other victims, nor will we ever stop pursuing the people responsible for this malign attack. As the Prime Minister told this House last week, were the two suspects within our jurisdiction, there would be a clear basis in law for their arrest for murder.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I thank the Minister very much for the speech he is giving. I am sure that the House will be aware of the remarks made by President Putin today in saying that these are not criminals but citizens. Does he agree that if the President is so assured of that statement, he might want to encourage those individuals to come to the UK for trial?

Mr Wallace: I believe in the British justice system, and if those individuals are innocent, they will be acquitted. I have every faith in that, so I would urge the President to hand them over for a trial. They are suspects and they are innocent until proven guilty.

We have obtained a European arrest warrant and submitted an Interpol red notice so that if these individuals leave Russia in future, they can be apprehended and brought back to the UK to face justice. We have not made a formal extradition request, because we have learned from experience, following the murder of Alexander Litvinenko, that such a request would be futile. The UK does not have an extradition treaty with Russia, and the Russian constitution prohibits extradition of its nationals. But should either of these individuals ever again travel outside Russia, we will take every possible step to have them detained, to extradite them, and to bring them to face justice here in the United Kingdom.

As the Prime Minister also said, we have taken action against the GRU itself. The Salisbury incident is but the latest example in recent history of Russian malign activity in which the GRU has played a key part. The GRU has been involved in the botched coup in Montenegro and the illegal annexation of Crimea. Last year,

we determined that GRU hackers were responsible for the indiscriminate NotPetya cyber-attack, which caused some £15 million-worth of damage in the United Kingdom. We exposed its despicable use of chemical weapons in Salisbury, we have exposed its operatives and its methods, and we will share this information with our allies in recognition of the shared threat we face. It is important to remember that the message to our international partners is that if the GRU can do it here, it can do it anywhere—in those people's countries as well. People who are perhaps tempted to think that Russia is going to be their friend should reflect on the actions it took this year in this country with a nerve agent. We will use every means possible to counter the threat by the GRU, both covert and overt, to ensure that the threat it poses to the United Kingdom is reduced.

The use of deadly, illegal chemical weapons on our soil is part of a pattern of behaviour: Russia's actions in Crimea, the Donbass and Montenegro; repeated violations of the national airspace of several European countries; sustained cyber-espionage and election interference; and a Russian-made missile belonging to the Russian army launched from territory held by Russian-backed separatists, bringing down civilian airliner MH17.

Mr Seely: Is the Minister aware that the senior Russian general in eastern Ukraine at the time was a GRU general whose code name was Orion, and he was exposed in an investigation in Holland a few months ago as being the senior GRU officer responsible for that?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend makes the point that the GRU's fingerprints have been all over these types of events. MH17 was a civilian airliner travelling between Schiphol and Asia, and 200-plus people—women and children going on holiday—were blown out of the sky. It is an outrageous thing to have happened to anyone, and it seems that Russia does not want to bear responsibility for any of that. This is way outside any international norm—it is on another planet from any international norm—and it is time that we said, "Enough is enough."

Russia has now started to undermine international institutions and degrade the structures and treaties that keep us safe. Russia is failing to act as a responsible member of the international community—one that has the privilege and responsibility of a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The Russian state must account for the despicable use of chemical weapons by the GRU on British soil. It must recognise that there can be no place in any civilised international order for the kind of barbaric activity we saw in Salisbury in March.

Regrettably, there are some who repeatedly flout the established rules of international conduct, their flagrant disregard threatening the entire international rules-based system. We have acted to protect our citizens and allies against the malign activities of those who disregard international norms and to send a message to all those who would contravene the international rules-based system: you cannot and will not act with impunity.

Detering unacceptable actions by Russia and other malign actors is critical to our collective security. Recent joint action using transparent, multilateral mechanisms such as the OPCW demonstrates the strength of our shared commitment to tackle the threat of malign state activity and to reinforce the global rules-based system. The June European Council endorsed a comprehensive

package to tackle hybrid threats, including the creation of a new chemical weapons sanction regime. We will continue to work with our European partners for its speedy adoption. The US has announced additional sanctions against Russia for the Salisbury attack, and in June, the G7 agreed in Canada a rapid response mechanism to share intelligence on hostile state activity. NATO has subsequently strengthened its collective deterrence, including through a new cyber-operations centre.

As the Prime Minister has said, we will push for new sanctions regimes against those responsible for gross human rights violations and cyber-attacks, as well as robustly enforcing the existing regime against Russia. We will also work with our partners to build the OPCW's capacity to attribute chemical weapons in Syria and more widely.

Malign actors have, for some time, been using a range of methods to undermine the international norms and laws, and our security and prosperity, and it depends on us to make sure we take a stand. They are trying to destabilise our advanced democracies, open societies and free economies. Those methods range from conventional military interventions to acts of non-military aggression in the form of disinformation and cyber-attacks. All these methods are designed to destabilise by sowing chaos, fear, uncertainty, division and mistrust.

In the face of such behaviour, the international community must continue to unite and to defend the laws, norms and institutions that safeguard our citizens. We must maintain and build on our strong alliances with those who share our values, stand shoulder to shoulder with our many partners and allies, send clear messages to malign actors that unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated, and remain resolute, determined and united against those who seek to divide us.

2.34 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I thank the Security Minister for the way he has opened the debate.

The Prime Minister said on 5 September:

"based on a body of intelligence, the Government have concluded that the two individuals named by the police and CPS are officers from the Russian military intelligence service, also known as the GRU. The GRU is a highly disciplined organisation with a well-established chain of command, so this was not a rogue operation. It was almost certainly also approved outside the GRU at a senior level of the Russian state."—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2018; Vol. 646, c. 168.]

The Opposition accept that analysis. I know that the shadow Home Secretary is grateful for the briefing given by the Security Minister on Privy Council terms earlier this week.

Mr Seely: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his generosity on that point. He says that the Opposition now accept that, but—this goes back to a point made by the shadow Home Secretary—they did not at the time. The Opposition were specifically putting out lines that were very similar to those being put out by the Russian state at the time.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I totally reject the suggestion that we were somehow putting out lines similar to those of the Russian state. With regard to implications that the hon. Gentleman is trying to make about the Leader of the Opposition, I have looked carefully at what the

Leader of the Opposition and his spokesperson have said about this in recent weeks, and it is pretty clear. His spokesperson has said:

"very strong evidence points to Russian state culpability, and obviously Jeremy condemns the Russian state for that culpability."

How much clearer could that be? The Leader of the Opposition said on 26 March:

"Based on the analysis conducted by Government scientists, there can be little doubt that the nerve agent used in this attack was military-grade Novichok of a type manufactured by Russia."—[*Official Report*, 26 March 2018; Vol. 638, c. 559.]

He said on 5 September:

"The use of military nerve agents on the streets of Britain is an outrage and beyond reckless."

He also said:

"No Government anywhere can or should put itself above international law. The Prime Minister previously outlined that the type of nerve agent used was identified as having been manufactured in Russia. The use of this nerve agent is a clear violation of the chemical weapons convention and, therefore, a breach of international law."—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2018; Vol. 646, c. 170-171.]

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman believes it was sensible to suggest that we send a sample of this material to Russia, as if Russia would receive it and say, "Oh yes, it's a fair cop—this is one of ours. We did it."

Nick Thomas-Symonds: What is an entirely sensible suggestion is to follow the procedure set out by the OPCW, and in doing it ourselves and by ourselves adhering to those rules, we are setting an example to the rest of the world about how to deal with the suspected use of chemical weapons.

James Heapey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I will give way once more, and then I need to make some progress.

James Heapey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for setting out so clearly the views of the Front Benchers of Her Majesty's Opposition. Would he like to take this opportunity to point out that the hon. Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson) is clearly saying something with which nobody on the Opposition Front Bench agrees and that his views are very much alien to Labour party policy?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson) is not a shadow Front Bencher, the last time I checked. It is up to Back Benchers on both sides of the House to put their views as they see fit—[*Interruption.*] Looking at the Back Benches today, I look forward to the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock).

On 4 March, Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were admitted to hospital after emergency services responded to reports of them both being in an extremely serious condition. Mr Skripal and his daughter were left hospitalised for weeks. Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey also fell ill after attending the incident, and all three were later discharged from hospital. I pay tribute to Detective Sergeant Bailey for his fortitude and endurance in undergoing medical treatment. I also pay tribute to all the staff at the Salisbury District Hospital. The hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen) is in his place. I hope

[Nick Thomas-Symonds]

that he will pass that on and pass on the gratitude of both sides of the House for what the staff did in those very difficult weeks.

The Prime Minister confirmed that the poisoning agent used on the Skripals was part of a group of nerve agents known as Novichok. A further 48 individuals were also assessed in hospital in relation to the incident. We of course also think of all of them and of what they went through at that time.

Four months later, on 30 June, Charlie Rowley and Dawn Sturgess were also admitted to hospital, having been found unwell at a property in Amesbury. This only goes to show the abomination of using nerve agents in this way. They cannot be targeted. They leave a trail. Clearly, that is what seems to have happened in the case of Charlie Rowley and Dawn Sturgess.

Having been admitted to hospital in a critical condition, Dawn Sturgess sadly died on 8 July, making her the only victim to have died as a result of exposure to this deadly nerve agent. The thoughts of everyone in this House are with her family and friends. I think we would all agree that a needless death has occurred on the streets of this country. After her death, a formal murder inquiry was launched. In July, the Home Secretary confirmed that tests at Porton Down confirmed that both Mr Rowley and Ms Sturgess were poisoned by the same type of Novichok substance used to poison the Skripals. As I have already said clearly, and as the Prime Minister has set out, strong evidence points towards direct Russian culpability and we condemn the Russian state for that culpability.

I want to say a word about the police and the intelligence services. With 1,400 statements and more than 11,000 hours of CCTV—and a report from the OPCW that I mentioned in response to an intervention—we commend the police, the security services and the UK's colleagues at the OPCW, as well as the people of Salisbury, for their patience, co-operation and fortitude in these very difficult circumstances. Following consideration of that evidence, the Crown Prosecution Service and Scotland Yard announced on 5 September that sufficient evidence had been collected to charge two Russian nationals, Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov. I choose my words very carefully as I refer to those two individual suspects. In her statement to the House on 5 September, the Prime Minister also stated that the same two men are the prime suspects in the case of Dawn Sturgess and Charlie Rowley.

We understand, as the Security Minister has set out, that on 2 March those two men travelled from Moscow to London on Russian passports. Two days later, the nerve agent Novichok was sprayed on the front door of the Skripals' home in Salisbury, Wiltshire, and it seems that the individuals returned to Russia the same day. The police believe the pair arrived at Gatwick and stayed in the City Stay hotel in Bow Road, east London. It is believed, as the Security Minister has set out, that a modified perfume bottle was used to bring the nerve agent into this country and to spray the door. It appears that Dawn Sturgess and Charlie Rowley were later exposed after handling a contaminated container.

The Prime Minister has indicated that, although there is no extradition treaty in place with Russia, as has already been mentioned in this debate, she has none the

less issued an Interpol red notice and taken advantage of the European arrest warrant. The Security Minister and I debated this in the context of the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill last night. We of course all hope that, after 29 March 2019, the European arrest warrant will still be valid and that the Government will have negotiated a position where that is the case.

The attack in Salisbury was an appalling act of violence. Nerve agents are abominable in any war and it is utterly reckless to have used them in a civilian environment in this way. In the words of the shadow Home Secretary in July:

“We cannot allow the streets of ordinary British towns and communities to become killing fields for state actors.”—[*Official Report*, 5 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 537.]

The Security Minister has already set out the behaviour of the Russian state during the course of the investigation. Russia has consistently failed to answer the questions put to it by the international community. It has responded with obstinacy and mocking, which I suggest demonstrates a lack of respect for the gravitas of this situation. The language it has used is not the language of a state dedicated to helping to shed light on the events that have happened.

The use of this agent on the streets of Britain is shocking. The exposure to military grade nerve agents by a foreign state is a reckless, dangerous and egregious breach of international law. Opposition Members believe that it is incumbent on all states to act within international law and with respect for human rights.

Mr Wallace: I recognise the point that the hon. Gentleman made about condemning the Russian Government. I would like to put on record the last statement by the Leader of the Opposition in his response to the statement last week, which was an opportunity to condemn the Russian state. I have just reread the response. There is condemnation about the act and the reckless use of a nerve agent and so on, but the closest I can find to a condemnation of the Government of Russia is the final line, which says that

“we will support any reasonable action to bring those responsible to justice and to take further action against Russia for its failure to co-operate with this investigation.”—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2018; Vol. 646, c. 172.]

What I do not see is a condemnation of the Russian Government for this act in Salisbury. I ask the hon. Gentleman to make it clear that it is his party's position and his leader's position that they condemn the Government of Russia for this act.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am quite happy to do that. When I set out the statements by the Leader of the Opposition, I was quoting both his words following the Prime Minister's statement and indeed what his spokesperson said on his behalf. I will read again—I have already read it once to the House—what the Leader of the Opposition's spokesperson said on 6 September, the day after the *Hansard* extract to which the Security Minister referred:

“It's clear now that very strong evidence points to Russian state culpability, and obviously Jeremy condemns the Russian state for that culpability.”

It could not be any clearer. That is what my right hon. Friend said through his spokesperson. There it is.

Mr Wallace: He could have said it in the statement.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Well, that is the position. I have read out the position pretty clearly. It is the second time I have done so. I say to the Security Minister: we worked in a consensual way on the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill and I hope that we can continue to do that in our response to this terrible incident and send out a very clear message that we are united in the measures that need to be taken to keep our country safe.

The expulsion of the diplomats has already been mentioned in the discussion in this House. They were identified by the Prime Minister as undeclared intelligence officers. This also led to the amendment of the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill that—

Stephen Kinnock *rose—*

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Stephen Kinnock: Continue, Sir. You are just gearing up.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I will continue the point.

There are increasing checks on private flights, customs and freight, and the development of new legislation to tackle hostile state activity. The Security Minister will be aware that we have been discussing that throughout the passage of the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill. Indeed, I and the shadow Home Secretary both voted in favour of the Bill on Third Reading last night. As the Security Minister well knows, we of course have reservations about a number of things—some of them we have resolved, and some I hope to resolve before the Bill appears in the other place—but both I and the shadow Home Secretary voted in favour of the principle of updating our laws and of providing protections against hostile state activity. I will come back to some of those measures.

Stephen Kinnock *rose—*

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Stephen Kinnock: If my hon. Friend is not going to say more about the Magnitsky amendment—[*Interruption.*] As he will be saying more about it, I will allow him to continue.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The suspense as I wait for my hon. Friend's intervention is starting to overwhelm me, but I will continue.

The Opposition are of course pleased with the solidarity that has been forthcoming from the international community and with the action taken in support of the UK position. I again make it clear that we on these Benches will back any further reasonable and effective action—whether against Russia as a state or the GRU as an organisation. I now turn to those actions.

Following the poisoning of the Skripals, the Prime Minister promised in March to develop new legislative powers to harden defences against hostile state activity. The amendments, clauses and schedules to the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill make particular provision on that. The Opposition believe in strong powers and strong safeguards, and we have sought to ensure that they are included during the passage of the

Bill. The powers are now there. I hope and trust that they will go through the other place, come back to this House and get on to the statute book later in the year so that they can be used to deal with these types of situations.

In her September statement, the Prime Minister confirmed that, in addition to those border powers, the G7 have agreed to share intelligence pertaining to hostile state activity via a rapid response mechanism; that the EU has agreed a package to tackle hybrid threats; and that NATO has strengthened its collective deterrence via a new cyber-operations centre.

Cyber is obviously an important part of how we deal with this issue. I have visited GCHQ and seen some of the work that goes on. The Opposition will continue to make the case for that work to be appropriately funded and that the capacity must be there to act as we need to. America has also announced additional sanctions against Russia in the light of the Salisbury attack, and, as I said a moment ago, support from the international community to back UK action is welcome on both sides of the House.

I turn to the Magnitsky amendment and other issues. In March, the shadow Chancellor talked about the need to tackle the “global laundromat” operation, in which immense sums of money obtained from criminal activity are laundered here. The Security Minister made the point, which I totally accept, that the money may well have been cleaned before it arrives on these shores. None the less, we have to do all we can to implement the measures that have been identified. We are pleased that the Government accepted the Magnitsky amendment; it is important to have the powers to seize assets when we believe that there is a situation with a corrupt foreign official or other matters that require action.

The Security Minister also spoke, on the radio earlier this week, about unexplained wealth orders, which are an important part of our weaponry. He is indefatigable and will be here to wind up as well as having opened this debate. Will he clarify how many unexplained wealth orders have been used so far, whether they have been used specifically in respect of Russian nationals and the extent to which he intends to press their use in future?

Stephen Kinnock: The action being taken on money laundering is, of course, very important. However, the Magnitsky amendment relates specifically to violations of human rights. I urge my hon. Friend to take this opportunity to ask the Minister to accept, during his winding-up speech—on the record, from the Dispatch Box—that there is no reason whatever why the United Kingdom cannot take unilateral national action on the basis of the Magnitsky amendment.

Clearly, we would like action to be taken at an EU-wide level, but the fact that Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have all taken unilateral action, implementing their Magnitsky legislation, clearly demonstrates that there is no reason why the United Kingdom cannot do the same. Could we have an explanation of why EU membership has been used as an excuse for total inaction—it is now four months since the Magnitsky amendment was passed? The Government could simply take the list of Russian citizens who have been sanctioned by those other countries under their Magnitsky legislation and use that as a starting point.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend asks a sensible question and then makes a sensible, practical suggestion about what the Government could do. The Security Minister has heard the point made by my hon. Friend, who made the same point in an intervention on the Minister. If the Minister addressed that issue during his winding-up speech, that would be useful for both sides of the House.

If the Baltic states that my hon. Friend referred to are able as EU members to take unilateral action, why does the Security Minister feel that the UK cannot follow suit? Also, if action has already been taken by EU member states against specific individuals, why can the UK not do the same? If the Minister addressed that in his closing speech, that would be welcome on both sides of the House.

I turn to Wiltshire police, the local police force. It is estimated that the response to the Salisbury attack has involved more than £7 million in additional costs alone for the force; the figure may be higher than that. I understand that the Government have offered some additional sums to cover the costs—I have seen the figure of £1.6 million—but do they propose to offer any additional money beyond that to Wiltshire police?

The Opposition have always said that we cannot have security on the cheap. The Security Minister often refers to the counter-terror budget, but the reality is that we cannot see that in isolation. When terror incidents happen on our streets, they always draw in mainstream policing resources.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The most important factor in anti-terror policing is local intelligence, which often helps the police to do their job better. To help to facilitate that local intelligence they need funding, but we all know that police forces are underfunded. What does my hon. Friend think about that?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Community police are the eyes and ears for our intelligence about what is going on in our streets. Cutting 21,000 police officers clearly has an impact on capacity. I urge the Minister to speak to the police Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Prior to this debate, there was an urgent question in which the issue of police numbers was repeatedly raised on both the Opposition and Government sides of the House. I urge the Security Minister to press the Chancellor for more money for our overstretched police.

I have set out that we will back any further reasonable and effective actions, either against the Russian state or the GRU as an organisation. I should also say that we have no quarrel with the Russian people—of course we do not. Many questions, however, need answers, and those answers can come only from the highest echelons of the Russian state.

2.58 pm

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I start by thanking the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) for the robustness and clarity of his condemnation of the Russian Government for their part in these outrages. It would be wrong for us to pry into private grief, but what he said from the Dispatch Box bore very little resemblance to what his leader said during the statement

two weeks ago. That, of course, was corrected by his spokesman afterwards, but at the time he used weaselly words. I thank and congratulate the hon. Gentleman for laying out the real stance of the Labour party: that it strongly condemns the Russian Government for this appalling outrage on the streets of Salisbury.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to slightly rephrase his description of the words used by the Leader of the Opposition.

James Gray: Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker; I should have said that I was quoting from *Hansard*: my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) used the word “weaselly” about that particular statement. If he was incorrect, alongside him I apologise for that. Even if the statement were weaselly, I perhaps should not have said that. I apologise, of course, and withdraw the remark.

I have the very good fortune to be able to speak for all the people of Wiltshire, for the very simple reason that I have the very good fortune not to have been noticed by those who make appointments and am therefore not a Minister. All the other Members in the county of Wiltshire—all seven of us, leaving aside my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), who will be joining us very shortly—are Ministers and so are not able to speak in this debate. I hope that I can speak on their behalf. It is very nice to see two of my hon. Friends from Wiltshire on the Front Bench, my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), who has recently become a Government Whip, and of course my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen), who has done magnificent work in the aftermath of this appalling outrage in his constituency. I hope that anything I say about his constituency will not be incorrect in any way. I am sure he will correct me afterwards if it is. He has done huge work. I hope to be able to speak for the people of Wiltshire as a whole on this one occasion by virtue of my strength as a Back Bench.

I agree with what my right hon. Friend the Minister said about Russia and security—I agree with what the Labour Front-Bench spokesman said, too—but I hope you will understand, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I speak largely on local Wiltshire issues, rather than on the broader security issue. I may touch, just briefly, on Russia a little bit later.

The first thing I think we should do, and it has been done by most speakers throughout the past couple of weeks, is pay enormous tribute to the emergency services in Wiltshire, in particular the ambulance service, the Odstock Hospital workers and the police, who did such a superb job both on the occasion itself—on the two occasions, I should say—and in the aftermath. We now know that Novichok was used and that it was localised. We now know there were only two outbreaks. At the time, however, it must have seemed to the police and NHS workers that it was quite possible that this was a huge appalling chemical incident and that thousands of people would be affected. Nevertheless, they did their job with huge dedication and courage. I salute them very much for it. I also pay tribute to the Army and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down. They made a huge contribution in the aftermath of the event. I also pay tribute to Wiltshire Council.

My noble Friend, Baroness Scott of Bybrook, has been very strong in the support she has given the people of Salisbury and the rest of the county in the aftermath of the event.

The hon. Member for Torfaen raised a point about the cost to Wiltshire police, which has been estimated to be between £5 million and £7 million. I had a very clear response from the Prime Minister, during her statement last week, that the Home Office would indeed cover the costs borne by Wiltshire police. I very much welcome that and hope that that is the case. We have been here before with the entirely unnecessary investigation into Ted Heath, on which Wiltshire police spent £1.7 million. I am glad to say that we eventually persuaded the Home Office to cover those costs. I hope that the same will apply here. Equally, I hope that the very large extra cost borne by the national health service and others will be borne by the Government in one way or another.

I very much welcome the fact that the county as a whole has already received more than £6 million from the Government. Some £327,000 of Government and council funding has been granted to 60 businesses particularly affected by the outrage. Some £92,000 of capital grant has been provided by the local enterprise partnership to support 29 businesses through these difficult times. Some £208,000 has been provided in business rate relief to a total of 50 businesses. Business drop-in centres have been provided in two locations, in Salisbury and Amesbury. That is already a significant level of support from the county council and the Government, but it is very important that we continue to provide that national support.

It would be wrong to exaggerate the effect that these incidents have had on the people of Salisbury, Amesbury and the surrounding district. They were, of course, appalling incidents and there was a real feeling at the time of concern that the effect might be wider than it turned out to be. As a result, there has been some downturn in tourism and commerce in Salisbury—some 12.9%, I am informed—but it is recovering rapidly. The people of Salisbury are resilient in every way. The businesses I have spoken to realise that they must offer something for the people who come in from the surrounding area, and they are already doing that to a significant degree. I do not think that we should talk Salisbury down in any way, shape, size or form. The people of Salisbury are well able to handle this. Now that it has been made plain that there is no risk of any kind at all to pedestrians or passers-by in the city of Salisbury or elsewhere, I think that people will return rapidly.

Tourism is, of course, enormously important to Salisbury. After Malmesbury Abbey, which is of course by far the finest church in Wiltshire, Salisbury Cathedral is a huge attraction and will no doubt attract large numbers of people—as does Stonehenge just down the road. It is very important that we make it plain to people everywhere that there is no risk if they visit Salisbury: they may go there without any form of risk of any kind whatever and we can put this incident behind us.

Wiltshire Council has put in place a long-term recovery programme for Salisbury and south Wiltshire, laying out a whole portfolio of measures it will be taking in the area to encourage footfall to recover. I particularly welcome the fact that the Government recently announced that the 2019 National Armed Forces Day, from 28 to 30 June, will be held in Salisbury. That will be a gigantic

boost for the city and the whole area. I very much hope that all those things will revive businesses and visitor numbers for the city of Salisbury. I encourage visitors to spend some time in North Wiltshire on their way to south Wiltshire and Salisbury.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you may not be aware that the expression, “as different as chalk and cheese” actually comes from the county of Wiltshire. Up in the north we have cheese and dairy, while down in the south they have chalk downlands. Down there, of course, they are members of the Church of England, whereas we in the north are non-conformists. So the difference between chalk and cheese comes from Wiltshire. We are one county divided by the great Salisbury Plain. On this occasion, I think that we speak as one county and one people. We entirely reject the appalling incident that occurred in south Wiltshire and we are determined to support the people of Salisbury and the surrounding district in their recovery from it.

I could not finish without adding my total condemnation of the event itself and adding one view of it. I would just like to ask why we think that Mr Putin chose to carry out this act at all and why he chose to do so in such a peaceful county town as Salisbury. Partly he did so because the Skripals were there, but my view is that he did so entirely intentionally. He wanted us to know it was him. He wanted us to know it was Russia. It was part of a power move not dissimilar to the way that he flies his aeroplanes over our airspace and the way he gestures in all sorts of ways. He wanted to demonstrate the strength of the Russian people by using this dreadful nerve agent in the middle of Salisbury. After all, he could have pushed them off a bridge or done all sorts of other things. He used a chemical nerve agent in the centre of Salisbury highly intentionally. Mr Putin understands one thing and one thing only, and that is strength. He does not understand politics, the law or international conventions. He understands strength. That is why, when he has used strength in this disgraceful way by using a chemical nerve agent in the centre of our city, we must respond with strength. We cannot let it pass. We cannot turn a blind eye to it. We must, must, must respond strongly and with clarity to what he has done. We need strength in our response to Mr Putin.

Finally, may I say just one more thing? This may sound a little counter-intuitive. I am just about to go off to Finland for a conference of international parliamentarians with an interest in the Arctic. There, there will be 16 Russian parliamentarians of one sort or another. I am confident that I will be discussing Arctic matters with them perfectly coherently and perfectly sensibly, and that these are good people. The people of Russia are not bad people. The people of the Duma, curiously, are not bad people. The Duma is a very fine organisation, albeit entirely ignored by the Russian establishment. It is very important that we maintain our soft-power connections with the people of Russia. We should have exchanges with them in all sorts of ways: on science, on exploration, on the arts and so on. It is very important that we maintain our talks and connections with the ordinary people of Russia. They are not our enemy; Mr Putin and his regime are our enemy.

3.9 pm

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I thank the Minister for his speech, and I associate myself with the remarks about our thoughts going to the families of all

[Stephen Gethins]

those affected by these events. In particular, it is valuable for us to remember the family and friends of Dawn Sturgess, who tragically lost her life. It is valuable for us to reflect on the fact that somebody has lost their life and been murdered. That is very important to remember. I also want to reflect on the Skripals, who have made a recovery, and Charlie Rowley, who has also, thankfully, made a recovery.

I associate myself with the remarks made not only by the Minister but by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), about the bravery of the police, medical personnel and others involved. Let us not forget that when the police and medical personnel were called, they were dealing with exceptionally dangerous substances. They were sent on to the frontline, into harm's way, on our behalf. I associate myself with the remarks made about the bravery of the police services in Salisbury, but also the medical personnel and others involved.

We support the measures that the Prime Minister has outlined. Such attacks—and they are attacks—cannot and will not be tolerated. We are absolutely united in our condemnation of Russia's actions. In line with the UK Government, the Scottish Government will not conduct any ministerial meetings with Russian Ministers until further notice. Official-level engagement will continue as planned, with senior official engagement requiring ministerial approval, but the Scottish Government and colleagues in the UK Government will be working on together on that.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): The hon. Gentleman knows that I hold him in the highest regard and respect, and his statement is most welcome. Let me also say how much I appreciate the comments made by the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford).

Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the First Minister of Scotland—I think that this is also the general opinion of leading politicians in Scotland—that it is inappropriate for Members of the Scottish Parliament and this Parliament to appear on RT, and will he join me in urging Alex Salmond, the former First Minister, to quit RT?

Stephen Gethins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. Obviously, I agree with my leader about RT, and I have been very clear on that in the past. I would add that there are Members of this House—in the hon. Gentleman's party, as well as in the Labour party—who have taken payment for appearing on RT, and I hope that he is vociferous in condemning those Members of his own party.

Stephen Kerr *indicated assent.*

Stephen Gethins: I know that the hon. Gentleman does, and I respect that. I would also say that RT continues to be an Ofcom-regulated broadcaster, so it should be for people's own judgment, rather than for me to tell them, whether or not they should appear on an Ofcom-regulated broadcaster, but I thank him for his intervention.

This was a chemical weapons attack on UK citizens on UK soil, which we condemn unequivocally, and we thank the Minister, his colleagues and all others involved for the work they have put into this so far. There can be

little doubt that the murder attempts—this was murder and attempted murder—were authorised by the Kremlin. Russia's actions can only reasonably be characterised as an extrajudicial, state sanctioned murder of a foreign citizen on a foreign soil, which we condemn without any equivocation.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) has already called for stronger action against Russia in the wake of the Salisbury attack, saying it was clear that the attacks were an “act of state terrorism” and that tougher financial sanctions are needed to make Russia “sit up” and pay attention.

For some time—this is not in the Minister's portfolio, but I hope he will ask his colleagues to reflect on it—the Scottish Government and Scottish National party Members in this place, not least my party leader, have looked to the Government to tighten up the regulatory framework relating to Scottish limited partnerships. I hope that he will take back to his Government colleagues the message that we are very willing to continue to work with them on that.

Mr Wallace: My commitment during the passage of the Criminal Finances Act 2017 stands. The work is ongoing, but we absolutely see the dangers and vulnerabilities of how those tools are used at the moment, and there is a lot more that can be done. I am grateful to the SNP for raising the issue with us in the House and in relation to the Criminal Finances Act. It is a niche thing: anyone who is not in Scotland or who does not happen to be in one of the other countries that, remarkably, have huge amounts of them will probably not have not come across them.

Stephen Gethins: I thank the Minister for his work on the issue. If I may gently say so, however, the one area on which I disagree with him—although I am sure that he actually agrees with me—is that I do not think it is particularly niche, given the volume of foreign transactions. I know that is not the point he was making, and I hope that he will take my comment in the spirit with which it was intended.

It has been pleasing to see the collective robust response of the international community to these attacks. In particular, the UK's ambassador to the United Nations, Karen Pierce, has done an excellent job in very difficult circumstances. She said that the nerve agent attack was a

“direct challenge”

to the

“rules-based international system that has kept all of us safe since 1945.”

I associate myself with those remarks.

The European Union has been an extraordinarily valuable tool when we seek to confront Russian aggression, whether in the UK, Ukraine or elsewhere in Europe. We welcome the leadership that the United Kingdom has shown on Ukraine. I hope that I do not step outside the spirit of the debate, but I am concerned about the effect that Brexit will have on that, and I know that that is also of concern to a number of Ukrainian politicians. I hope that Ministers will bear in mind over the coming weeks and months that our relationship with our European partners is absolutely crucial when it comes to Russia. I also gently welcome the fact that a European arrest

warrant has been issued. I repeat that it is an incredibly valuable tool in these circumstances, and I hope that Ministers will reflect on its value over the coming months.

On Russian bullying as a whole, all of us in this House need to reflect on the fact that this is not entirely new. Since the fall of the former Soviet Union, we have seen acts by Russia in places such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia and in Georgia, whose territorial integrity we respect. We have seen Russia's heinous actions in Syria. We must remember that the state that can most hold back Assad and his murderous regime is Russia. I want to highlight in particular the targeting of the White Helmets online, which should appal each and every one of us. None of us should be in any doubt about the way in which they are being targeted at the moment. There is also the illegal annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in the east of Ukraine, and the shooting down of the Malaysian Airlines flight. None of us should forget that the actions in Salisbury, as appalling as they are, are in line, unfortunately, with the way in which Russia has carried out its foreign policy in recent years.

In addition to addressing how Russia has carried out its actions here, I want to reflect on how it is viewed by many of its nearest neighbours. The Baltic states have thrived since independence in the early 1990s. The very fact that we have had to deploy UK and NATO troops to the Baltic states should be of concern to us all in this day and age.

Finally on soft power—this welcome point was well made by the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray)—the people of Russia have contributed hugely to European civilisation. We have benefited enormously from our relationship with the Russians. I hope that nobody will mind if I plug the great work of Billy Kay—I should add that he is my constituent—who in his excellent BBC Scotland series looks at links with Russia, particularly those between it and Scotland, over the years. We have benefited from that fruitful relationship. We should be grateful to people in Russia for their ongoing contributions to science and culture. It is why we benefit from a strong relationship and why soft power and maintaining those relationships are so important. In particular, I will mention the excellent work of the British Council. We should continue to support its work in Russia—this is not one for the Minister, but I hope that he will relay the message to his colleagues in the Foreign Office—because it is as important, if not more important, than it ever has been.

As we reach the centenary of the end of the first world war, none of us should forget the huge price paid by the Russian people in that conflict and the second world war. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude for the sacrifices they made in the 20th century in particular. That is why we should stand with the people of Russia. We are right to reflect on the victims of Salisbury in this debate, but we should also reflect on the other victims of Putin's Russia—the human rights activist who finds himself targeted, the LGBT activists who find themselves targeted by the police. In particular, I would like to highlight Mothers of Russia. These are mothers who have lost their sons and daughters in Putin's wars who find themselves targeted because they want to find the truth for their children. It is appalling. They are among the bravest people I have ever had the good fortune to meet and a credit to their country.

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman made a powerful point about the British Council and its excellent work. Will he join me in condemning Russia's decision, in response to our expulsions in March, to order the closure of its activities in Russia—the very thing, if anything, that will help to lay the foundations for improved relations in the future?

Stephen Gethins: Of course, I absolutely agree with the Minister in condemning that. The work of the British Council has been outstanding. The bravery of its employees, both Russians and UK nationals, is something for which we owe them an enormous debt. I realise that this subject is very close to the heart of the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) as well.

To conclude, we stand with the UK Government over Salisbury, but we must also stand with the people of Russia, who fundamentally are the Putin regime's biggest victims.

3.22 pm

Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con): I start by thanking all those involved in the investigation surrounding the Salisbury incident, including the 250 detectives and the thousands of police and security officers. They have played a vital role in protecting and enhancing our nation's security, and for that we owe them our deepest gratitude. We should never forget their unfaltering determination to comb through 11,000 hours of CCTV footage and record over 1,400 statements, for it is such efforts that save lives.

We should also give thanks for the role the NHS played in saving the lives of Sergei and Yulia Skripal and its efforts to assist Charlie Rowley and Dawn Sturgess. I also commend the Government for their proactive approach in obtaining a European arrest warrant and issuing an Interpol red notice for the suspects. I also commend my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for her excellent statement last week in the House. The tone and information were perfect and just what was required.

This was an attack that ultimately left one person dead and others fighting for their lives. Such barbaric acts have no place on the streets of this country, especially not at the hands of a foreign Government. I fully endorse the Prime Minister's comment that if the men who carried out this attack ever step out of Russia we should use every means available to bring them to justice. Her response has been swift and proportionate, unlike that of the Leader of the Opposition, who demonstrated at worst a lack of patriotism and at best a stunning naivety in showing such openness to the Russian version of events.

We must remind everyone—ourselves and the international community—that this is not the expression of some dislike for the Russian people, but rather a full condemnation of the actions of the Russian Government. I have personally been appalled by the levels of immaturity displayed by the Russian embassy in London. The attempted murder of two innocent people is never a laughing matter, but based on their satirical and sarcastic social media posts, it is clear that the Russian embassy staff think it is. Whether you are the accused or not, this is disgraceful behaviour, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

[Trudy Harrison]

I also commend the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and our international partners for the largest ever collective expulsion of Russian diplomats and intelligence officers. More than 150 have now gone. Now, more than ever, we should be tightening and reaffirming our international partnerships in the face of such adversity. Let us also use this important moment to highlight the need to safeguard nuclear materials and protect our energy security. In this regard, the passage of the Nuclear Safeguards Act 2018 is a turning point.

Since invading Ukraine in 2014, Russia has launched a campaign of cyber-espionage and disruption, notably hacking the Danish Ministry of Defence and the Bundestag. I commend work in my own constituency on the cyber-security apprenticeship scheme, based at Energus, which is exactly what we need to do more of. Such apprenticeships are enjoyed by the employees and benefit our national security. The Government are also building on the considerable technical expertise in GCHQ—our world-leading cyber-specialists—and have invested £1.9 billion in cyber up to 2021.

Salisbury and the surrounding area now have an opportunity to recover and look towards a brighter future, and I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray). Salisbury is a place steeped in history and set in a picturesque rural landscape, the home of Stonehenge and an original copy of the Magna Carta—[*Interruption*!—and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) is serving his community well at this important time. I wish the people of Wiltshire the best as they endeavour to recover from this year's events, and I commend the Security Minister for his speech to the House today.

3.27 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I remember my first flight to St Petersburg in May 2005 as clearly as if it were yesterday. I was on my way to take up my post as director of the British Council's operations in St Petersburg and felt a palpable sense of hope, combined with a healthy dose of trepidation. I was looking forward to improving my Russian and getting settled into my new life in St Pete, before formally starting the job in September. I was also, however, wondering what the coming years held in store for me, given the parlous state of the bilateral relationship.

Equally memorable, but for very different reasons, was my flight out of Russia in January 2008. The British Council had become a pawn in the stand-off that followed the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko by two state-sponsored hitmen on the streets of London, and we had been forced to close our St Petersburg office.

In spite of the aggression and unpleasantness that came to dominate the relationship between the British Council and the Russian authorities, Russia will always hold a special place in my heart. It is a fascinating country of contradictions, extremes, suffering and joy, and I will never forget my time there. A wise person once said, "You can leave Russia, but it will never leave you," and I can certainly confirm the truth of that statement.

The world view of the Russian people is shaped by the conviction that those who seek to exploit and undermine *nasha Rodina*—the motherland—are constantly hovering on her doorstep, and their default position is therefore to strike first, to subjugate their neighbours and, from that platform, to build a sphere of influence. From the empire-building of Peter the Great to the establishment of the Soviet Union and its extension to the eastern bloc countries, to the constant and furious opposition to the expansion of NATO, through to Putin's adventurism in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria, the narrative of encirclement provides the backdrop to every chapter of Russia's turbulent history and actuality; but understanding the historical, cultural and geopolitical forces that shape Russian behaviour is by no means the same as excusing it.

The Russian Government have literally been allowed to get away with murder for far too long. There are 10,000 dead in Ukraine, and 10 times that number in Syria. Alexander Litvinenko was brutally murdered by the Russian state; at least a dozen more adversaries of Mr Putin have died in suspicious circumstances on the streets of London; Anna Politovskaya and Boris Nemtsov were assassinated in Moscow, a stone's throw from the Kremlin; and now we have seen Sergei Skripal, his daughter and a British police officer struck down by a nerve agent on the streets of a quiet town in Wiltshire, followed by the tragic death of Dawn Sturgess.

The Skripal attacks have of course provoked a great deal of speculation about why the Kremlin would choose to carry out such a high-profile hit just a few short months before the World cup. In my view, the explanation is a simple one, encapsulated in two simple words: greed and self-preservation. The Putin regime has no guiding ideology. It exists in order to protect and further the financial interests of a narrow elite, and to preserve its grip on power. It is a kleptocracy, turbo-charged by hydrocarbons.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the dependence of the financial elite on the economy in Russia. He will be aware that Russia depends primarily on oil and gas for its exports, while countries in the European Union are very dependent on oil and gas exports from Russia which are not currently part of the sanctions regime. Does he agree that it is the responsibility of every nation in Europe to try to reduce that dependence on Russian gas, so that we can make the sanctions much more effective?

Stephen Kinnock: I agree that a tough sanctions regime is absolutely the right one. The question is how targeted it should be, and how best to target it. A sanctions regime which has a very general broad-brush impact on the Russian people may well not be hitting and targeting the right people. What I like about, for instance, the Magnitsky sanctions and the unexplained wealth orders is the fact that they directly target the Russian elite. Our argument is not with the Russian people; it is with the Russian state and the corrupt nexus of Government officials and oligarchs who are making this happen. I think that we must tread very carefully.

In the case of oil and gas, the secret, in my view, is the European energy union. If we invested in the interconnectors and the integrated energy market, we

would drastically reduce Europe's dependence on Russian gas. That relates particularly to Germany, 30% of whose gas imports come from Russia. The key to Russia is through Germany, and I think that the key through that is the energy union of the European Union.

Stephen Kerr: Does the hon. Gentleman share the concerns felt by many Members about the Nord Stream 2 project, which leaves our allies in the Baltic states and in central Europe feeling particularly exposed?

Stephen Kinnock: Yes, I do share that concern. I think it is clear that, at the very least, a pause is necessary, and I think that the European Union needs to take the required action to make that happen. We need to pause and review how it will work, but Europe needs a plan B for its energy, and the key must be to reduce its dependence on Russian hydrocarbons. That must be the strategic objective.

When oil is selling at over \$100 a barrel there are rich pickings, and the nexus of Government officials and mafia bosses who run modern Russia are able to co-exist in relative peace and harmony, but a few years ago the price dropped to nearly \$40 a barrel, and although it has risen recently, it is still struggling to reach \$70 a barrel. The pie has therefore shrunk, which has constrained the Kremlin's ability to incentivise and buy loyalty. What do you do if you are a Russian President who is no longer able to offer the carrot to your henchmen and cronies? You must then deploy the stick. You must send a message, loud and clear, to all those who may know your secrets and may be thinking about betraying you that retribution will be brutal, cruel and swift.

While assassinations on the streets of Britain are Putin's specific weapon of choice when it comes to securing the loyalty of the various clans and cabals that run Russia, he also knows that he must retain the broader support of the Russian people, which he has done through a series of cynical and ruthless foreign policy initiatives and military interventions. He knows that he needs to compensate for the abject failure of his Government to place the Russian economy on a sustainable growth footing, and he does so by seeking to unite his people against a range of common enemies. It is the oldest trick in the book. Thus the Russian threat to our security is not only through the Salisbury attack, or through the murder of Litvinenko; we see it in the invasion of Ukraine, and we see it in the indiscriminate bombing of Syria. From 24 to 28 February, Russia conducted 20 bombing missions every day in eastern Ghouta. The month-long assault on eastern Ghouta alone is estimated to have killed over 1,600 people, most of them thanks to Russian bombs, bringing the death toll in Syria to over half a million people, with 5 million refugees and over 6 million displaced people.

As we have seen with the refugee crisis and the threat from IS, the effects of the Russian intervention have rippled on to our shores. President Putin deploys state-sponsored murder in order to retain the loyalty and discipline of his immediate entourage, and he uses military aggression in order to secure the broader support of the Russian people. Both strategies represent a grave threat to our national security and the security of our partners and allies, and both must therefore be tackled and defeated.

Russia's geopolitical influence and substantial military clout stand in stark contrast to the small size and fragile state of its economy. In 2013 Russia's economy was roughly the size of Italy's and considerably smaller than Germany's. Russia is grossly over-reliant on hydrocarbons, with approximately 70% of its GDP linked to the oil and gas industries. With the price of a barrel of oil plummeting, the value of the rouble tumbling, the demographic time-bomb ticking, sanctions biting and poor economic policy decisions compounding these problems, the Russian economy is facing a perfect storm. It is against this backdrop that sanctions as a foreign policy tool are ultimately likely to have real effect. The sectoral sanctions imposed by the EU in the wake of the shooting down of flight MH17 by Russian-made missiles in July 2014 certainly led Russia to tread more carefully in terms of incursions into eastern Ukraine, and there is some evidence to suggest that President Putin is not actively seeking to up the ante there.

The Government must now build on the success of those measures by committing to the following. First, we must ensure that the Magnitsky amendment to the sanctions Act is implemented effectively. It needs to be implemented effectively without excuses about our membership of the EU being an impediment; that clearly is not the case because Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have all implemented their Magnitsky legislation.

Mr Wallace: I have now seen the Estonian and other measures, and I would not want the hon. Gentleman to make out that they are sanctions regimes. They are a travel ban regime under which the country sets out a list of named people it will prevent from entering it. They are not sanctions regimes in the way we would understand that; they are travel bans saying, "You can't come to our country." We in this country do it differently; we have always had that power and we regularly take steps to keep people out of this country either through exclusion or refusal of visas if they pose a threat to the common good or a security threat and so forth. I am afraid that the Baltic states regimes are not sanctions regimes; they are a predetermined list of people not allowed into the country. We already operate a case-by-case scheme; we just do it differently.

Stephen Kinnock: I thank the Minister for that clarification, but it remains a mystery to me that it is now four months since the Magnitsky amendment was passed by this House and we have not even drawn up a list of names and made it publicly available, whereas the United States, Canada, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia have all produced lists of names of Russian citizens whom they intend to sanction, or have sanctioned, albeit initially by travel bans which can clearly be built on. It is still a mystery to me why four months have passed and there has been absolutely no follow-up whatsoever on the Magnitsky amendment, so I look forward to hearing a little more from the Minister on that in his winding up.

The second key point is on unexplained wealth orders. Again, far too little action has been taken to instigate those targeted measures. Thirdly, while I have been robust in my comments on the Magnitsky amendment and on the unexplained wealth orders, I believe that the measures that the Minister set out from the Dispatch Box on the work we are doing multilaterally and

[Stephen Kinnock]

internationally, through the G7, the UN and elsewhere, are absolutely to be welcomed and fully supported. The shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), has already expressed support for them.

It is also vital that we argue forcefully for the completion of the European Union's energy union. The EU's fragmented energy market and infrastructure are causing several EU member states, including Germany, to be more reliant than necessary on Russian oil and gas, which in turn gives Russia disproportionate influence in its dealings with the EU. By investing in interconnectors and integrating the energy trading market, the EU would fundamentally rebalance its relationship with Russia.

My abiding memory of my time in Russia was of a burgeoning sense of polarisation between society and state. I saw and heard the values, instincts and hopes of growing numbers of young, well-educated and internationally minded Russians contrasting sharply with an increasingly reactionary and authoritarian governing elite. Support for Mr Putin was, and still is, relatively strong and widespread, but it is also brittle. He derives his legitimacy from the fact that people are prepared to trade the rule of law, pluralism, transparency and freedom of speech for what they perceive to be security, stability and economic growth. However, when Russian holiday jets are being blown up in response to military adventurism, and when recession and inflation become the dominant features of the Russian economy, many more Russians will start to draw the conclusion that their President is failing to keep his side of the bargain.

Change in Russia will not come any time soon, however, as evidenced by the recent election. President Putin can still count on the support of the majority of Russian voters, with the only notable exception being the growing middle classes in Moscow and St Petersburg. Clearly, the assiduously developed propaganda that is pumped out by the state media machine plays a major role in maintaining Putin's approval ratings, but my time in Russia also taught me that the Russian people are still traumatised by what they perceive to have been the chaos and humiliation of the Yeltsin years, and the stability that Putin brought following that turbulent period continues to underpin his popularity today. It is therefore essential that we respect the will of the Russian people. Vladimir Putin has been the leader of choice for more than 15 years, and he will in all probability continue as President until 2022.

Let us therefore engage with Russia as it is, not how we would like it to be. Let us demonstrate through our words and deeds that we truly understand the history, culture, interests and foreign policy objectives of this vast nation with its huge potential, but let us also be absolutely clear, strong and resolute in the face of Russian aggression. That clarity, strength and resolution must start right here in this House. The Kremlin will constantly and consistently attempt to divide us, and we must not allow it to do so. That is why it is vital that my party makes it crystal clear that we support the words and actions of the Government, the EU and our NATO allies in the action that we are taking against the Russian state. This is not the moment for whataboutery. This is the time for a robust defence of our values and for the clear recognition that if we give a bully an inch, he will take a mile.

Let us therefore move forward together, across parties and communities, to forge an unbreakable and unanimous position on this issue of profound importance to our national interest, and let us send this message to Mr Putin, loud and clear: the British people will no longer tolerate the brazen and reckless actions of your regime, and we will no longer tolerate the way in which you and your cronies use London as a laundromat for your ill-gotten gains. We will therefore act rapidly and robustly to deliver the changes that are long overdue. We have the utmost respect for the history and culture of Russia, and we will never forget the tremendous sacrifices that the Russian people made when they stood shoulder to shoulder with us to defeat the Nazis. We also accept that Russia will probably never be a liberal democracy, and we have absolutely no desire to impose our world view. Nobody in their right mind is talking about regime change, but we do need to see radical behaviour change.

I referred to respect, the Russian word for which is *uvazhaniye*, and underlined the importance that Russia rightly attaches to being respected by others. But respect is a two-way street, and it has to be earned. If the current occupants of the Kremlin wish to earn our respect, they must radically change their mindset and behaviour, and they must do so now.

3.44 pm

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): It is a great honour to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who has just given a superb example of the knowledge, experience and eloquence for which he has become renowned in this House. In my brief remarks, I will pick up on some of the themes he mentioned in relation to our broader security response.

What was so shocking about the appalling outrage in Salisbury, apart from its intrusive nature and the way it undermined our norms of behaviour and our sovereignty, was the extent to which it was an entirely brazen act. However, we must keep it in the context of a long list of brazen international acts by the Russian state that have violated the post-cold war security settlement in Europe and have sought to undermine the international norms that civilised states should observe in their interactions with one another. Some of that interference has been conventional, some of it has involved the use of cyber-warfare, and some has been a mixture of both—a classic form of hybrid warfare. We will all be aware of the long list of instances, starting in 2008 with the invasion of Georgia and moving through to the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014, leading on to the downing of MH17 and the outrage in Salisbury.

Those events are well known, but less well known is the impact of Russian state activities in the cyber-sphere. In the Minister's superb opening remarks, he mentioned the NotPetya virus, the most virulent that the world has ever encountered, which caused some \$10 billion-worth of damage worldwide and had a significant impact in this country. I am delighted that the Government are enhancing our national counter-cyber-attack capability, and I commend the Minister for announcing £1.9 billion of extra funding until 2021 to turbocharge the tremendous work of GCHQ in countering the cyber-security threat that our country faces every day. I also commend the Minister for bringing forward improvements to our border security and defences. The proposals, which are

going through Parliament in the form of the Counter-terrorism and Border Security Bill, will give our security forces, emergency services and Border Force the capacity to deal with state hostile activity on the same basis as they may deal with terrorist activity.

Winston Churchill famously declared that Russia was an impenetrable state, with motives that are hard to decipher. He said:

“I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma”.

Churchill was speaking in 1939, but today, ironically, the reverse is true. The Russian state’s agenda on the world stage is very clear. It wants to dominate its neighbourhood, by force if necessary, and to undermine and overturn the international order, particularly the security order that we have enjoyed for a long time in post-cold war Europe. How do we guard against that? My simple belief, picking up on some of the themes discussed by the hon. Member for Aberavon, is that we and our allies need to achieve peace through strength. We must meet Russian threats with total resolve. The Prime Minister, in her response to the outrage in Salisbury, was a model of swift and resolute action, and the diplomatic coup that she managed to achieve—our expulsion of 23 diplomats followed by similar action by some 27 allied countries—was a remarkable triumph that sent a clear signal to the Russian state.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): To return to what the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) said—“You can leave Russia, but it will never leave you”—it is 18 years since I visited Russia; I travelled from Moscow down to St Petersburg. We should remember that our argument is with the Russian state—with Putin—not with the Russian people, whom I found on my visit to be incredibly warm and welcoming.

Leo Docherty: I am very grateful for my hon. Friend’s contribution. Like him, I have enjoyed travelling in Russia—in Moscow, St Petersburg and many other cities—and I have always been very touched by the Russian people’s hospitality and tremendous sense of pride in the magnificent Russian heritage and culture, which we should all enjoy. He is right that our argument is with the Russian state, not the Russian people.

As I have said, our Prime Minister achieved a tremendous diplomatic coup, but our resolve and response must also be in the conventional sphere. I am very pleased, therefore, that we now contribute some 800 soldiers to the enhanced forward presence—a combined NATO presence in Estonia and other Baltic states and eastern countries. That is a very clear signal that we will commit conventional forces to deter Russian aggression on NATO’s borders.

We must also be aware that our deployment to Estonia and our contribution to the enhanced forward presence contains a lesson, which is that we urgently need to relearn our ability to exercise, deploy and sustain military force at scale. We have not done that since the end of the cold war. We must take note of the fact that, this week, the Russian military is conducting a large-scale military exercise—the Vostok manoeuvres—involving some 300,000 soldiers in eastern Siberia. Our NATO equivalent, which also takes place this month, will involve 40,000 soldiers. We need to relearn those lessons urgently, and I hope they will be incorporated into the modernising defence

programme. Simply put, the British Army needs two fully manned, fully equipped divisions that can be deployed at reach and sustained for as long as we need them to complete those sorts of operations.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I very much support everything my hon. Friend is saying. Does he agree that, in retrospect, it was perhaps a bit premature to abolish, as part of the strategic defence and security review in 2010, the joint chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear regiment, which was created in 1999? He will have noticed members of our armed forces on the streets of Salisbury recently, and if there were incidents of that sort in the future, possibly involving biological or nuclear devices as an alternative to the chemical one that was deployed on this occasion, we might need the kind of expertise that we thought we were growing from the Royal Tank Regiment and the Royal Air Force regiment in 1999.

Leo Docherty: I agree entirely. We need to maintain the ability to react to chemical, biological and nuclear warfare, and I hope that lesson will be contained in the findings of the modernising defence programme, which should be announced towards the end of the year.

The approach of achieving peace through strength is something we learned in our historical dealings with Russia; it is not new. Indeed, in 1858, our Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, declared:

“The policy and practice of the Russian Government has always been to push forward its encroachments as far and as fast as the apathy or want of firmness of other Governments will allow them to go, and always to stop and retire whenever it was met by decided resistance.”

Lord Palmerston knew what he was talking about, because at that point he had just concluded, in victorious fashion, the Crimean war with Russia.

I will finish by saying that this decided resistance—this resolve—has been exemplified in a superb fashion by our Prime Minister and our emergency services. I hope and am confident that this resolve throughout our Government, our armed forces and our emergency services will be maintained in our dealings with Russia long into the future.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I have now to announce the result of today’s deferred Division on the EU-Singapore free trade agreement. The Ayes were 331 and the Noes were 145, so the Ayes have it.

[The Division list is published at the end of today’s debates.]

3.55 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is a great privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty), who, as ever, gave a very insightful speech, especially on matters related to the defence of our country. I have felt fortified by what I have heard this afternoon and I congratulate the Minister on his opening remarks. The remarks of the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) were wholly appropriate, and they resonated with my own feelings on the subject. The hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) gave a masterful exposition of the relationship that we should aspire to have with Russia and how we should go about establishing that.

[Stephen Kerr]

The attack on Salisbury was an attack on us all. I am sure I speak for other Members when I say that it was as real and personal to me and my constituents as it would have been had it been an attack on the streets of Stirling. A few days ago, relatively speaking, I had the privilege of welcoming my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) to Stirling and was able to speak with him at some length about the impact of these events on the people of Salisbury and Amesbury. I pay tribute to them for their fortitude, endurance and patience. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, too, because I have become aware of how hard he has worked for his constituents throughout this period of what can only be described as an emergency.

I also pay tribute to the Prime Minister and both the previous and current Foreign Secretaries for the work they have done in response to these events. The Prime Minister's patience and commitment to service to this country have paid off in how our allies, in an unprecedented way, responded to the events in Salisbury. The evidence suggests that an attack by a foreign power on British soil occurred during which a British citizen was murdered and several more people were made seriously ill. Comments have already been made in tribute to the valour of Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey, who, in response to an emergency call, did what is all too often the case with our blue-light services, and went towards danger without fully appreciating the danger that he was putting himself in.

An attack on one of us is an attack on all of us. We must approach this as one nation. The spirit and tone of this debate has undoubtedly conveyed that. Comments have been made about the degree of our indebtedness to the security services of our country, and I echo those sentiments. Now is the time for us to stand together and meet this challenge with the combination of fortitude and resolve that we have seen from the people of Salisbury—and even, I would suggest, with a degree of truculence. We must first seek to prepare and to tackle any deficiencies that might be discernible in our defences against the likelihood of a repeat attack—whether that is an attack of the same style against individual British subjects or one against critical national infrastructure.

I am particularly concerned about cyber-security, and endorse what has been said about it in the debate so far. Cyber-security and physical security go hand in hand when it comes to addressing this threat. I echo the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot about the modernising defence programme. Things have changed dramatically in recent years in respect of where the threats to the nation's security lie. I very much hope that when the time comes to present the modernising defence programme, the Government will take a realistic view of what we need to do and not shy away from being on the level with the British people about what the cost might be of our response to these threats.

People sometimes say, perhaps too casually, that there are no votes in defence, but I cannot agree. My constituency has a long tradition of association with our armed forces, and there is certainly a strong feeling there about the need for this country to maintain its defence posture with strength. I do not think that we currently have sufficient strength in our defence. The point was made earlier about the need for critical mass in our response to the threats the country faces. Reference was made

earlier to the Vostok exercises. Quite frankly, it is mind-boggling just to listen to the scale of what these Russian exercises—the largest conducted for decades—consist of: some 300,000 soldiers, 36,000 vehicles, 1,000 aircraft and 80 ships. It should also give us pause for thought that these exercises are being conducted with the Chinese. The prospect, sight and sound of President Putin and Chairman Xi making pancakes, eating caviar and taking vodka shots in Vladivostok ought to make us think very seriously about our nation's security.

James Gray: My hon. Friend is making a fine speech. Even more chilling than the exercises he describes were the Zapad 17 exercises last year, where an alleged 125,000 Russian soldiers, all armed with tactical nuclear weapons, took part in a huge exercise within 100 miles of the borders of NATO, near Estonia.

Stephen Kerr: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that contribution, which underpins why our friends and allies, especially in the Baltic states, are incredibly nervous about the developments that have transpired in recent times. That is why I intervened on the hon. Member for Aberavon to ask about the Nord Stream 2 project. I hope that our Government's representations to the German Government are as forthright as they need to be in respect of the risks and dangers posed to European security by their determination—or at least so it appears, from the outside looking in—to proceed with the Nord Stream 2 project. I very much hope that our representations to the German Government are of such a nature that they are in no doubt as to how we see that situation.

The spirit of Russian adventurism is disturbing. Mention has already been made of action in Syria, as well as, of course, the annexation of the Crimea and the ongoing violence and threat in the eastern part of Ukraine. I feel particularly strongly about the fate of the 298 people on board flight MH17, who were shot out of the sky over eastern Ukraine by Russian missiles. Among those 298 passengers and crew were 10 British subjects—although all lives have equal value, regardless of which passport they hold. In the context of the matter we are debating, we should refer often to that particular incident, because it cannot be allowed to be forgotten—swept away under the carpet like so many other things in recent history and conveniently forgotten. Justice needs to be done for those people and their families.

I absolutely endorse the comments that have been made by a number of Members that we should bear no malice towards the people of Russia. I have previously mentioned in this House that our elder son spent two years in Russia. He went to Novosibirsk, in Siberia, which is not the warmest part of the world to go to, as well as to Omsk and Ulan-Ude. My wife and I will be forever grateful for the incredible hospitality, kindness and generosity of the people of Russia whom my son lived among and worked with during his time there. We have nothing but admiration and affection—I can speak from the heart on this issue—for the people of Russia. I had the opportunity to go with Luke to Moscow. He is a fluent Russian speaker. He loves Russia and its culture; he is immersed in it. That infectious love that he has for Russia and the Russian people has been transmitted very freely among all of us in his family circle, so there is no malice and no malintent towards the people of Russia, but there is strong objection to the activities of the Russian state.

Let me speak now as a Scottish Member of Parliament. There are regular incursions by Russian military aircraft into British airspace over Scotland. The RAF is regularly scrambled to go out to meet that threat head-on. That represents the threat that the Russian state poses.

Stephen Gethins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his speech and for bringing up the issue of Russian incursions. As a Member of Parliament for Leuchars, I can say that that is something that has been of particular concern to a number of my constituents. I wish to pay due regard to everyone who works at Leuchars for the excellent work that they do, and I know that he and his hon. Friends will also reflect on the work that is being done at Lossiemouth as well.

Stephen Kerr: I am grateful for that intervention and endorse the sentiment behind it.

In concluding, let me say that I hope that we will remain united behind the steadfast and resolute leadership of the Prime Minister; that we will use the influence and soft power that this country undoubtedly has—as was witnessed by the response of our allies to the events in Salisbury—to bring pressure to bear unceasingly within the international rules-based system on the Russian Government, on the broader hierarchy of Government and on other prominent people in Russia; that we will use all of the laws available to us in this place, in this country and on a global basis; that we will, as I have said, be indivisible in standing with our Prime Minister in defending and protecting our country from this threat; and that we will be the Parliament that is prepared to do whatever it takes.

4.8 pm

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) and a particular pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who made an excellent speech. I will not be attempting any of the Russian language in mine. It is also a huge pleasure to follow my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty), whose remarks about the Vostok exercises should be very sobering for all of us in this House. The issue deserves a lot more attention than it gets in our 24-hour news media cycle.

One interesting idea in politics is that of the Overton window. As everyone knows, it is the idea that, when people start to say things that were previously considered unacceptable and unsayable, they move the boundaries of the debate. It seems to me that the people who run Russia today are trying repeatedly to hammer away at the norms of the international rules-based order to normalise what should be outrageous and make us think that actions that should be unbelievable to us are just par for the course.

Other Members have already mentioned these things but to recap, in recent years, the Kremlin has invaded Georgia, occupied the Crimea, fomented war in the Donbass, shot down a passenger jet full of innocent civilians, launched cyber and disinformation attacks across the west, and violated the airspace of a number of countries. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling, I was struck by the shooting down of a passenger jet over Ukraine and profoundly sad to see the “Rough Guide” in the wreckage. These were people just trying to go on holiday.

In this country, the people who run Russia have killed a man in the middle of London, attempted murder and killed one person in Salisbury, and put many more people's lives at risk by deploying military-grade chemical weapons on the streets of a quiet cathedral city, and that is just what we know about. I was very glad to see the former Home Secretary launch an investigation into the 14 other suspicious deaths linked to Russia in recent years. It seems to me that we can never be too sceptical about the actions of the Kremlin, which is now in the hands of people who are almost unimaginably cynical, ruthless and gangster-like.

As other Members have pointed out, it is important to always talk about the people who run Russia or the Kremlin rather than “the Russians”, to quote the shorthand that people occasionally use. It is impossible for those of us who have been there not to be charmed by Russia and the Russian people. In fact, it is hard not to feel very sorry for a people whose wealth has been systematically looted by Mr Putin and his cronies. To give just one example, I read in the *Financial Times* that the wealth of Mr Putin's closest friend, Sergei Roldugin, has been estimated at \$130 million. That is somewhat surprising, given that the man is a cellist. Perhaps we should all go busking in Russia, as it is clearly lucrative, although perhaps he has other sources of income, because the Panama papers revealed his involvement in taking money in and out of Russia and various other shady places.

I was incredibly grateful for the Minister's update on progress and congratulate the Government on achieving international co-operation and the largest mass expulsion of Russian diplomats. I wonder whether I can press him on the next steps, including in building an apparatus and a campaign to combat Russia's sophisticated disinformation campaign, in which it has invested a lot of time and money. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) has already made this point, but we know that Russia has made a huge investment. Russian disinformation comes from all kinds of sources, from fake news outlets to TV channels, and operates on all kinds of different levels, from buying up influential people, ranging from celebrities to politicians, to creating networks of bots on social media.

The strategy that Russia is implementing is enabled by the rise of social media. A couple of hon. Members have referred to this, but the strategy is always the same: to sow so many different lies in so many directions that the waters are successfully muddied. They include, in this case, “We never had Novichok,” “We had it, but we got rid of it,” “It exists, but maybe it was stolen or leaked out of the country,” “Maybe it was terrorists,” “Maybe it was the British Government,” or, “Maybe it was the ‘mysterious gentlemen’,” whom the Minister mentioned earlier. And of course, no lie is too big. If a man is killed with radioactive polonium in the centre of London and there are radioactive footsteps leading all the way back to Russia—“Well, maybe he was a dealer in nuclear material around the world. Maybe he effectively killed himself.” Literally, the comparison is with Hitler: no lie is too big, too outrageous or too audacious to be told. I am therefore profoundly sad whenever I see credulous, nice people in Britain being used as useful idiots as part of a sophisticated strategy by people who are not nice or naive, but incredibly ruthless.

Although the techniques—the botnets and so on—are new, the strategy is not. My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Aldershot referred to Lord Palmerston. I

[Neil O'Brien]

am also reminded of the words in George Kennan's "Long Telegram" of 1946. The strategy is to "disrupt national self confidence, to hamstring measures of national defence, to increase social...unrest,"

and

"to stimulate all forms of disunity."

That is the strategy—disunity internationally and in each country in the west. The Russian state has invested incredibly heavily in this disinformation apparatus, and we need equivalently strong mechanisms, and credible sources, to help us to fight against it across the west. Will the Minister update us on what is being done on that?

Will the Minister tell us a bit more about efforts to build a common sense of purpose across liberal democracies to uphold the international rules-based order? I commend the Government for securing the large mass expulsion and action in all the main international forums. The Minister mentioned the G7, the EU, and NATO—the NATO cyber-centre, in particular. Will he update us on what further actions he will be taking in all those international forums and, in particular, whether these issues will be put on to the agenda for their future summits?

The strategy of the people who run Russia today is, in effect, to walk through the gaps in our attention. It is to do something terrible, wait a while until we lose interest and are distracted by something on Twitter, and then do a new, terrible thing in a new place. It is to exploit the weakness of democracy, as our attention can easily be distracted by other things, and to constantly probe it. If they find resistance, they will fall back for a bit, but they will probe and probe again until they are convinced that the cost of that probing is too high to continue.

Let me reflect for a moment on how far we have fallen back since 1989. The spirit of that period was that we would all be friends—that Russia would become a liberal democracy with the rule of law, join all the relevant major international institutions and be part of the community of nations. Even at the point where Mr Putin attained power, we still hoped that, after the rather chaotic period under Boris Yeltsin, he would be a strong man, but a strong man who believed in the rule of law. Gradually, it has become apparent that that is simply not the case. We have seen liberal opposition leaders shot on the streets of Moscow and a constant probing of the west in every possible way.

This is profoundly sad. I have a happy memory of standing on an ice floe in the Neva in St Petersburg in the 1990s, having an ice cream and talking to a Russian professor. We remarked on how wonderful it was that we could have that conversation, which, only a few years before, would have been impossible. It seemed then that our countries were guaranteed to become firm friends. There are still a lot of people in Russia who want that to happen. The only depressing part of the speech by the hon. Member for Aberavon was when he said that he thought that Russia might never become a liberal democracy. There are still a lot of people in that country who do want that to happen, but it never will unless it becomes clear to the people who run Russia that there is no future in gangsterism, and no possible way to gain any advantage in continuing to outrage the norms of the international community.

My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Aldershot talked about peace through strength. Funnily enough, we will also get democracy and liberal reform in Russia through strength. Only by having a firm response of the kind that the Government are now leading can we not only keep our citizens secure but help to build a brighter future for people in Russia.

4.18 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien), who made a very powerful speech, as have so many speakers in this debate. I pay tribute to Members in all parts of the House for the strength of their contributions. I pay particular tribute to the Prime Minister and to the Security Minister. At all times, their response has been sure-footed, decisive, resolute, and, most importantly, proportionate. That has been the hallmark of the British response. I am delighted to commend it.

A lot of Members across the House recognise that the situation we find ourselves in today regarding the state of Anglo-Russian relations is a very sad one. Although other hon. Members have made this point, it does bear re-emphasis: the Russian regime would have us believe that there is rampant Russophobia in the UK. Literally nothing could be further from the truth. As other Members have said, we have no quarrel with the Russian people; we have enormous admiration for them. This is a country that has made such enormous contributions in science and literature. In science, they have done pioneering work on lasers and in computer science. This is the country that invented the technology behind fracking, for example. In literature, many of us will have studied Pushkin, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Solzhenitsyn, Blok, Pasternak and so many others.

We also pay tribute to the astonishing resilience of the Russian people. Anyone with the slightest knowledge of Russian history can be nothing less than in awe of the sacrifice that they showed in the second world war, or, as they would put it, the great patriotic war. There is no Russophobia and our quarrel is only with the Russian leadership. Indeed, our affection for the Russian people cannot blind us to the actions of that leadership.

Others have rehearsed this, but I will as well. This is a country that has invaded another sovereign state. It seems utterly extraordinary that we should even be saying those words at this time in global history. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough indicated, it is having the effect of normalising the outrageous. To invade a sovereign state is an extraordinary action. We have heard about the downing of MH17, with 298 people killed, but almost as shocking as that was the campaign of disinformation, which must have added immeasurably to the anguish of the families of the innocent people. The Russian state put out that MH17 was blown up by a missile intended for the Russian President's plane and, in a suggestion of incalculable insult, that the plane was already full of dead bodies and deliberately crashed. To put out that kind of nonsense and propaganda is shocking. We have also heard about the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko, the violation of international airspace and election interference.

When it came to the Skripals, again, there were palpable lies and disinformation. The Prime Minister herself was blamed and even, lest we forget, Porton Down.

I welcome the fact that the British Government have been robust but also lawful and proportionate, which must always be the hallmarks of our response. Beyond that, there has been a sophisticated and capable effort to mobilise international opinion. There has been a strong united response from 28 allies, with 153 Russian intelligence agents expelled.

I want to take this opportunity to make two points. First, in my capacity as the Member of Parliament for Cheltenham, I want to thank the intelligence agencies, and in particular GCHQ. These are some of the finest public servants anywhere in our country, not just because of their sheer intellectual brilliance and the abilities that they bring to bear serving the mission and the national interest, but because of their dedication to the values that mark us out internationally. In my experience, both as a lawyer before I came into this place and as a Member of Parliament, they are scrupulous about remaining within the law, defending the values we stand for and doing so in a way that is to the credit of this country.

My second point is this. The UK now has an offensive cyber-capability. That was made clear by George Osborne when he came to GCHQ in Cheltenham in November 2015, and it has been made clear subsequently. What we as a nation need to do, consistent with the values that I have just articulated, is to be clear about how we go about using that offensive cyber-capability, if at all. What are the rules of engagement? We are very familiar, of course, with the rules of engagement for conventional weapons, but what are the circumstances in which it is appropriate to deploy our offensive cyber-capability? What is the threshold of attack on us that is to trigger a response?

I say those things for three reasons: first, because the intelligence agencies look to us for a lead and want that lead; secondly, because we owe it to them to ensure that they comply with their best instincts of remaining within the law; and, thirdly, because we always have to be mindful that, in these difficult circumstances, things can spiral out of control, and we do not want them to spiral out of control or escalate unnecessarily.

The hallmarks of our response must be consistent with the approach we have shown hitherto. We must be resolved. We must be determined. We must be clear. We must be united. This kind of behaviour is outrageous, inappropriate and will meet with a proportionate and condign response. It is easy to say that, but sometimes it is more difficult to achieve. We must turn our attentions with dispatch to ensuring that our cyber-response is calibrated, lawful and proportionate.

4.24 pm

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), not least because of the brilliant work that is done at GCHQ in his constituency.

Like my hon. Friend, I pay tribute to the actions of the Prime Minister and, indeed, of the Security Minister. As he said, it was her sure-footedness that ensured the global response to the outrageous incident in Salisbury was so united. We should bear in mind that that global response was itself a tribute to the actions of our security services. The global response was also part of something that has perhaps surprised many constituents. The absolutely certain tone from across the world when

it came to assessing the actions of Russia—or, rather, the Kremlin—speaks volumes, and we should all pay attention to that.

In this short speech, I do not want to dwell too much on the extraordinary use of hard power by Russia, which so many people have talked about. Whether in Crimea and the Donbass or in shooting planes out of the sky, we know that Russia has exceeded the standards of common decency by more than anyone had perhaps thought possible. Instead, I would like to talk a little bit about some of its soft power.

In my opinion, too many of my constituents have come back from visiting Russia for the World cup with a view of a country that they would say, and rightly so in some ways, feels very much like Britain. They have been to extraordinary football stadiums and seen some extraordinary things, but in that process they have also seen a Russia that wants to project an image of itself as a country that is not the kind of country we know Russia—the Kremlin—in fact is. Given that soft power, I think FIFA made a serious mistake in awarding the World cup to Russia. Such soft power has been allowed to continue, which is why I pay tribute to the work of the British Council and of the World Service in spreading British values around the world and trying to combat what Russia has, in some cases, allowed itself to stand for.

Similarly, we have talked about Magnitsky amendments or Magnitsky Acts, which are a serious attempt to challenge the soft power of oligarchs who have often come up through very cloudy methods or gained fortunes in very difficult legal circumstances in a way that certainly would not have happened in this country. There are too many people who act as Putin's ambassadors around the world, which allows his views and attitudes to global security to become normalised.

That brings me to the main point I want to make, which builds on what others have said. The attitude of the Russian state has been to produce a fog of multiple versions of what happened in Salisbury. I think that we are now up to more than 30 individual, and largely mutually exclusive, versions of the truths that have been explicitly suggested from the Kremlin. That in itself is a shocking tactic, but it is one that the Russians have used for many years.

What is different today is that too many of our constituents who we would have thought were sensible and decent people have found themselves exposed to that propaganda and have become a little bit too convinced that some of it may even be true. Too many of my constituents have got in touch with me worrying that perhaps the British Government were not actually on the right track with this. They have seen some of the propaganda and become too convinced.

The same goes for people who have got in touch with many of us about the White Helmets, suggesting that it is not in fact the Nobel prize-winning organisation that it is, but that we should doubt whether it is on the right side of the argument. Many people who have been in touch with us to defend Tommy Robinson are probably in the same boat. We should bear in mind that it is not the spreading of propaganda by Russia that is new, but the relative credibility that people seem to give it, and that is largely thanks to the internet.

We talk about British soft power, but we should also be careful in considering future regulation—and there needs to be regulation—of what the social media giants

[Matt Warman]

and the internet can do. We should not allow the pretence that they are simply platforms for the spreading of whatever someone happens to want to put online, but say that the networks have to bear some responsibility for the impacts they have on society when that is palpably negative.

I say that as one who spent more than a decade writing about technology; I started this conversation thinking that the free speech enabled by the internet would allow our liberal values to win the argument. Now I cannot help but feel that we need to do something—I do not have an answer; none of us would wish to regulate free speech in an old-fashioned and limiting way. However, the Minister has rightly talked about some of the conversations involving the previous Home Secretary and the current one about what we can do to talk to social media companies in particular, so that they take the responsibility that we would all like them to take without limiting freedom of speech.

We can do a couple of things. We should stop saying that social media networks are mere conduits, but hold back from pretending that they are entirely publishers; the idea that Facebook is the same as my old employer, *The Daily Telegraph*, is clearly not right. They occupy a middle ground that we have to regulate in a sensible way.

We can do other things, which have to come back ultimately to making a greater effort at transparency online. That means indicating not just what is a political campaign but where it comes from and who has funded it. I commend the work of the Cabinet Office in trying to produce what a digital imprint might look like online. In my own paper for the Centre for Policy Studies, I proposed some specific wording for what that sort of imprint might look like: saying, for instance, who has funded something—specifically who they are. That is what we do in printed campaigning literature, and it is what we should be doing online. However, we cannot pretend that that would ever result in a situation where there was something at the bottom of an article of fake news saying, “This item has been funded by the Kremlin and here is who you can get in touch with.” We should not be quite so naive, and I am not suggesting for a moment that the Minister would be.

We also need to encourage social media networks to build on the work they have already done in identifying trusted sources and what sources being shared online have as a history. Many sources have very plausible names and kinds of history, for which a little debunking goes an awfully long way. We should work with social media companies to do more of that. We cannot pretend that every one of our constituents will consult a Channel 4 fact checker as soon as they see something a little suspicious online.

As input, this all sounds relatively small, but we should bear in mind that if we do not tackle the attitudes of our own citizens to what they read on the internet in respect of the approach that the Russians have taken, we risk more and more people not believing one particular version of the truth, but doubting the credibility of our own security services in general. Now more than ever, we must have faith in those security services. That may involve their being a little more open than they have in the past and building on the enormous openness that they have adopted in recent years, compared

with what they were like decades ago. A little openness from the British will go a long way in tackling what, if we nip things in the bud, will be a serious victory in the long term.

I end by paying tribute, as I did at the beginning, to the work of the Prime Minister, the security services and the Security Minister. We have to be absolutely unashamed in saying that we should have confidence in our British values and our British security services. If we do not, we will allow an aggressive Russian state to punch through in a way that would do untold damage at a civilian level, as well as at a national level.

4.35 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I am pleased to be taking part in this important debate, in which there have been many thoughtful contributions by Members drawing on their personal interest and knowledge of Russia. In particular, I would like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on his speech, which reflected his extensive experience and understanding from his time working with the British Council in St Petersburg from 2005 to 2008.

This debate takes place in the week that the inquest opened into the victims, including PC Palmer, of the Westminster terrorist atrocity. The inquest and the human stories we are hearing remind us all of the human cost of terrorist activity. They remind us, as the Minister said earlier, that we should be proud of the police and everyone who keeps us safe. On behalf of Labour, I want to reaffirm that the Labour party condemns any use of chemical weapons, just as the whole House does. Chemical weapons are illegal under international law. The Labour party condemns outright the reckless, murderous attack in Salisbury and Amesbury, as the whole House does.

It is important that we go where the evidence leads and do not engage in speculation, but I also want to make it crystal clear, to use the phrase of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon, that, on the basis of the Prime Minister’s statement and the briefings I have received, I am clear that responsibility lies with Russia and that it was authorised at a very high level. There is no conceivable justification for such an attack, and it is to be condemned utterly. We look forward, if it is at all possible, to the perpetrators being brought to justice. The comments today by the Russian state are in no way helpful. We want to see real co-operation from the Russian state on this matter. We do support the actions of the Prime Minister, including the expulsions of diplomats, thus far.

Our thoughts are with the family of Dawn Sturgess, and with Charlie Rowley who is still recovering from his ordeal. We are obviously very sad at the death of Dawn and we send condolences to her partner and her family. We also send our best wishes to Sergei and Yulia Skripal for a full recovery. We are thankful for what appears to be a full recovery by Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey.

The use of military nerve agents on the streets of Britain is an outrage and beyond reckless. It is easy to imagine how even further death and suffering could have been caused, such was the recklessness of the disposal. As I have said earlier on this matter, we must on no account cease from saying that we cannot have

the streets of Britain turned into a killing field for state actors. This is what Jeremy Corbyn told the House in response to the Prime Minister's statement last week.

The investigation into the shocking events in Salisbury must reach its conclusions. We need to see all the evidence and a full account from the Russian authorities in the light of the emerging evidence. As I said, on the evidence thus far, the finger points at Russia. We need to let the investigatory authorities do their work, and we need to continue to seek a robust dialogue with Russia on all the issues and make a series of demands on them regarding disclosure. Members may think that it is naive to make such demands, but we need to follow the international rule of law and we need to follow international processes.

Government Members have gone out of their way to attack the leader of the Labour party. I understand that it is an attractive tactic for them, and it is a tactic as old as the Zinoviev letter, to question the patriotism of persons and politicians on the left. But the Leader of the Opposition has long spoken out—and repeatedly spoken out—on human rights abuses by Putin's regime.

The notion that because someone is on the left in politics somehow their patriotism is impugned was belied by a speech by Harold Macmillan, a past Conservative Prime Minister, in the other place at the height of the miners' strike. He referred to the members of the National Union of Mineworkers, at a time when many Government Members would have been accusing them of being the "enemy within", as

"the best men in the world. They beat the Kaiser's army and they beat Hitler's army. They never gave in."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 November 1984; Vol. 457, c. 240.]

It is simply wrong to assume that people in the Labour movement, at any level, are not as patriotic as anybody else in this House. Perhaps Government Members will want to question that.

Alex Chalk: I am not suggesting for a second that the right hon. Lady is not patriotic, but she did say in the past:

"Every defeat of the British state is a victory for all of us."

She has not yet recanted those remarks. Will she take this opportunity to do so entirely?

Ms Abbott: That is taken out of context. The idea that I as shadow Home Secretary can have my commitment to British democracy and to this country impugned is, I am afraid, wrong. My parents came from an island. When the second world war was called, they heard the call and came willingly—they were not conscripts—to defend their mother country. They would not understand why Government Members assume, for reasons I can only speculate on, that somehow my commitment to British democracy and the rule of law can be challenged.

In drawing my remarks to a close, it is indeed true, as Government Members may wish to remind me, that I voted against certain counter-terrorism measures, particularly ID cards and 42-day detention without trial. But I did that walking through the same Lobby as many Conservative MPs. I was proud to have done that because I did not believe at the time that those measures made us safe.

We are a parliamentary democracy—we are not Russia—and in a parliamentary democracy the role of the legislature, including Opposition politicians, is to

ask questions. For Government Members to suggest that because we ask questions we are somehow complicit with terrorism is really quite wrong.

We on this side of the House are clear that all the evidence we have to date points to Russia, and we are clear that it was authorised at the highest level. We support the Government in the action they have taken, but we will not take aspersions cast on politicians or persons on the left about their patriotism and willingness to defend their country.

The events in Salisbury were horrifying. It is only by perhaps luck that more people were not killed or made extremely ill. We congratulate the police, the security services, the NHS, the ambulance service and all the other people who came together after this terrible event. But there can be no question but that we on this side of the House are as committed to British security as any other Member. I am glad to have had the opportunity to speak in this debate.

4.44 pm

Mr Wallace: I will start by clearing the air. I have sat through this debate from the beginning, as has the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and indeed the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) on the Labour Front Bench, and I have just heard the right hon. Lady's speech. She will have heard me say at the beginning of the debate that I did not question the motives of the Labour Front-Bench team or their commitment to security. In all our meetings and discussions, I have found the shadow Home Secretary to be engaged and to care about security. I have not heard a single person make the assumption that people on the left are less patriotic than people on the right. In fact, I made the point, when one of my Back-Bench colleagues raised it, about the growth of nationalism in the 21st century and how far-right nationalists were peddling the same tune. It was as if she had come with a prepared speech aimed at tackling the stereotypes of her own office—the idea that we were all queuing up to say these things.

The only point I made about the Leader of the Opposition—not the Labour party, not the Front-Bench team, not my friends in the Labour party—was that I had not heard from his own lips, during last week's statement, which was the perfect opportunity, a condemnation of the Russian Government; it had to be left to his spokesperson later. It is important that such a thing be heard from the lips of the party leader and at the right time. I do not doubt that collectively the Labour party is condemning the Russian Government and has at its heart a commitment to keeping us safe. We will continue to disagree about the methods and the balance of power between liberty and our security services—we will continue to have our disagreements—but we will continue also to agree.

In this matter, from the time I have spent with him personally, I do not doubt Jeremy Corbyn. We visited Iran together once. Interestingly, it was I, Jeremy Corbyn and the former Member for Blackburn, and I found myself to be the most pro-European, if anyone is interested—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I need to emphasise that we do not call hon. Members by their names. We refer to their constituencies

[*Madam Deputy Speaker*]

or, in this case, to the Leader of the Opposition. I am afraid that both Front-Bench spokespersons were guilty of it, but I could not let it go the third time.

Mr Wallace: The casual 21st century—it is becoming a bad habit! I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

There are things on which we disagree fundamentally, but my opening speech was not an attack on the Labour party or the left collectively. We can argue about our methods, but I do not doubt people's patriotism on the left at all. I have served as a soldier with people who voted Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and the rest. Our patriotism has nothing to do with our politics.

The incident in Salisbury was an appalling and despicable act. Operatives of the Russian military and intelligence service deployed an illegal chemical nerve agent on the streets of Britain. This intentional act resulted in the death of an innocent woman and left four others fighting for their lives. Our thoughts remain with all those affected, particularly the family and friends of Dawn Sturgess. I acknowledge once again the dedication and professionalism of the emergency services and the staff at Salisbury District Hospital and of the police and security and intelligence services.

In summing up, I should set out what we have done to return Salisbury to normal. I thank the police and experts from Public Health England for their hard work in ensuring that the public spaces immediately affected by the incident are once again accessible and safe. I extend my thanks to the Defence, Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down, where more than 430 world-leading scientists and experts have been providing specialist advice and assistance to Wiltshire police, the well-led Wiltshire County Council and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I also thank the military personnel for their support in helping to clean up Salisbury and return it to normal as quickly as possible while ensuring public safety. They did this at risk to themselves. Obviously, they were wearing protective clothing, but who knew early on how widely this deadly nerve agent had been spread and the risk posed?

The clean-up work by DEFRA is well under way on a small number of potentially contaminated sites to bring them back into safe use for the people of Salisbury and Amesbury and their visitors. In total, nine sites were identified from the first incident in Salisbury as requiring some level of specialist decontamination. This work is now complete at six sites. The three other sites remain cordoned off so that the clean-up work can be carried out safely.

In connection with the June incident in Amesbury, there are currently three sites of decontamination. In addition, 21 vehicles involved in the response to the first incident, in March—a mixture of emergency response vehicles and private vehicles—have been moved to a hazardous landfill site. The clean-up process on the streets of Salisbury and Amesbury has been comprehensive and exhaustive, and I am content to say that it is our assessment that all the areas that have been handed back after the decontamination process are now safe. Indeed, I visited a number of those sites in Salisbury last Monday, and it was good to see the people of Salisbury back to normal: cafés were full, people were enjoying the park, and children were paddling in the

river. We should pay tribute to the people of Salisbury, who have not been put off by this horrendous incident, and who are determined to get that wonderful cathedral city back to normal.

I must, however, echo the advice of the chief medical officer. We must ensure that the public remain vigilant. It is important to guarantee that no other materials are present elsewhere. As other Members have already pointed out, it is vital that the public continue to follow the advice of the chief medical officer, and not to pick up anything that they do not recognise as an item that they themselves have dropped. We must continue to be guided by that advice, and we must give the police, the local council and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs the space and resources that they need to proceed with their valuable work ensuring public safety.

It is with that in mind that I again pay tribute to the patience and resilience of the people of Salisbury. I also pay tribute to the city council and, indeed, to the county council for its response to what was not only an outrageous attack, but a situation that was highly complex and difficult to deal with. Who would plan, who would regularly exercise, for the releasing of a nerve agent on our streets? They acted extremely professionally, and, on behalf of my officials, I must express my gratitude for the way we were able to work together to deliver the right package of decontamination to help to reassure the public—and, indeed, to deliver a package to support the local community and help it to put itself back together.

Dr Murrison: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend: the resilience of the people of Salisbury is remarkable. One group that he has not mentioned—I am sure that it is inadvertent—are the healthcare workers who were involved, particularly those at Salisbury District Hospital. The rapidity with which an extremely unusual set of symptoms was diagnosed accurately at the hospital was truly remarkable and an exemplar. Had that not been the case, the outcomes might not have been as favourable as they were. My right hon. Friend will recall that the media were talking of the imminent demise of the Skripals, and the fact that that has not occurred is largely due to the expertise deployed at Salisbury District Hospital.

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend may not have been present at the beginning of the debate. In my opening speech, I paid considerable tribute—as did the hon. Member for Torfaen—to the staff and clinicians, and to the paramedics who initially went to the victims' aid. We were incredibly lucky, not only with the professionalism that we encountered in Salisbury, but because of Salisbury's proximity to the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory and the knowledge that it could provide. Some of the clinicians had, in the past, had expertise in or knowledge of matters of this kind. That was a significant piece of luck. We could have been looking at a worse situation had this happened a long way away from where it did.

Let me return to our support for the council and the people of Salisbury. The Government have committed a £10 million package to support local businesses, to boost tourism, and to meet some of the policing pressures. In the coming weeks and months, we will continue to work alongside the council and businesses to identify

further or exceptional cases arising from the incident, to ensure that Salisbury, Amesbury and, indeed, Wiltshire are not adversely affected by events that were completely out of their control.

I also note Members' concern about the pressure that was placed on Wiltshire's vital public services, including the local police and NHS. I am happy to commit myself to ensuring that neither will be left financially worse off as a result of the events of March and June. So far we have provided £6.6 million in special grant funding for Wiltshire constabulary, and we will continue to work closely with the local police forces and health services to identify rapidly when and where further funding is needed.

As I have said, painstaking and methodical police investigation has identified sufficient evidence to allow the Crown Prosecution Service to bring charges against two Russian nationals for the attack. These same two Russian nationals are also the prime suspects in the investigation into the poisoning of Dawn Sturgess and Charlie Rowley, and both incidents now form a single investigation.

The two suspects were from Russian military intelligence. It was not a rogue operation, and the attack was almost certainly approved at the senior levels of the Russian state. Ultimately, though, how and why this decision was taken are questions that the Russian state can answer. The action we have taken against Russia since April constitutes some of the toughest packages of measures we have ever taken. Many Members contributed today with regard to the next steps and I want to respond to a number of them.

The hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) talked about sanctions. I am as keen as he is to use the sanctions mechanism to tackle and push back against Russian activity, including illicit finance. The sanctions he highlighted in respect of Estonia and the other Baltic states relate to travel bans. We have that power already and use it on a case-by-case basis to deter people, stop or exclude people from coming to this country; we have used it and we will continue to use it, not just around this particular issue but around many other issues. Also, there is already in place an EU-wide sanction list covering 150 individuals, including the chief of the general staff and prominent people in the GRU; it is like a "Who's Who" of the Russian state, linked to both Crimea and the leadership of Russia and its security. It makes for interesting reading: the European Council journal document is comprehensive, with the siloviki—the internal security state of Russia—named in considerable numbers. I do not think that the list would be very different if it were compiled purely on the Salisbury incident; it is a fairly comprehensive list, and so long as we remain in the EU we will press to keep it up to date and in place, not only with regard to Salisbury but in recognition of the fact that Crimea was invaded by another sovereign state.

My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) will know only too well that Russian state activity extends a lot further than just the south-east. Barrow-in-Furness, the home of our submarine manufacturing, is not far from her constituency, and for many years what goes on up there has been of interest to a number of states. We must remember that hostile states are not only concerned about London and the centre; we saw action in a cathedral city in England and we see activity up and down our country. That is true of

Scotland as well, and I welcome the strong support of the SNP Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins). He made some clear points about the good influence of Russia in Scotland and vice versa, but about the negative influence Russia could have on the people of Scotland, too. We should note that the SNP support has been extremely strong, and I welcome that.

I heard the discussion between the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) about Russia Today. My instinct is that we are better than Russia. I think RT is like a comic channel—I do not find it sensible at all—but we do not go around banning media outlets. That is the job of totalitarian and other such states. We ask media outlets to comply with the regulation of Ofcom, the regulator, and if Ofcom makes a recommendation, it makes a recommendation; it will not be interfered with by Ministers, and it will not be up to me to tell it to go and pick on people. We believe in that type of operational independence and we should not forget that it is what makes us better than them.

That also goes to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) about soft power: the power of these hostile states to use our open media sometimes to manipulate us and our political systems and spread seeds of doubt.

I am now going to say something rather controversial from the Conservative Benches. I am an incredible fan of the BBC, and one of the things that gives me hope that the United Kingdom is not as vulnerable as some other countries to that type of malign behaviour is that our mainstream media—ITV, Sky, BBC News—usually all start from the point of view of accepting the same facts. They might interpret them differently, but they are a vital reference point in what is in this century a hectic, crowded and shouty social media space. To me, the soft power of the BBC World Service and the BBC's reputation, as well as of ITV's main news, is really important, and I hope that it will help to protect us from some of that malign disinformation. If that means that I have to swallow some of the things that the BBC says about me and my Government, I shall just live with it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough also asked what more we could do about internationalising the response and keeping it going, and about reaffirming our commitment to the international rules-based system. I was at the G7 in Toronto discussing these matters. We should not underestimate how supportive the international community is, not only of our response but of our view of the Russian state and where it has got to today. Other countries may express themselves differently, and they may do things in the covert space rather than in the overt space, but there is a genuine recognition not just by the Five Eyes, the NATO members and the European states but by middle eastern and Asian states that this is unacceptable and a dangerous direction for Russia to be taking. Those nations know that if Russia can use a nerve agent here, it could do it anywhere. We have felt no weakening of that resolve, and we will continue to invest in it to ensure that the international response is the way to proceed.

As ever, my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) made a brilliant speech. Not only was it proportionate and necessary, but he made the point that

[Mr Wallace]

we have to respond in a proportionate and necessary way. This is another thing that makes us different from those kinds of regimes. Yes, we could indulge ourselves by going beyond what is proportionate and necessary, and we could appeal to the populist agenda on certain occasions, but what keeps the international community and our free media with us is the fact that our responses are proportionate and necessary. Throughout this debate, we have talked about suspects and people whom we wish to put on trial. We have not convicted them. I hope that justice will catch up with them and that they will face trial one day.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) talked about the predominantly military activity that we are seeing at the moment, with Russia entering our airspace, the major exercises taking place on some of our allies' borders and the stepping up of the military rhetoric. That is a matter of serious concern to our allies, because some of the Baltic states are not far away from those large exercises. We question whether their purpose is purely to exercise soldiers rather than making a menacing statement to people Russia disagrees with.

Coming back to a point made by the hon. Member for Aberavon and my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who is no longer in his place, I understand the impatience felt by many Members about illicit finance and about locking up or dealing with people they view as oligarchs funded with illicit money or criminals. Carrying out investigations into those types of people is a difficult, resource-intensive and complex thing. In the case of a number of those people, we will get there from around the world, not from one particular country, based on who presents the most threat, who could do the most harm, who has stolen the most money or who is corrupting us here. Those will be the guiding principles, but the biggest guiding principle will be the operational independence of our law enforcement agencies.

Again, what makes us different is that I do not sit in my ministerial office picking up the phone and telling our police to pick on whoever I choose. Of course, Ministers can push, test and question how much resource the police are putting in and how much resolve they are committing. We can ask whether they are picking up on public opinion or on the desire to do something. We can help them with priorities when it comes to the reputation of the United Kingdom. Ultimately, however, it is about the decisions of professionals, coupled with advice from the CPS and others, about how and when we take action against individuals.

This Government could not be clearer. We want action on illicit finance. We passed the Criminal Finances Act 2017 and the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018. The Labour party passed the Bribery Act 2010 and we implemented it. We have produced a suite of legislation that allows us to take the matter on and to build Britain's reputation as a better, more transparent place in which to do business. That is why I was pleased that we moved from 10th to eighth in Transparency International's rankings. We are moving up, not down. I feel the impatience of others, but things are not easy when we are dealing with people with layers of facilitators and so on.

Many right hon. and hon Members made the point that the Russian people are our friends. We all have the highest regard for Russian culture and the Russian contribution to our history. This is not Russophobia or an attempt at regime change; this is about dealing with unacceptable, reckless, dangerous, aggressive behaviour by the agencies of the Russian state—the GRU in this case—and a direct challenge to our values, not only in the west but around the world, and to the international rule of law. Thanks to our values and perhaps our size, this country has decided that we are going to take a stand. Perhaps that is why they choose to attack us here in our country; we represent the very things they hate.

When I say that we are better than them, that sometimes costs us something. It means that we have a freer media and open travel, which gets abused by people coming to carry out the attack in Salisbury, for example. However, that is the cost of being better. The strongest message that we can send to Mr Putin in response to the Salisbury incident is that we are better than them. We have identified the people whom we suspect carried out this attack. We seek justice, but not summary justice, and we will continue to pursue them. We are not just going to sit back and say, "That's enough." We are going to press and push back the malign activity of the Russian state if we see it in our media, the military space, the espionage space or cyber-space, and we will do that using the resources that we have invested in over decades.

I am grateful that the whole House has been united on this issue, on the response and on pushing back against Russia, but my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham was right about our actions being proportionate and necessary because we also have to resolve the situation. There have been lots of outrageous events, but our aim is to have good relations with the Russians one day. It is worth their while reversing some of their actions and their views. We want to get them back into the international order of things. We cannot demonise or act recklessly; our actions must be proportionate and necessary. We will defend our values. We will pursue the individuals involved for justice. I am proud of the work of the people of Salisbury, the NHS, the blue-light services and the intelligence services in dealing with the horrendous incidents in March and June, and we will not let up the pressure.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Salisbury incident.

Business without Debate

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL (9 OCTOBER)

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No 10(2)(b), the sitting in Westminster Hall on Tuesday 9 October shall begin at 11.30 am, shall be suspended from 1.30 pm to 4.30 pm and may then continue for up to a further three hours.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

PETITIONS

Sale of Jackson Lane Car Park

5.10 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): If you ever drive to Wellingborough and park, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will find that you will not be charged. That is one of the great things about the borough council.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Like Chorley.

Mr Bone: Just like Chorley.

There is a large car park opposite my parliamentary office, so I have to declare an interest in this petition, but nothing I say refers to my view of the situation. That large car park is free, and it is proposed that houses be built on it. Many of my constituents are upset about that, 5,000 of them have signed a petition, and we had public meeting in the Pork Pie church.

The petition is presented by Councillor Jonathan Ekins, Claire Ette and Rev. Martha McInnes, and states:

The Humble Petition of residents of Wellingborough, Northamptonshire and the surrounding area,
Sheweth,

That the Petitioners believe that the proposed sale of the Jackson Car Park, should be refused on the grounds of the loss of public parking in the area which will have an enormous effect on local businesses, doctors surgery, the chemists, the Salvation Army, the Afro Caribbean Association, the Daylight Centre, the Society of Friends, the Job Centre and the United Reformed Church.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urges the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Borough Council in Wellingborough to take in account the concerns of the petitioners and refuse to grant the sale of the Jackson Lane Car Park to a private developer.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

[P002263]

Residential Development on Nicholas Road, Irthlingborough

5.12 pm

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Irthlingborough and the surrounding area, relating to the proposed residential development on Nicholas Road in Irthlingborough. It declares that residents of the United Kingdom wish to oppose the planning application, 18/00945/OUT, for a proposed residential development with public open space and associated infrastructure on Nicholas Road because of their concerns about the strain the development will put on local infrastructure—particularly on roads and traffic—and their concerns about the land and the nearby conservation area.

A similar petition organised on change.org has received 2,695 signatures from people around the world and in our community. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to urge East Northamptonshire Council to refuse the planning application for a proposed residential development on Nicholas Road in Irthlingborough.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares an objection to the proposed residential development on Nicholas Road in Irthlingborough – 18/00945/OUT.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to compel East Northamptonshire Council to object to the proposed residential development 87/00945/OUT.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002265]

Beeston Station

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

5.13 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): It is a great pleasure to put forward my case for some substantial improvements to Beeston station in my constituency. Mr Deputy Speaker, you will always be welcome to come to see me and, even more importantly, my constituents in Broxtowe. You are welcome any time, and I would urge you to catch the train and travel from St Pancras. You could come over from Chorley, but it is more likely that you would come up from St Pancras. You would then be able to come to Beeston station.

I have two stations in Broxtowe: Attenborough, which is just a few minutes away from Beeston; and Beeston station. I do not want it to be thought that Attenborough is not important, and that it does not require improvement and upgrading in its own right, but it is fair and true to say that Beeston is the more dominant of the two stations because it serves more than half a million people every year. It offers a greater service to many more destinations than Attenborough does.

Beeston is on the midland main line, one stop down from Nottingham on the way to London St Pancras, through stops such as Loughborough, East Midlands Parkway, Leicester, Market Harborough, Wellingborough, Kettering, Bedford on some occasions, and Luton Airport. The fastest service reaches St Pancras within one hour and 45 minutes. That is a huge improvement over recent years. It is primarily down to the hugely increased investment that has gone into the route thanks to the Government I am proud to support. The time that trains take to get down to London and, obviously, to come back again has really improved, but investment has also meant that the journey down is considerably smoother and more enjoyable.

I am not arguing for one moment that more improvements cannot be made to the service between Nottingham and St Pancras, of which Beeston is a clear beneficiary, and I shall address that in a moment. However, Beeston does not just sit proudly on the midland main line service. It is a stop on the service between Newark and Matlock, on the link into Leicester service, on the Nottingham to Birmingham service and on the Nottingham to Cardiff service. It is possible to get to a large number of destinations directly from Beeston, so it is also an important interchange and connection for a large number of passengers. As I say, well over 500,000 people use Beeston station every year. It serves commuters, general travellers, students at the University of Nottingham, tourists of course—why would they not want to come to Beeston to enjoy its many delights and those of the surrounding area?—and the people who are doing business in the area, most notably with great Broxtowe-based businesses such as Boots.

Beeston station has a proud history. It was opened in 1839, so it is not surprising that it is a grade II listed set of buildings. Last year, after a lot of effort, we finally set up the Friends of Beeston Station. A band of keen volunteers has worked incredibly hard since they got themselves together last year to improve the station, and we can already see the huge benefits of that.

[Anna Soubry]

I know that we are not really allowed to refer to props in this place, but if only I could then I would show everybody a photograph of Beeston station. Members would see its beautiful wood canopies, and the original wooden benches, but they would also notice that it is in need of improvement. The Friends of Beeston Station have played an important part in improving the overall appearance of the station, but they are not merely a great band of local people devoted to the station and to the sort of voluntary work that similar groups are doing in stations the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. They are also, quite rightly, a campaigning group and have, for example, produced the report that I have in my hand, which I cannot really flash around but which can be seen on my website—I am sure that you will want to see it, Mr Deputy Speaker. I urge everybody to look at it, as it shows the problem that we have.

The report not only shows the beauty of this great Victorian station, but enables people to begin to understand what the problem is. It is not only unacceptable but rather disgraceful that disabled passengers needing to get from platform 1 to platform 2 or from platform 2 to platform 1 are advised by National Rail to take a taxi. Indeed, East Midlands Trains used to advise passengers to get on another train, to go to Long Eaton in Derbyshire and to use the lifts there before getting a train back to the other platform. I have to say that that advice has now been removed from the website; I cannot imagine why. The problem is simply this: there are no lifts.

The exceptionally good report “Improving Access at Beeston Station”, to which I have referred and which was produced by the Friends of Beeston Station, shows the problem on its cover photograph. I shall describe the problem. At Beeston, there is obviously access directly from the road. Platform 1 has a car park near to it and people can literally walk on to the platform and catch a train that goes up towards Nottingham. The trains from platform 2 go down to St Pancras. Platform 2 has another car park, and it is right that improvements have been made to it. It could be better—the disabled access is not perfect—but it is better than it was.

If someone arrives by car and goes to platform 1 to catch the train to, let us say, Lincoln—an excellent journey and a great place to which to go—when they return, they will arrive on platform 2, so they will want to get their car from the car park at platform 1. If they are disabled or have a buggy or, indeed, if they have heavy luggage—fancy catching a train with luggage, Mr Deputy Speaker—the only way they can make the journey is up a very steep flight of stairs that go up on to the road bridge, then across the road bridge and down the other set of stairs to the other platform. If a person is disabled or has a buggy or heavy luggage, they cannot do that because they obviously cannot go up the steps; instead, they have to go all the way around. It is half a kilometre—it is 13 minutes on a mobility scooter—which is why the advice is to take a taxi all the way around to make the journey. That is clearly unacceptable. Of course, the other thing to do is to go all the way down to Long Eaton in Derbyshire. There is nothing wrong with Derbyshire—mustn’t be rude about Derbyshire—and it is a great place, but the previous advice was to go down

to Long Eaton on another train, cross using the lifts there and come back up to Beeston and then to the destination car park or wherever.

So that is the problem. Yes, we want to make improvements to Beeston station in any event. It needs more than a lick of paint; it needs improvements. There is a wonderful little footbridge at the other end of the platform that is certainly in need of improvement; indeed, FOBS has already done some work on it. Because this is not the usual half-hour Adjournment debate and I have the time, I can tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker, what a great station Beeston is and why you might want to come to see it and enjoy it. It has a magnificent pub, the Victoria, with a gate that I think I am right in saying is now lawfully open. Someone can catch the train to Beeston station and have a pint of orange juice, or something else, in this fabulous pub. At the end of their time in the Vic, they can catch a train back to wherever they might be going. That just gives an indication of the station’s wonderful characteristics. It has fabulous Victorian history, décor and architecture; it also happens to have a fabulous pub literally off the platform; and, of course, it can take people to a huge variety of destinations directly, or they can go up to Nottingham, which is around five minutes, if not less, up the track, from where they can go onward to even more wonderful and exciting destinations throughout the United Kingdom. It is really important to make the point that people can get a direct train to Newark, which is on the east coast line, giving them even greater access to other parts of the United Kingdom.

In short, then, I am a fan, and it is not acceptable that users of the station—whether they are trying to cross from one platform to another or are coming back from a journey elsewhere so need to get back to the car park at which they started their journey—do not have the access that they should have. They have to make this long, circuitous journey around, which takes time and is not acceptable.

The solution is lifts. Earlier in my speech, I referred to the stops on the way down to St Pancras. I mentioned East Midlands Parkway, Loughborough and Leicester, all of which have lifts, which means that they are properly accessible, especially in this day and age. However, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to tell you that there is a solution to this problem. It is that old-fashioned thing called money. The Government have made available a very good Access for All pot of funding for a programme to improve stations. I believe that it sits at record levels and that it is available for people to bid into every five years. Here is a surprise: the latest five-year tranche has very recently opened for new applications, so I am taking my chances by raising the need at Beeston. I know that the Minister is listening and I know that she will have to do things very fairly, but if she has anything in her box of tools so that she can shove this up the list we would all be very grateful.

We can demonstrate existing footfall. We have obviously identified the problem. Half a million people are using Beeston station. We can also demonstrate that demand for the station will grow. Just by way of example, we know that 150 new homes are being built literally at the back of my office in Beeston. Another 200 homes are being built at the Myfords site and I think another 250 houses are planned at the Old Beeston business park, which is very close to the station, in the Rylands.

We have Boots UK headquarters with all its attendant works and its 8,000 employees. There are other fabulous opportunities coming on stream at the Boots site, with more people and more housing also going into that mix. We have the University of Nottingham quite literally over my border with Nottingham South. That serves 33,500 students. The FOBS document argues that we could even put into the mix the Queen's Medical Centre, one of the most marvellous hospitals in our country, which is also down the road and which arguably could be also well served by Beeston station.

East Midlands Trains told me that it shares the ambition to see the installation of lifts, but that it does not have the money, which I understand, and it needs to make the application. Sadly, it did not make that application in 2013, but we are in a very different situation now. I am sure that it will now submit an application and of course it absolutely has the support not just of me and the council, but of the wonderful Friends of Beeston Station. I have to mention—we do, rightly, give credit where it is due—people who have put in a great deal of time and effort not just in painting and taking the weeds out of the gutters, but in campaigning. I am talking about Trish Roberts-Thomson, who may be in the Public Gallery, but we are not allowed to refer to that, Sarah Hampton and Chris Palmer, who is himself someone who uses a wheelchair, so he absolutely knows exactly what he is talking about. Sarah and Chris cannot be with us this evening, but I know that they will be watching—or watching on catch-up. *[Interruption.]* One wonders why anyone would do that, but they are great people and I think they will. Anyway, I shall put it on my email newsletter, so people can watch the debate. Actually, I am not sure that that is always a good idea. It is much better to refer people to *Hansard* and hope that the *Hansard* writers are doing their usual great work taking out all the mistakes.

Anyway, I am digressing. This is a serious matter. In this day and age a station of this importance serving as many people as it does, with the potential to serve even more, really should have lifts in it so that it is properly accessible to everybody—not just to disabled people, but to people with luggage, pushchairs and all the rest of it.

We have a tram that goes into Beeston. It is highly controversial, but it is there. One of the big mistakes that was made is that, although there are quite a few tram stops in Beeston, there is not one at the station. *[Interruption.]* Mr Deputy Speaker, I can see your face and I heard what you just said. It is indeed absurd. If we are to make public transport absolutely work, it is critical that we have connectivity between different branches of a particular type of transport and between different modes and models of transport. That was not done, which, as I say, was a huge mistake. However, we do have a tram, which is not that far away, although not near enough to provide connectivity. We must learn the lesson from that.

I have to mention HS2, because it is important to this whole argument and some of the controversies around the midland main line. I like HS2 and am a big supporter of it. There is no debate in my mind about whether we should be building it; my only criticism is that we are not doing it more quickly. I and my constituents particularly like HS2 because we get the east midlands hub in Broxtowe, at a place called Toton Sidings. We know that

HS2 is not about substituting for existing systems but about additional capacity. It is not even necessarily about speed; it is about capacity and having more trains on the new line, serving different people.

One of the arguments made against HS2 is that it has been at the cost of the midland main line. There was a lot of disappointment when the Government rode back from full electrification all the way up to Sheffield, because frankly in a modern age we need electrified trains, I would suggest. Electrification delivers better, more efficient and smoother rail transportation. There was a lot of disappointment, but I give full credit to the Government, because there will be electrification at least up to Corby and Kettering. That will make a big difference. I need to be convinced about these biofuel trains, but there are two things that I do accept.

One is that, through the investment in our railways, the Government have ensured that the journey is not just quicker, as I identified earlier, but much more pleasant. For example, big bends have been taken out, so that people are not thrown around all over the place. The other thing that has happened is improvements to other stations on the line. It is just that we have missed out in Beeston. I am sure the Minister will do everything that she can to change that but, if we are to make the case to the public about HS2, it cannot come at the cost of great lines such as the midland main line. They, too, must have the investment that they need to survive.

In this modern day and age, with the footfall that we have and the even greater potential that we know is coming, it is just not acceptable for there not to be full access at Beeston station, so in addition to the improvements that we need in any event, what we want more than anything is lifts. I look forward to the Minister's response.

5.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) on securing this important debate about access to Beeston station and on highlighting the good work done locally to take the project forward. She is not only a powerful advocate for her constituency; I believe she also nurtured and supported the local action group, Friends of Beeston Station, and put it on the map. A huge debt of gratitude is owed to Trish, Chris and Sarah—unfortunately I did not catch their surnames, but no doubt they will be watching this on the website or see it in my right hon. Friend's newsletter.

In recent years, expectations about accessibility have changed, both among disabled passengers and in the railway industry. That is particularly so following the success of our transport networks in providing accessible journeys during the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. As my right hon. Friend mentioned, the extra investment in our rail infrastructure has meant improved services and greater passenger satisfaction. Unfortunately, though, many of our mainline railway stations date from Victorian times. These 19th-century stations, including Beeston, which I believe opened as far back as 1839, were not built with the needs of 21st-century passengers in mind. Interestingly, I tried to look up who the MP was in 1839 and the computer said, "Do not know," so maybe my right hon. Friend can let me know at some point. No doubt, the constituency did not have as strong a female advocate as it does today.

[*Ms Nusrat Ghani*]

The Victorian stations have left us with a huge task in opening up the rail network to disabled passengers. Only around a fifth of stations have proper step-free access into the station and between platforms. Clearly, accessible stations make a huge difference to the journey experience not only of people with reduced mobility, but, as my right hon. Friend pointed out, those carrying heavy luggage or pushing unwieldy pushchairs.

I understand how important stations are to passengers, and every rail journey involves at least two of them, but as well as providing access points to the network, they are often important to the wider community.

I am keen to improve access for disabled passengers across the rail network. The Department has therefore continued and, indeed, extended the Access for All programme. As my right hon. Friend will know, the inclusive transport strategy published on 25 July included a commitment to extend our Access for All programme across the next rail control period, starting in 2019, with an additional £300 million of funding from the public purse. This funding is the most appropriate way to deal with the critical areas that she mentioned regarding accessibility challenges at Beeston station.

It must be noted that the station has not been nominated previously. I know that my right hon. Friend is as curious about that as I am, and she may want to ask the train operating company why it is the case. However, we are where we are, and we have asked the industry to nominate stations for the new funding by 16 November this year.

Anna Soubry: To be fair, the company has to prioritise the stations that it thinks are absolutely at the top of the pile. There is at least one station locally—Langley Mill, I think—where access is even worse, although it is difficult to believe how it could be. To be fair to the company, it had to put forward its top priorities, but I hope that Beeston—and, I think, Bingham, which the Minister will not know—are now right at the top of its list.

Ms Ghani: My right hon. Friend is being as fair as she usually is, but today we have put Beeston on the map.

The deadline is 16 November. Nominated stations will be selected based on their annual footfall, which we heard about, weighted by the incidence of disability in the area. We will take into account local factors such as proximity to a hospital or the availability of third-party funding for the project. We will also ensure that there is a fair geographical spread of projects across the country. I encourage my right hon. Friend to liaise with East Midlands Trains and ask it to put the station forward and, ideally, to seek a proportion of third-party match funding that will help to weight the business case.

This new funding builds on the success of the Access for All programme, which was first launched in 2006 as a 10-year programme, but which we have continued to extend. We are also pressing the industry to comply

with its legal obligations to ensure that work at stations meets current accessibility standards, not just on flagship projects such as Crossrail or the redevelopment of Birmingham New Street, but as part of the business-as-usual work of their renewals programme—for example, by making sure that any replacement bridges have lifts or ramps. It is important that the industry meets its obligations to anyone who needs assistance, whether or not booked ahead of time. People should expect the best possible help to use the trains, particularly at stations that do not have proper accessible facilities.

My right hon. Friend has written to the Department several times asking for a Minister to visit Beeston station to see the fantastic work that has been carried out by Friends of Beeston Station, to admire its beauty and to see some of the issues that it faces. I am delighted to accept that invitation, and I look forward to visiting the station after the conference recess. I will work with my right hon. Friend to continue to help her to champion her constituency.

Anna Soubry: I am grateful to the Minister for being able to come up so quickly. I need to put it on record that the Leader of the Opposition approached me earlier today and told me that he was supporting my campaign and that of Friends of Beeston Station on the basis that he, too, has visited Beeston station and seen the problem for himself. I have suggested that he need not come up again to see it. I am delighted that the Minister will be coming up, but I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support as well.

Ms Ghani: My right hon. Friend is inundated with guests. No doubt, she will take care of me. I am keen to have a drink at the Beeston pub she mentioned, and maybe all the other guests could pop along, invited or not.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's remarks on HS2. We had a powerful debate on it this morning. It is important to remember that it is about not just capacity, but ensuring that we have productivity and prosperity north of London.

I hope that my right hon. Friend and other Members have been reassured that the Government are committed to investment that will improve rail services for all. The Government will ensure that passengers continue to benefit from our record levels of investment. The Department recognises the need to look to the future, to ensure that the railways work for those who use them—passengers, freight and local communities. That means delivering the enhancements already on the way, as well as working with others to develop the next generation of improvements.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's invitation and look forward to visiting Beeston and seeing the application.

Question put and agreed to.

5.39 pm

House adjourned.

Deferred Division

EU-SINGAPORE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (FTA) AND INVESTMENT PROTECTION AGREEMENT (IPA)

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 7966/18 on the signature of the proposed agreement along with Addenda numbered 1 to 13 and European Union Document No. 7967/18 on the conclusion of the proposed agreement along with Addenda numbered 1 to 13; welcomes the proposed signature and conclusion, on behalf of the EU, of the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement; further notes European Union Document No. 7973/18 on the signature of the proposed agreement along with Addenda numbered 1 to 2 and European Union Document No. 7974/18 on the conclusion of the proposed agreement along with Addenda numbered 1 to 2; and further notes the signature and conclusion of the proposed Investment Protection Agreement between the EU and its Member States and Singapore.

The House divided: Ayes 331, Noes 145.

Division No. 239]

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Clarke, Mr Simon
Afolami, Bim	Cleverly, James
Afriyie, Adam	Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Aldous, Peter	Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Ali, Rushanara	Collins, Damian
Allan, Lucy	Costa, Alberto
Allen, Heidi	Courts, Robert
Andrew, Stuart	Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Argar, Edward	Crabb, rh Stephen
Atkins, Victoria	Creagh, Mary
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Crouch, Tracey
Baker, Mr Steve	Davey, rh Sir Edward
Baldwin, Harriett	Davies, Chris
Barclay, Stephen	Davies, David T. C.
Baron, Mr John	Davies, Glyn
Benyon, rh Richard	Davies, Mims
Beresford, Sir Paul	Davies, Philip
Berger, Luciana	Davis, rh Mr David
Berry, Jake	Dinenage, Caroline
Blackman, Bob	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Blunt, Crispin	Docherty, Leo
Boles, Nick	Dodds, rh Nigel
Bone, Mr Peter	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey
Bottomley, Sir Peter	M.
Bowie, Andrew	Donelan, Michelle
Bradley, Ben	Double, Steve
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Dowden, Oliver
Brady, Sir Graham	Doyle-Price, Jackie
Brake, rh Tom	Drax, Richard
Braverman, Suella	Duddridge, James
Brereton, Jack	Duguid, David
Bridgen, Andrew	Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Brokenshire, rh James	Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Bruce, Fiona	Dunne, Mr Philip
Bryant, Chris	Ellis, Michael
Buckland, Robert	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Burghart, Alex	Elphicke, Charlie
Burns, Conor	Eustice, George
Burt, rh Alistair	Evans, Mr Nigel
Cairns, rh Alun	Evennett, rh Sir David
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Fabricant, Michael
Cartlidge, James	Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Cash, Sir William	Farron, Tim
Caulfield, Maria	Field, rh Mark
Chalk, Alex	Ford, Vicky
Chishti, Rehman	Foster, Kevin
Churchill, Jo	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Clark, Colin	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Clark, rh Greg	Frazer, Lucy
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Freeman, George

Freer, Mike	Kennedy, Seema
Fysh, Mr Marcus	Kerr, Stephen
Gale, Sir Roger	Kinnock, Stephen
Gapes, Mike	Knight, rh Sir Greg
Garnier, Mark	Knight, Julian
Gauke, rh Mr David	Kwarteng, Kwasi
Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Kyle, Peter
Gibb, rh Nick	Lamb, rh Norman
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Lamont, John
Girvan, Paul	Lancaster, rh Mark
Glen, John	Latham, Mrs Pauline
Godsiff, Mr Roger	Leadsom, rh Andrea
Goldsmith, Zac	Lee, Dr Phillip
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Lefroy, Jeremy
Gove, rh Michael	Leigh, Sir Edward
Graham, Luke	Leslie, Mr Chris
Graham, Richard	Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Grant, Bill	Lewer, Andrew
Grant, Mrs Helen	Lewis, rh Brandon
Gray, James	Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Grayling, rh Chris	Liddell-Grainger, Mr
Green, Chris	Ian
Green, rh Damian	Lidington, rh Mr David
Greening, rh Justine	Little Pngelly, Emma
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Lloyd, Stephen
Gyimah, Mr Sam	Lopez, Julia
Hair, Kirstene	Lopresti, Jack
Halfon, rh Robert	Lord, Mr Jonathan
Hall, Luke	Loughton, Tim
Hammond, rh Mr Philip	Mackinlay, Craig
Hammond, Stephen	Maclean, Rachel
Hancock, rh Matt	Mak, Alan
Hands, rh Greg	Malthouse, Kit
Harper, rh Mr Mark	Mann, Scott
Harrington, Richard	Masterton, Paul
Harris, Rebecca	May, rh Mrs Theresa
Harrison, Trudy	Maynard, Paul
Hart, Simon	McKinnell, Catherine
Heald, rh Sir Oliver	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
Heapey, James	McMorris, Anna
Heaton-Harris, Chris	Menzies, Mark
Heaton-Jones, Peter	Mercer, Johnny
Henderson, Gordon	Merriman, Huw
Herbert, rh Nick	Metcalfe, Stephen
Hinds, rh Damian	Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Hobhouse, Wera	Milling, Amanda
Hollingbery, George	Mills, Nigel
Hollinrake, Kevin	Milton, rh Anne
Hollobone, Mr Philip	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Holloway, Adam	Moore, Damien
Howell, John	Mordaunt, rh Penny
Huddleston, Nigel	Morgan, rh Nicky
Hughes, Eddie	Morris, Anne Marie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Morris, David
Hurd, rh Mr Nick	Morris, James
Jack, Mr Alister	Morton, Wendy
James, Margot	Mundell, rh David
Javid, rh Sajid	Murray, Ian
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Murrison, Dr Andrew
Jenkyns, Andrea	Neill, Robert
Jenrick, Robert	Newton, Sarah
Johnson, rh Boris	Nokes, rh Caroline
Johnson, Dr Caroline	O'Brien, Neil
Johnson, Gareth	Offord, Dr Matthew
Johnson, Joseph	Parish, Neil
Jones, Andrew	Patel, rh Priti
Jones, rh Mr David	Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Jones, Mr Marcus	Penning, rh Sir Mike
Kawczynski, Daniel	Penrose, John
Keegan, Gillian	Perry, rh Claire
Kendall, Liz	Philp, Chris

Pincher, Christopher
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary

Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swinson, Jo
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Phil
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Woodcock, John
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn

Byrne, rh Liam
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, Julie
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr
 Jim
 Daby, Janet

Dakin, Nic
 David, Wayne
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Doughty, Stephen
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Efford, Clive
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Goodman, Helen
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hill, Mike
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hussain, Imran
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham P.
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, Afzal
 Laird, Lesley
 Lavery, Ian
 Lee, Karen
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana

Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McInnes, Liz
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Norris, Alex
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rodda, Matt
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Stevens, Jo
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, Mark
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Question accordingly agreed to.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 12 September 2018

[MR GEORGE HOWARTH *in the Chair*]

High Speed 2

9.30 am

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered High Speed 2.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. Today I am calling for the scrapping of HS2. Coincidentally, today there is a ComRes poll in the *Express*, of which I have just been made aware, which shows that 67% of British adults do not think HS2 would benefit them personally at all, 61% think it is poor value for money, and more people oppose the construction than support it. I recommend that people read very carefully the basis of that polling. Interestingly, in the west midlands only 24% think that HS2 will benefit them. There is gathering momentum to derail the plans. Peter Osborne wrote recently in the *Daily Mail* that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and other senior Ministers might be about to call publicly for it to be cancelled. Apparently, the Defence and Foreign Secretaries are of this view, as is my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson).

Members might notice that I am wearing my HS2 white elephant badge. A white elephant is defined as:

“a possession that is useless or troublesome, especially one that is expensive to maintain or difficult to dispose of.”

This particular white elephant might look docile and harmless at present, but it is not. I voted against the principle on Second Reading, as did many other Members here today, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) and my hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton). I did so because I thought it was a fundamentally flawed project.

The Second Reading of the Bill authorised the London to Birmingham route. Only 41 voted against that Bill, with 452 voting for it. Interestingly, the penny dropped for the second Bill on the stretch from Birmingham to Crewe, which directly affects my constituents. Although only 12 of us voted against it, the number who voted for it dropped considerably, to only 295 out of 650 MPs. Where were the other 255?

I want to pay tribute to my constituents at both ends of the constituency, who are profoundly affected by the project, particularly Trevor Parkin of the Stone Railhead Crisis Group and Ian Webb, Fred Smith and Gary White from the Whitmore2Madeley HS2 action group. I also want to mention Keith Ralls. Those people put specific questions in their petitions in relation to the manner in which they were injuriously affected by the HS2 proposals between Birmingham and Crewe. However, they are also profoundly opposed to the concept of HS2 in itself, which is clearly consistent with the opinion poll I have just mentioned.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I, too, voted against HS2, as I am sure he is aware, because we have probably the most affected constituencies in the country, given phases 1 and 2. If HS2 were to be scrapped, as he suggests, with potential savings of £50 billion, is he aware of the great British transport competition, which I recently launched in conjunction with the Taxpayers' Alliance to identify how the money could be better spent across the country rather than in narrow swathes? Will he recommend to his constituents that they take part in the competition?

Mr George Howarth (in the Chair): Order. Before Sir William continues his speech, I remind Members that a lot of people want to speak in the debate and I am sure that there will be interventions, which I hope can be kept brief, because otherwise it inhibits my ability to call everyone who wants to speak.

Sir William Cash: I endorse what my hon. Friend has said about what is an extremely good idea and fits in with the opinion poll I mentioned. I am extremely glad that he voted against HS2, and sorry that I did not mention that earlier.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. I have consistently voted against the project, for various reasons. It will affect investment in Coventry and at the same time be detrimental to the environment in Warwickshire. It has never been costed properly, and there has never been a proper impact study or a proper consultation that takes on board the community's concerns. I agree with him that it should be scrapped.

Sir William Cash: I am extremely glad to hear that. I am sorry that I did not mention that in my opening remarks. Although he is an Opposition Member, I pay tribute to the wisdom of the hon. Gentleman.

I and the other people I mentioned are concerned about not only the concept, but the manner in which HS2 Ltd has dealt with the issues, as I have said in the petition that I and others deposited, and as I have said in previous debates. I also petitioned on the first and second Bills and raised all my constituents' grievances, which are on the record for anyone to see. I do not need to go into those today, because I want to deal with the central principles.

I have also taken part in other debates with my right hon. and indefatigable Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham. Our criticisms about the lack of consultation on HS2 are already on the record. Indeed, back in November 2015 the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman found serious failings in HS2 Ltd's engagement with a community in Staffordshire. The report stated that its actions fell so far below reasonable standards that they constituted maladministration. I had similar experiences to my right hon. Friend, and I understand that she will deal with that later in the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) is not able to be here today. He apologises for that—he had another engagement—but I want to cite his concerns, which relate to the disruption it will cause his constituents and the disconnected nature of

[Sir William Cash]

the railway, which is a matter of grave concern. He makes the point that the railway does not connect with Heathrow, the continent via HS1, or even Birmingham New Street station. He says that if ever there were a model of how not to design an integrated railway, this is it.

Amidst our collective opposition, the white elephant is running amok in the Treasury and has already charged the British taxpayer more than £4 billion before construction has even started. My own position on the outrageous and accelerating costs of HS2 is that, although £4 billion is a colossal sum, there is no excuse for continuing to throw money down a black hole. The spending plans began to spiral after 2018: £3 billion in 2019; £4.2 billion in 2020; and £4.8 billion in 2021. So if we are going to stop it, now would be a good time.

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): At this stage in the project, apart from drawing up plans, the biggest cost is the compensation schemes. The reason why billions of pounds are being spent at the moment is that the project is buying homes up and down the line because of MPs agitating for decent compensation schemes. Some of the money will come back in due course, because after 20 years the homes will be sold at a profit.

Sir William Cash: My hon. Friend is a valiant supporter of the Government. He chaired the Select Committee on the hybrid Bill and I pay tribute to the way in which he sought to deal with the problems that cropped up during the proceedings. However, there would be no need for compensation if there was not an HS2 project. I do not think the opinions polls that I referred to feature people who have been affected by the route of the line; they simply think it is an extremely bad deal. It is a white elephant indeed.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Although our colleague praises the fact that a lot of money has been spent on compensation, the truth of the matter is that many of our constituents have had to fight tooth and nail to get the value of their properties, and in fact are losing out overall because it will be HS2 that capitalises on their properties. They have lost their homes and, in some cases, their livelihoods.

Sir William Cash: That in itself is a complete tragedy. I totally endorse everything that my right hon. Friend said. The project has caused an enormous amount of anxiety and stress. I have friends and constituents who have literally been made physically ill as a result. Not only is it a catastrophic exercise in maladministration and failure to cost things properly, as I will mention, but it has caused anxiety and ultimately cannot be justified.

Mr Jim Cunningham: I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan), who has led the way in consistently opposing HS2. I have constituents who cannot get compensation because they are just outside the area that qualifies for it. Surely that is a diabolical situation for people to find themselves in.

Sir William Cash: As I expected, the hon. Gentleman makes another extremely sound point. The reality is that people are affected by the indirect consequences.

People talk about the number of jobs being created. I will come on to that as well, because many other projects could be put in place that would create an equal or greater number of jobs.

Craig Tracey: I give credit to the Minister, whom I have found extremely helpful in dealing with compensation claims. However, HS2 Ltd is spending more money on consultants to squeeze people down on price than it actually saves by doing so. It is a false economy.

Sir William Cash: That is an extremely important point. I am sure that those listening to the debate will take note of it, as will the Minister.

Those linked to the construction of the project—the brainchild of no less a genius than the hapless Lord Adonis—seem to admit that there has never been a structured estimate of costs for phase 1 of the track. Mr Tim Smart, the chief engineer, told the High Speed Rail Bill Select Committee on 23 April that HS2 Ltd was unable to provide detailed cost estimates for parts of the project because it relied on its cost model as a guide to the entire project cost. Also, in evidence given to the High Speed Rail Bill Select Committee in the House of Lords, Lord Berkeley, the chairman of the Rail Freight Group, the representative body for rail freight in the UK, estimated that the cost of the Euston to Old Oak Common section—a mere seven miles—was more than £6 billion. We have to get real. That is based on the cost estimates and data from other projects using the rail method of measurement and commissioned by Network Rail.

I understand that that estimate was not challenged by HS2 Ltd, which appeared not to have any reliable costings. Unbelievably, that makes each mile of the planned route worth almost £1 billion. For the same price the UK could buy two new aircraft carriers, each costing about £3 billion, or 10 state-of-the-art NHS hospitals, or invest in local infrastructure in roads and so on.

The Treasury's Infrastructure and Projects Authority has given HS2 an amber to red rating for each of the past six years, meaning that there is a high risk that it will not deliver value for money. A confidential report commissioned by the IPA and released in December 2016 also warned that the costs were likely to end up being between 20% and 60% over HS2's £56 billion budget, which it says would be classified as "failed" by any internationally recognised definition. It also warned that HS2 was

"highly likely to significantly overspend"

by 20% to 60%, which would increase the cost to as much as £90 billion.

The Government assert that the scheme will bring benefits to the wider economy through an enlarged labour market and greater commuting capacity, but they admit that those benefits cannot be achieved by building HS2 alone, depending almost entirely on more spending not accounted for in the HS2 budget. The National Audit Office wrote a critical report in June further highlighting that the £55.7 billion funding package does not cover all the funding needed to deliver the promised growth and regeneration benefits.

The Public Accounts Committee also highlighted that issue in its September 2016 follow-up report, recommending that the Government

"seek assurances from the relevant local authorities that they have plans in place to identify sources of funding and financing".

That means going out to other people and asking for more taxpayers' money. Furthermore, politicians in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands combined authority have published HS2 strategies, with the West Midlands combined authority estimating that its HS2 local growth plan will cost £3.3 billion. However, it is by no means clear where that money will come from.

Aside from the fact that HS2 apparently cannot generate growth without more—unaccounted for—money being pumped into local communities, in September 2013 a report by KPMG suggested that although some communities would gain from a high-speed train line, it would result in economic losses in others, for which the Government would inevitably be asked to compensate. That remains the case.

The project has not yet left the station and the runaway costs are already out of control. If the situation was not so serious, I would congratulate the HS2 executives for their role in constructing the most amazing gravy train ever built in the UK, with one quarter of HS2 staff paid more than £100,000 in the last year, and the chief executive taking home £600,000. By way of contrast, Andrew Haines, the chief executive at Network Rail, is paid about £20,000 less than that. People can say what they like about our current network, but the fact that the HS2 boss is paid more than the head of a network that actually exists demonstrates a grotesque lack of control over finances.

Unfortunately, those are only the costs we know about. In 2018 *The Sunday Times* reported that a whistleblower who worked for HS2 Ltd as head of property said that staff were told to

“falsify figures, mislead parliament and cover up ‘petrifying’ overspends”

with regard to the budget for buying lands and buildings. I believe that there are already grounds under the Inquiries Act 2005 for a full public inquiry into the scheme, as there were over Stafford hospital—an inquiry that I called for, and which my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford was associated with as well. That inquiry changed the whole nature of the health service. A full 2005 Act inquiry into HS2, the engineering projects that go with it and its significant impact on our public finances is well worth calling for.

Before that, I would hope for, and I am calling for, Select Committee inquiries to review HS2, particularly by the Transport Committee, which has today severely criticised the Department for Transport over the east coast rail project. By comparison with HS2, that project is a walk in the park. HS2 needs far more scrutiny than it is getting and the High Speed Rail Bill Select Committee report could have gone much further in exposing the lack of planning and spiralling costs of the failing project. However, a number of people do need to be praised for their forensic scrutiny, and I repeat my praise for my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham.

The planned route cuts right through my constituency. Baldwin's Gate, Bar Hill, Whitmore and Madeley are in a rural area of outstanding natural beauty. The proposed scheme slices it in two, with two viaducts at the River Lea valley and Meece brook valley, and two tunnels along the way, meaning that there will be an enormous amount of construction work in a delicate area.

The environmental damage is not limited to Stone; the scheme cuts right through the country. The Woodland Trust has called it

“the biggest single threat from development to ancient woodland” in the UK, with 98 ancient woods threatened with loss or damage from phases 1 and 2 of the project.

The National Infrastructure Commission has suggested that, in addition to the £56 billion that HS2 is projected to cost, £43 billion in additional funding will be needed to improve local transport links in cities outside London to allow people to make full use of the service. That is a combined total of £99 billion, yet in today's poll 85% of people say they want the Government to spend that £99 billion on improving the capacity of existing railways instead of building HS2. The population in the west midlands will go up by more than a third, and improvements in local infrastructure are needed.

One of the questions in the poll revealed the London-centric nature of the proposal. Some 58% of Londoners support the construction of HS2, whereas only 20% of those in the north-east back it. Why are we continuing to back a failing scheme, supposedly planned for the benefit of those outside of London, if they do not even want it?

The case against HS2 has been well and thoroughly made. Perhaps less obvious have been the alternative policies we could pursue if the Government were to begin to roll back.

Craig Tracey: Has my hon. Friend found, as I have, that getting north to south is not what our constituents want? What they want is to be able to get from villages into towns, and from towns into cities.

Sir William Cash: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The whole concept is completely flawed. In addition, if we travel down from our constituencies in Staffordshire—from Stoke-on-Trent, Wolverhampton or wherever—it takes around one hour 20 minutes or less. We do not need to travel at any greater speed than that. As I have already pointed out, HS2 is not even going to connect with Birmingham New Street. It is a completely crazy project.

On the basis of rail passenger growth on the west coast main line, it is accepted that there is a need to add capacity to meet future demand. The Government have dismissed upgrades to the current rail network and claim that HS2 is

“the best way of getting ahead of current demand on our core transport network.”

That might be true—if the demand were for poor management and a shoddy business case. In reality, capacity could be increased in far more cost-effective ways.

The length of trains could be increased from eight carriages to 12 on the existing main line network. That could be achieved by lengthening station platforms. The speed of existing trains could be increased, which would reduce the time benefit of HS2 compared with traditional rail. That would probably involve engineering solutions to remove bottlenecks on the existing line. The height of trains could be doubled, as has been successfully done on the continent and elsewhere in the world, which would increase capacity. All those solutions and many more would be immeasurably cheaper than HS2, but those small gains together would create a step change in the capacity and efficiency of the network.

[Sir William Cash]

If the Government really are bent on spending such a large sum, it is far from clear why it has to be on HS2. Shuttling along at 250 mph is quick compared with the west coast main line, but painfully slow when one considers the trains in development today. By contrast, Richard Branson's 750 mph Hyperloop One is aiming to operate at nearly three times the speed of HS2. There are those who believe that the country should be focusing on new innovation rather than rebuilding yesterday's technology. There may be some suggestion that the Hyperloop is a fantasy for the future, but that is what they said about aircraft, and it is the kind of innovative thinking that has to be examined in its own right. The HS2 project is out of time and increasingly obsolete. We need to be more innovative and to spread the improvements in rail infrastructure across the country as a whole.

I want to highlight the Great British Transport Competition from the TaxPayers Alliance—mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey)—which seeks to identify alternatives. It was launched last week with the support of my hon. Friend and is seeking bids from across the country for transport projects that might be more deserving of the colossal sums being funnelled into HS2. There have already been around 50 bids for alternative schemes, which will be judged on their benefit to the local and wider economies, their ability to deliver value for money, the level of public support and the impact on the environment—in short, all the categories on which HS2 fails miserably. I encourage colleagues from all sides to enter the competition and to suggest better destinations for taxpayers' money than this enormous white elephant.

It is clear that more money needs to be spent on infrastructure, but that needs to be on worthwhile projects—for example, the capacity of existing railways and the repair and maintenance of roads other than motorways. That includes, of course, dealing with potholes, which might seem far removed from HS2, but anyone who travels anywhere around the country in rural areas will know that potholes are the biggest issue of all. In my constituency and where I live, potholes are a massive issue and there is no money available at the moment.

When I had a word with a very senior member of the defence establishment yesterday, he was quite emphatic that he would much rather have the money spent on defence. Members of the Defence Committee and many other Members have also made that clear. Furthermore, we could help to reduce our debt and spend more on the national health service and other public services.

When the public do not support HS2, when environmental groups are up in arms and when it now appears that half the Cabinet want to chuck it, it is time to call it a day. The Chancellor needs to stop throwing money down a black hole and to put the brakes on this vanity project before it leaves the station. I and others have said on many occasions that this is a white elephant, but it is perfectly clear that it is not only a white elephant; it is a dying white elephant—or it certainly should be. I now believe there are grounds for a full review by the Transport Committee and others, as appropriate, and for a full inquiry under the 2005 Act into this disastrous project.

9.55 am

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) on bringing HS2 to Westminster Hall for a serious debate today. Although I agree with him on a number of issues, on this issue we unfortunately find ourselves on opposite sides of the debate. I gently tease him about the start of his speech, where he referred to an opinion poll and laid a lot of the foundations of the logic of his argument on that poll and people not wanting HS2. I dismiss that opinion poll, because people will not have known all the facts about HS2, as I suspect he would dismiss opinion polls that ask for a second referendum on the EU.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the Select Committee on Transport examining HS2. From memory, that Committee has carried out three reports on HS2; I think the first was just after the 2010 general election. Every single one of those reports has supported the building of HS2. The Committee has looked in detail at one of the hon. Gentleman's other points—whether there will be economic benefits from building HS2. It looked at the TGV system in France and found that some places that were connected to high-speed rail did not benefit, but those towns and cities that put effort into economic development and did not just sit back and do nothing—a point that is generally true, not just for high-speed rail—benefited enormously from the advent of TGV to their towns.

Another point that is often made against HS2, although the hon. Gentleman did not make it today, is that it will benefit London more than Manchester, Leeds or Birmingham. The argument against that is the Workington argument. If people wanted to be further away in time from London, we would all aspire to be in Workington, which is about as far away as we can get from London in time, but Manchester, Newcastle, Leeds and Birmingham actually do rather well, because they put effort into economic development and benefit from being close to London. Nobody wants slower times. They want faster times.

Of course, the serious argument in favour of HS2 was never simply about time. It is about capacity and improving our infrastructure. The number of passengers on the current rail network has doubled over the last 10 or 15 years, and one of the reasons for that—although not the only reason, given, for example, better marketing of tickets—is how poor our overall transport infrastructure is, how poor the motorway system is and how poor some of the rail system is. We need HS2, and it should go not only to Leeds and Manchester but to Scotland via Newcastle, Preston or wherever, which would help the infrastructure of the whole of the United Kingdom.

We see the London establishment—*The Sunday Times*, the *Daily Mail* and parts of the civil service—saying, “This is money going to the north of England.” In actual fact, the spending on transport in London and the south-east, but in London primarily, massively outstrips spending on transport in the rest of the country. The statistic I regularly give, which is getting more out of date but is still astonishing, is that the overspend on the Jubilee line in 2000 was more than the total expenditure on transport in the regions.

Another real competition is going on. Although Crossrail 1 massively overspent and is going to be delivered late—we still do not know what the costs will

be, but it will happen and be a good thing, benefiting London and communities to its west and east—people now want Crossrail 2. The competition is not only for resources but for parliamentary time. It is about whether the Crossrail 2 hybrid Bill gets ahead of phase 2b of the HS2 Bill—the routes from Crewe to Manchester and from the west midlands to Leeds via Sheffield—which I completely oppose. Incidentally, the strongest support for HS2 has been in Greater Manchester and Leeds. There has been more opposition in London, where a lot of the costs fall because it is a very densely populated city. It would have been better if HS2 had started in Leeds and Manchester, not only because of the tremendous support but because there would have been immediate economic benefit, with people in London expecting and wanting the project to get to London faster. That is the competition we are seeing.

Another—rather subversive—argument is that the east-west route from Liverpool to Hull, which certainly needs improving, should take precedence over HS2. The two should go in step, because when HS2 is built—I believe it will be and go to Leeds, Sheffield and Manchester—in order to get passengers on and off the line, we will need the capacity to move across the north of England. There is not a competition as there is with Crossrail 2, because HS2 and the east-west route go arm in arm; we need both, and we need HS2 not to be delayed. I hope the Minister will reassure hon. Members that the HS2 phase 2 hybrid Bill will not fall behind the Crossrail 2 hybrid Bill in the schedule, because that would be a huge mistake.

One of the many points made by the hon. Member for Stone was, quite reasonably, about costs. Lots of infrastructure projects find it difficult to control costs and that is a completely reasonable point to make, as are points about the effects on our constituencies. The problem with the way in which the National Audit Office and the Department for Transport measure cost-benefit analysis is that transport schemes always favour London, because it is about the number of people and the time saved on their journeys. What is really being measured is the density of population, and that means that London schemes are always prioritised. The combination of the London establishment and the methodology used for cost-benefit analysis is bound to be biased against HS2, which is of major national importance for unifying the country after a period in which the north of England, other regions such as the south-west and whole countries such as Wales have been starved of resources.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I understand the hon. Gentleman's perspective. My father, having worked in the steel industry in Sheffield, would acknowledge that many businesspeople north of the Watford gap will prioritise the cross-Pennine links over HS2.

On the point that the hon. Gentleman is making, I argued in the initial stages that if we were going to do to this project to unify the United Kingdom, it should start in Scotland. Unfortunately, nobody listened. Does he agree that Scotland would have been a much better starting point?

Graham Stringer: The right hon. Lady makes a good point. I am a Manchester MP, I went to university in Sheffield and I always wanted the project to start in Manchester and Sheffield, but it would have been a unifying factor for the United Kingdom for the project

to start in Scotland. There is no reason for it to start in only one or two places—it could have started in three; many projects of this scale do.

I could talk at length but many hon. Members want to speak. This is a project of national importance, like the third runway at Heathrow. I understand that the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) has constituency issues. Many of us understand national priorities but we are elected by our constituents and have to represent them. I understand that balance. I do not think that the HS2 consultation has always been perfect and it—and the compensation—could have been improved. I pay tribute to the right hon. Lady for the considerable amount of increased investment in HS2 tunnelling that she has managed to get for her area. We have to keep this in perspective. We do not want investment in the north of England to stop, yet again, because of the methodology and because lobbying in London is so intensely powerful.

Mr George Howarth (in the Chair): Before I call the next speaker, I need to say that we will start on the wind-ups at 10.40 am. I will not set a time limit, but it would be helpful if those who speak from hereon in confine their remarks to about eight minutes.

10.7 am

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth.

I welcome yet another Minister for HS2 to the Front Bench. The turnover in Secretaries of State and junior Ministers responsible for this project at the Department for Transport has been regular, to say the least. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) because he made many of the points that I wanted to make. I will try not to repeat some of them, although some inevitably bear repeating.

Back in 2009, when Andrew Adonis and the Labour party announced the project, I told him that not only was it going to damage my constituency, but that it was an unpopular and costly proposition, and would perhaps not benefit the country as a whole—it will certainly be paid for by the many and be used only by the few. Unfortunately, the incoming Government, of which I was a part—I tried hard to persuade my colleagues in Cabinet to drop the project—went for it. Today, we find ourselves in a situation in which not a single inch of track has been laid, but billions of pounds have already been spent.

To follow up on the point made by the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer)—we first came into contact when I fought the Manchester Central European seat many moons ago—I am very lucky to have persuaded my colleagues to invest in tunnelling. That was not only for my constituents, but for the country as a whole, because this dreadful project is going through an environmentally sensitive area—an area of outstanding natural beauty. There is merit in looking at making the area a national park, although that may not be successful. Such a rare piece of our land, with fragile chalk streams, really deserves that protection. It is a shame that such protection does not cover the whole of the AONB but stops prematurely at the end of my constituency.

[*Dame Cheryl Gillan*]

For me, this project has been one of poor management, poor corporate governance and failures in communication right along the way. Let me refer to a couple of constituency cases; in fact, I have a letter that I will hand to the Minister at the end, addressed to the Secretary of State, about yet another failure regarding a constituent. The issue is communication; as far as I am concerned, HS2 has not learned any lessons about communication with communities.

My constituent is troubled by the closure of Shire Lane, the partial closure of Roberts Lane and the completion date for the construction of the link road. Since last November, she has been given a range of dates, ranging from January this year to April and May, and now to September or even July next year. She has continually chased answers, only to be ignored or told that someone will get back to her.

My constituent's complaints about HS2's engagement can be summarised in terms of sporadic communication; broken promises; incorrect information; having to chase constantly, making her feel that she is a nuisance to officials; and the trivialising of her concerns. At the same, a very glossy engagement strategy brochure, which is a spin on public relations, has been delivered to her house. Goodness knows how much that cost to produce. It seems that HS2 is continually secretive. People must not be messed about like that.

My constituent received the first letter on 20 June, which stated that HS2 required land access. It said:

"we will need to enter your land to carry out surveys or investigations during the period from 23 July 2018 to 30 September 2018."

The second letter, dated 22 August, was exactly the same, but changed the dates from 1 October to 31 December.

On the date of completion of the link road, the communications audit trail shows that HS2 took more than a month from the last known completion date for the link road to tell residents that it had been delayed another six months. That is not good enough. I will hand the letter to the Minister to pass to the Secretary of State. I am sure the Minister will look into this matter.

I had another case earlier this year that bears repetition. It was on compensation, which everyone seems to think is so highly paid to constituents who are thrown out of their homes. I raised this issue with the Secretary of State, and he had to fix it. After HS2 had agreed the compensation, my constituent wrote:

"Despite us having a clear and agreed contract for a year, signed in January 2017, having provided all the necessary documentation from our end, and HS2 Ltd being obligated by the contract to pay the sums to us within 21 days, three months later HS2 Ltd have still not fulfilled their side of it and made the additional payment to us."

That transaction threatened a disabled couple's move into their newly adapted home.

I think the Minister is familiar with the case, but it bears repetition because of the contrast with the lucrative high salaries paid to officials, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stone alluded to. HS2 paid at least £100,000 in salary and perks last year to 318 officials—up from 155 in 2015-16. It spent more than £600 million on consultants—well over double the figure the previous year. This is a taxpayer-owned project, but more than 25% of staff enjoy a six-figure remuneration package,

including salary, bonus and company pension contributions. Four years ago, that proportion stood at 4%, and two years ago it was less than 17%. If we add that up—particularly the extremely expensive and often very aggressive and intimidating barristers who have been used in the hybrid Bill process—the costs really outweigh what is reasonably to be expected of a taxpayer-funded project.

I will not mention Carillion or the fact that the Department has not updated the costs of the project. There are so many areas in which this project falls down. For example, for years we pushed for a property bond scheme, but in May 2018, the Department set up a High Speed 2 property price support consultation, and it will publish its decision on the consultation exercise later this year. When will that consultation be published, and what are the chances of getting the property bond that has been promoted by many people?

The whole project is starting to slip and is out of control. The phase 2b Bill has been put back and will be tabled again in 2020. The Government say that will not have a bearing on the final completion date

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani) *indicated dissent.*

Dame Cheryl Gillan: The Minister is shaking her head, but I would like better clarification on that issue. It is depressing not only that the legislation is being halted and is slipping but that there are setbacks in the civil works. The initial costs for the main civil engineering contracts for the first phase of HS2 are £1 billion over budget. That will lead to delays in starting the works. Seven contracts covering the work were announced last July, estimated at £6.6 billion, but I understand those have slipped by at least six or nine months.

The Minister was shaking her head, but she will know how difficult it is to extract information about the project. I have been batting on about that for a long time. This is taxpayers' money, and the project should be transparent. I understand that it is commercial in confidence, but it is not transparent. Indeed, if hon. Members try to read the documents, they will find a large amount are redacted. Minutes from meetings often are not published on the Government website in any timely manner. That goes against HS2's framework agreement. The minutes are often meaningless. HS2 has published board minutes up to March 2018 as far as I know, but I am not sure that that fulfils its responsibility to engender public confidence and accuracy in the information it discloses. The Minister should address that. All minutes of all meetings should be published on a timely basis. HS2 is supposed to be committed to being an open and transparent organisation, but I am afraid that is far from the truth.

When it comes to my local area, I am exceedingly worried about my local authorities. They face potential local government reorganisation—we do not have a decision yet on that. The cost and burden on my county council and district council have been quite phenomenal. Neither will get back the time, money and true cost to our local institutions, and that is not to mention our parish and town councils, which have really been burdened in this matter.

I have nothing against the Minister, as she knows. We have known each other for quite some time, and I am very proud that she is a politician. She must not take

this personally, but I have called for a dedicated Minister. The champion for the Oxford-Cambridge link, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), has called for a dedicated Minister on that project alone, yet HS2 is much larger and there is no sign of a dedicated Minister. He is a Minister just going into Government and has called for a dedicated Minister on something that is actually smaller and less complicated than this project.

I have been so disturbed by what I have read and heard recently about the failure to extract information about this project. One might think that I would get disheartened and get HS2 opposition fatigue, but I am afraid there is no such luck. Sometimes I feel I am the only person who is trying to hold the project to account, although my colleagues are doing a sterling job.

I wrote to the Secretary of State on 17 August because I was particularly perturbed that Sir John Armitt had called for the Government to invest £43 billion more in further transportation links so that HS2 could meet even the basic business assumptions made about it. I have asked the Secretary of State to ensure that the Government carry out a full evaluation of this project—its viability and its value for money for the taxpayer. These moneys could be spent on other areas of modernising transport and communications in the UK and on other matters. As can be seen in the newspapers today, many people think that the money would be better spent on health and education, certainly in view of the technological advances in transport. The Government are still playing catch-up on 5G and on other matters.

In the interests of the country and taxpayers, I hope the Minister, the Cabinet and the Secretary of State will respond positively to the request I made, which I copied to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury for their consideration. Because of the major implications of this massive expenditure, the high costs and the poor corporate governance, HS2 should be completely independently assessed. If that results in a pause while that work takes place, I will be satisfied. I hope that HS2 will hit the buffers. It is not good value for money for the taxpayer.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr George Howarth (in the Chair): Order. I have to impose a five-minute limit on speeches—I am afraid the time available does not allow for anything else.

10.20 am

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): I fully understand the concerns of constituency Members. The worst thing to happen to a Member of Parliament for a rural constituency is to have a railway go through it. A nuclear power station would bring several thousand jobs, an airport expansion would bring jobs, but if a railway goes through a constituency, particularly above ground, it is bound to affect the local people but bring them little benefit. Even if a motorway were built, there would be junctions—some of the locals would benefit. It is terribly difficult for Members of Parliament to deal with this sort of project.

The timescale of most rail projects is another problem. HS2 started in 2009 and the first phase will probably finish in the mid-2020s. Most people, when they think about a Government project, think it is all fully worked out and in a filing cabinet in Whitehall. They cannot understand why their questions are not answered. The reality

is that there is a sketch, the details for which are then filled in. People get fed up because they keep writing to their Member of Parliament to try to get reassurances on things, but they cannot because things have not been detailed and designed.

The wear and tear on MPs and their staff is pretty formidable. I know most Members here have dedicated staff in their office dealing with constituents, many of whom get ill and suffer stress as a result of living with concerns about a national infrastructure project. I understand where most of the local Members are coming from, but Parliament voted for HS2 by a large margin. I abstained in the first vote because I had a role in the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill Select Committee. HS2 should not be seen as separate from the rail network but as part of it. Its genesis was that the west coast main line's capacity was filling up. It was thought that if a new line were built, it might as well be a high-speed line, and that if all the intercity traffic were put on that, opportunities would be opened up to have more freight on the west coast main line and more services.

This is about investment in public services. If this country has had a problem over decades, it is that we have sometimes not invested in them enough. It is also about linking up the spine of the country, eventually getting to Scotland. As the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) pointed out, there are benefits at his end of the country as well. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) is perfectly right that much of the cost is related not to building the railway but to all the stations—the major cost of Euston, Old Oak Common and Curzon Street. HS2 has to be seen as part of a major regeneration project for those areas. The result is that, although it takes decades to get any kind of money back from investment in railways, there will be major benefits where investment goes in.

My hon. Friend made a brief comment about there being no spur to Heathrow. Most people coming from the north are not actually going to Heathrow, but HS2 goes through Old Oak Common, as does Crossrail. All one will need to do is walk across the station to get on Crossrail, which I think will take eight or nine minutes to get to Heathrow. Spending £1 billion on a spur would not be a good thing to do.

HS2 is a national infrastructure project and will roll out over 30 years. That means civil engineers can plan for the long term, training academies can be set up and Britain will improve its rail network. That does not diminish the fact that MPs whose constituencies are affected have to deal with the real difficulties of their constituents, farmers and owner-occupiers. We are a small country with a lot of owner-occupiers who are very vocal when their communities are affected, and I know that creates special difficulties for their MPs. My hon. Friend has to some extent played a part in changing history in our relationship with Europe—I suspect he will be more successful on Europe than on stopping HS2.

10.24 am

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. After the excellent speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), I will not go into a lot of detail but will concentrate on two matters: the overall cost and implications, and some specific problems relating to my constituency.

[Jeremy Lefroy]

My hon. Friend has already referred to the rising cost of HS2. The latest estimate we have seen is at least £80 billion—that was from Michael Byng, whom I have met and whose work is based on the standard method used by Network Rail to cost its projects. That estimate is approximately 50% more than the one the Government have used in their arguments for the Bills to approve HS2 so far. Such a sharp rise in costs would have a serious impact both on the rate of return of the project and on public finances. It would also make it by far the most expensive railway in the world and by far the largest infrastructure project in Europe.

It is surely time to at least pause the project and conduct a proper costing, so that Parliament knows what we are committing to. HS2 has more information now than it did two or three years ago, when it arrived at the £56 billion figure. It is incumbent on the Government to bring the issue back to Parliament, because we need to know the facts. It may well be that Parliament nevertheless approves a project costing 50% more—that is Parliament's prerogative—but it is up to Parliament to make that decision, given that the figures are likely to be so different now from what they were when the project was originally put before us, certainly at phase 1 if not at phase 2a.

During that pause, we could look at alternatives as well as the costs of the proposed plan—alternatives for improving capacity and reliability on key routes around the country, especially for Scotland, Wales and all the English regions, so that we have a fully integrated proposal for the future of our rail network. In the case of the north of England, as the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) mentioned, a fast east-west link should be made a priority.

The problem with HS2 is that it was specified as a solution before the needs had been properly identified. It also assumed that we had to have a train capable of 350 to 400 kph because that was becoming a standard elsewhere. However, rather than looking to France, Germany or China, where distances between major population centres are greater, we should perhaps look to Switzerland, where intercity speeds are comparable to ours and where there is a highly regarded, reliable railway. Speeds of more than 200 kph are already achieved on some of our lines and are perfectly adequate. We need to make those speeds standard across far more of our network, rather than increasing the gap between HS2 and the rest of it. We have one chance to get this right for the coming decades, because once HS2 is fully committed to, there will be little or no financial capacity for an alternative approach. It is surely worth pausing and developing a full national rail plan based on capacity, connectivity and reliability, rather than speed.

In previous debates and in my petitions, I have raised a number of concerns about the way my constituents have been dealt with. I will repeat the most significant of those. No one should be prevented from moving home as a result of the blight caused by HS2. My constituents' experiences have been mixed. Some have been assisted well—quickly and efficiently—by HS2, but others have had lengthy delays and unreasonable refusals. Constituents have been told that their long-held plan to downsize once their children have left home is not a good reason to sell. That is not acceptable.

I am also increasingly concerned about the sheer quantity of additional land that HS2 aims to take over or compulsory-purchase in addition to that specifically required for the route. Just last week, a constituent told me that some lovely woodland near the River Trent, which he has been rehabilitating, is now required for a depot. There is also the question of properties that have been purchased by HS2 remaining unoccupied in some villages. I know the Minister takes that seriously, and I ask her to look at the current situation.

I return to the need for the Government to bring the question of the cost of HS2 back to the House in a transparent manner so we can judge again its cost-effectiveness, the business case and whether our public finances can afford it now that circumstances have changed.

10.29 am

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) on securing the debate. As a great believer in the future of rail transport, I have long welcomed greater investment in our railways. On Second Reading of the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill, I raised the positive case for ensuring that HS2 trains serve Stoke-on-Trent, and I continue to push for the enhanced connectivity that our growing economy needs. I am pleased that the Department for Transport recognises that. However, I have continued to raise concerns about the level of disruption that we are likely to experience during construction—in particular, I did so at the Bill Select Committee. I will set out how HS2 could deliver much greater benefits for the substantial investment being made and how its impacts can be mitigated much more effectively.

The new high-speed rail line is sound in principle but, as I have always warned, for HS2 to maximise in practice the suggested social and economic benefits, it must be met with improvements locally on the conventional network. Indeed, much more work must be undertaken in partnership with Network Rail to assess what measures will be necessary to ensure that the conventional network is up to an acceptable standard to facilitate HS2 classic-compatible services.

Services via Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford should terminate not at Macclesfield but at Manchester, and work must be done to understand how additional capacity can be facilitated on the network north of Macclesfield to allow for that. In addition, work must be done to address constraints caused by the numerous junctions and level crossings on the network throughout Staffordshire. Importantly, there is a section of the line at Alsager that must be redoubled to increase capacity and the frequency of services linking through to Crewe and beyond.

While the commitment on HS2 services serving Stoke-on-Trent is welcome, current levels of economic growth demand more than one service an hour. In particular, the introduction of a classic-compatible service between Birmingham Curzon Street and Stoke-on-Trent, terminating at either Manchester Piccadilly or Liverpool Lime Street, would help relieve severe overcrowding on the network north of Birmingham.

There are clear challenges with running HS2 services on the conventional network, some of which I have outlined. I hope that the Minister will indicate what is being done to understand what works are required to

achieve full integration. That spending must be planned for in Network Rail's control period 6, which is due to start in 2019. As I continue to stress, it is essential that HS2 works effectively with Network Rail, the city council and other partners to ensure that improvements to Stoke station are completed.

My greatest concern is about construction traffic. Traffic modelling carried out by HS2 is based around the stipulation that 90% of excavated material will be reused in construction. As an estimate, for every 1% that that figure is out, there would be roughly an additional 250,000 vehicle movements. Geotechnical ground investigations have yet to be undertaken on phase 2a, but studies on phase 1 commenced in autumn 2017 and that data will include analysis of the quality of the excavated material, which will help inform whether it is viable to reuse 90% of it. It is essential that early lessons are learned from phase 1, and the data is vital to informing the traffic modelling.

There will be a significant impact from construction traffic on the road network along the route, especially at junction 15 of the M6, which serves Stoke-on-Trent. That location will see the highest impact from construction traffic during phase 2a. HS2 figures suggest that it will cause gridlock at the junction, with a 50% increase in HGVs at the morning peak and nearly a 100% increase at the afternoon peak. It has been widely recognised that the approach taken in the traffic assessment is insufficient; it is not a network analysis but an analysis of junctions independently of one another, which is most problematic at this location.

Junction 15 is made up of three interacting junctions, yet HS2 has analysed the impacts separately and independently, meaning that the full impact has not been recognised. I call for the Government and HS2 to take action to ensure that junction 15 is upgraded before the construction of phase 2a. That is essential to ensure that it can accommodate not only HS2 traffic but future growth in the economy and complete the national smart motorway spine. I also call for upgrades on the A34, where it is predicted there will be a 400-car queue every evening.

10.34 am

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I thank the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) for bringing forward the debate and all other hon. Members for their pertinent questions. Let us first remind ourselves why investment in growing our railways is imperative. We need investment in capacity growth and connectivity, which is being called for particularly in the north but also across the rest of the country. We also need to see environmental improvements, particularly in air quality. Rail provides a real opportunity for modal shift, whether from car to train or, indeed, from plane to train in the case of high-speed trains. We also need to invest in economic opportunity, so much so in the north, which for generations has missed out on the investment we have seen in London and the south-east.

However, we must be mindful of communities, the environment and construction costs. For such major infrastructure projects, we must also be mindful of skills, the opportunity for employment and how we develop engineering across the country. We must also be aware of the cost of getting it wrong. It is therefore right for hon. Members to call for reviews, investigations

and transparency, because this is a publicly supported project about which the public demand answers, and they must receive them. As the project moves into a new phase of governance and leadership, it is important that a new approach is brought to high-speed rail to put in place the scrutiny that the public demand.

We must also get answers from the Minister. We have heard speculation and read reports, so today I ask her to clarify the actual costs of each part of phase 2—phase 2a, phase 2b east and phase 2b west—so that we can all understand the figures, how they have been derived and where costs fall. We must also understand the timeline, which we hear has been set back.

HS1 was hailed as a success, coming in on time and on budget, but clearly the rumours are that HS2 will not have such success. We need to understand why the learning of HS1 has not been translated into this project. HS1 is successful in bringing people from mainland Europe to the UK and in taking people to the south-east. We are proud of that project, but we must understand where the needs sit now.

I understand the public's frustration. The complete chaos across our rail network over the last three months has set it in the minds of so many that rail can no longer be relied on. We have seen people stranded at stations, people losing jobs because a train has not turned up, and people not getting home to see their family in the evening. When the Government cannot even get the basics right, people are asking, "Why aren't we getting things shored up before we move on to HS2?" We will read the Glaister report—I understand the interim report will be out later this month—which will address those issues, with interest.

We must have a fully integrated rail system, not one with segregated high-speed rail. I want assurances from the Minister that we will see that integration rather than have high-speed rail just for people who can afford premium rates, because that will not bring economic opportunity to the north. That is why Labour is clear that we would have one fully integrated rail network owned by the public and run by the public as we move forward.

We know that we must build more capacity on the rail network, that we must invest in the economies of the north and that people must be able to travel. The point about freight is important: we need more paths for freight. We must enable that serious modal shift and move freight off roads and on to rail. Investment is therefore imperative, as we know that the road haulage industry cannot recruit the drivers required to run the freight network on the roads. We must make those changes, and we therefore need available paths to do that. Building that capacity is essential, and the west coast main line will lend itself to that.

We also need leading-off capacity to the south-west, Wales and elsewhere across the north, including north of Manchester and York. Labour has closely considered how to develop a long-term plan for rail investment because, as many hon. Members have indicated, it is important to invest in the right places. We have been clear that creating a Crossrail for the north, bringing that connectivity to the north of the country, is our priority.

The Secretary of State's decision not to electrify the trans-Pennine line has brought real damage to the north, but Labour will introduce reparation for that decision as soon as we come into government. We will ensure that someone can travel from Manchester, Liverpool,

[*Rachael Maskell*]

Leeds, Bradford, York or Hull, and down into Sheffield and up to Teesside and Newcastle. These are important decisions, and Crossrail for the north will be our priority, ensuring that we catch up on the timeline on which we have been so let down by this Government. Building connectivity to Sheffield will start to address the issues about what route HS2 should take in a faster way, because we wish to ensure that people can get to where they need to go. We must also invest in digital rail so that we get maximum capacity and opportunity from our railways. We must address the dreadful overcrowding that commuters experience day by day, because often people are not even able to get on the trains.

On speed, we believe that it is important to improve the east coast main line. Since we do not know when—or indeed whether—HS2 will be achieved, it is important that control period 6 provides extra capacity for speed and upgrades to the east coast main line. Travelling from York to London will take only 1 hour 31 minutes, and the additional time saving that HS2 will bring to cities such as mine will not be the reason why we need the additional spend required by high-speed rail. This is about capacity, not speed; it is about whether someone has a seat and can work or carry out their activities. That is why we need to invest in rail.

We must also ensure that we are responsible for the environment. I have met the Woodland Trust, and I am concerned about some of the environmental impacts of the project, particularly on sites of special scientific interest. We must be mindful that once things have gone, we cannot bring them back, and I believe that we must maximise our support for the environment as this project moves forward.

Today we have all identified wasted opportunities. Where, for example, is the cycle route alongside this network? That would make sense, but it has not yet been planned, despite its minimal cost. The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) mentioned a depot that suddenly appeared on land, and we must scrutinise every decision and decide whether it is imperative for each little piece of infrastructure to go ahead, or whether there are alternatives. It is certainly distressing to hear that so much construction will be delivered by road rather than rail, and it is important to consider that.

Finally, on economic opportunity, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) that we need better connectivity to the north. Manchester is such an exciting city, but we cannot stymie its growth by denying it that much-needed connectivity. Liverpool is also moving forward and follows closely behind. We must ensure the right connectivity and invest in the right places. We need transparency on spend as we move forward. People are concerned; they are paying so much more for their rail fares, which have gone up by 35% under this Government, and they need to understand what the future will hold.

Mr George Howarth (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Lady has exceeded her time.

10.45 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash)

on securing the debate. The construction of HS2 phase 2a will have a significant impact on his constituents, and they have in him a tireless advocate for their interests. I hope that today I will be able to answer most of his questions, and those of all Members who have made thorough and considered contributions to the debate. If I do not, I will follow up those points in writing.

Before I respond to the specific points raised, I wish to outline why the Government are committed to HS2. Quite simply, our current train network is running at almost completely full capacity. Demand on the west coast main line has increased by 190% since 1995, and people are often left standing the whole way on long-distance journeys. We are close to being unable to add any more seats or trains, and although delays occur less frequently than in the past, we still need to overcome that challenge. HS2 will be a new train on dedicated high-speed lines, and because long-distance services will be shifted to the brand new railway, that will free up extra space for more trains to run on the most overcrowded and heavily congested routes.

HS2 direct intercity services will improve the experience of all passengers. Train operators will be able to run more varied and frequent services, including more passenger trains to locations that are not directly served by HS2. From 2033 we expect up to 48 trains to run on the network every hour, carrying more than 300,000 passengers a day—around 100 million a year. There will be greatly increased capacity, faster journey times and better connectivity between eight of our 10 largest cities. Those are the fundamental benefits of HS2, and it will make the lives of passengers easier.

However, the HS2 project is about more than transport—that point was made by many hon. Members—and we want it to turbo-charge economic growth that is shared by the entire country, allowing transport to open up new work and study opportunities and boost the prospects of millions. The key point is that increasing connectivity and capacity to and from the midlands, the north of England and London will help to rebalance the UK economy, and the benefits of that will be felt long before the railway enters the operational phase in 2026.

We are already seeing progress. Tomorrow I will be in Worksop, meeting local businesses to discuss the opportunities that arise from HS2. We know that more than 2,000 businesses have already won work on HS2, and an estimated 6,000 jobs have been supported by it. Meanwhile, 100 apprentices are already working on the project, with 2,000 expected to do so over its lifetime, many of them trained at our high-speed rail colleges in Doncaster and Birmingham. I suggest that Members drop in to visit one of those colleges, to see the opportunities being provided for those young people. HS2 provides a massive opportunity to train people in the skills that the UK needs to compete globally, and it will allow us to generate long-term employment opportunities across the UK.

Birmingham—as a Brummie, I am allowed to say this—is the heart of HS2. The Mayor of the West Midlands combined authority has said:

“HS2 will be worth billions to the West Midlands economy once complete”.

He is a strong supporter of the project. I could not be more passionate about trying to improve the economy, employment prospects and aspirations of young people

from our second city. Of course, HS2 will not do that all on its own, but it will be an enabler of economic growth by connecting our great cities and towns in the midlands and the north, encouraging employers not to focus only on London and the south-east.

As I travel around the country to make the case for HS2, there is a true sense of pride and excitement about the project. I recently met the leaders of Bradford Council and Leeds City Council to discuss their plans to maximise the potential of HS2 and regenerate Leeds city centre. The leader of Leeds City Council has said:

“HS2 is an incredible opportunity to create something truly transformational to the economy of our city and the wider region.”

That is what the north is saying. Too often we just hear the voices of London and the south-east.

It is that sense of enthusiasm about HS2 and its potential that we want to encourage. That is why the Government are also working hard to ensure that HS2 integrates with the emerging ambition for Northern Powerhouse Rail and transport improvements in the west midlands. We have been in close contact with local authorities on the route developing growth strategies that will ensure that the benefits of HS2 are fully realised in local areas. That work is critical to the long-term impact that HS2 will have on regeneration and connectivity between our great cities.

We are making progress with the construction of HS2 and remain on track to deliver the plans. Work is starting on phase 1, which will link London and Birmingham by 2026, and we are legislating for phase 2a, which will connect Birmingham and Crewe from 2027.

Sir William Cash: There is a real problem—a potential scandal—about the issue of where the spoil will go. Is it going to be used properly? Can it be used? The other thing that I will write to the Minister about—I hope she will send me a reply—is to do with boreholes in the Whitmore and Baldwin's Gate area. I have some serious questions about the viability of the proposed tunnel work.

Ms Ghani: I know that my hon. Friend has raised that matter a number of times, including with the Select Committee. It is a detailed question that requires a detailed response. I am happy to provide him with a written response. I know that he has already had a response from the Select Committee, but I am more than happy to put things down on paper.

Phase 2a will connect Birmingham and Crewe from 2027, which is many years earlier than expected. Phase 2 will run from the west midlands to Manchester in the west and Leeds in the east, completing the network by 2033. We are committed to delivering to those timescales. Of course I am deeply aware that the project, despite its huge benefits, will have a significant impact on many people during construction.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, particularly as she is reading out some of the PR speech that I have heard before from Ministers about how marvellous HS2 is. Has she carried out an economic impact assessment on my constituency of Chesham and Amersham? Can she tell me exactly how we will benefit or what damage will be done to the economy? Can she give me detailed figures to show how HS2 benefits my constituency?

Ms Ghani: I know that my right hon. Friend has been a strong champion of her constituency and has undertaken a forensic investigation into HS2. There will be broader benefits, not only to her constituents but to people living around HS2, and that will create a number of opportunities. I will respond to some of the points that she raises in a moment, as I get through my speech.

My right hon. Friend talked about the impact on her constituents. I agree that previously HS2 did not deal with enough efficiency or compassion with the issues raised by constituents. We must continue to work with MPs and constituents affected, and we must work with affected landowners, businesses and residents to ensure that they are suitably compensated. We must make addressing their concerns a priority wherever we can.

I will now address the finer points made by Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone, as well as making a number of points about HS2, delved into the far more important topic of potholes, which his constituents have raised with him. In case he was worried about numbers, I can assure him that £6 billion is being invested in repairing potholes to help improve the condition of our local highways. Funding includes a record £296 million for the pothole action fund, which is enough to fix around 6 million potholes. In case there are any concerns, there is funding available.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone made a number of points about costs and spending relating to HS2. I confirm that the 2015 spending review envelope of £55.7 billion for HS2, in 2015 prices, still stands, of which £27.18 billion has been set for phase 1 and £28.55 billion for phase 2. He also mentioned the route from Euston to Old Oak Common. HS2's strategic objectives are to deliver connectivity between London and our cities in the north and the midlands. Old Oak Common will offer connectivity to Crossrail, on the great western main line, dispensing passengers east and west into London. I think that adequately covers the issue of costs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone also mentioned the environment. There is no denying that HS2 will have an impact on the environment as it is laid. We want HS2 to be more environmentally responsible than any other major infrastructure project in the history of the UK. We are aware of the potential detrimental impacts it could have on the environment and we will do what we can to mitigate them, as well as creating a new green corridor incorporating 9 sq km of new native woodland, alongside tailor-made habitats for species, including 7 million new trees and shrubs for phase 1 alone.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone also raised the issue of maladministration. HS2 Ltd has moved on positively from the point that he raised. HS2 does not always get it right, but I hope that he will agree that the level of engagement has improved, both locally, with local community engagement officers, and here in Westminster, with drop-in meetings for Members.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) for the work that he does with the Transport Committee. I point out that the Committee's last three reports stated clearly the case for HS2. To be clear, the phase 2b Bill will be in Parliament long before Crossrail 2. The timetable for the phase 2b Bill will be announced shortly. That will help to unlock Northern Powerhouse Rail and it will be debated before Crossrail 2.

[Ms Ghani]

I will respond to all the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) about her casework and I am more than happy to take her notes away. I fully understand how stressful it must be for constituents who are having to deal with HS2, if their issues are not dealt with swiftly and appropriately. I can only apologise if those cases have not been dealt with efficiently. I will do my best to ensure that each constituent's case is dealt with as swiftly as it can be, and I am more than happy to take that work away.

My right hon. Friend also raised the issue of a national park—she has spoken to me about this previously—and I have raised it with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I would encourage her to do so as well, and I hope to continue to work with her on that. Her constituency has already received more than £26,000 from HS2 to help her neighbourhood to be as green as possible.

My right hon. Friend also raised the matter of the property bond. We ran a technical consultation about that this year and we are now examining responses. We will take a position on the outcome and there will be an announcement later in 2018.

I am a little nervous that I am running out of time, so I will quickly conclude. If I have been unable to respond to everyone's questions, I will write to them.

I want to ensure that we fully understand the strategic case for HS2. It will not only increase capacity and improve connectivity, but create jobs and regeneration in the UK. For far too long investment and prosperity have been focused on London and the south-east. HS2 will completely change that, benefiting communities up and down the line, but mostly in the north. Moreover, our 2017 manifesto makes a clear commitment to strategic national investment, including HS2. The vote on the phase 1 Bill in the House of Commons was 399 to 42 in favour, and in the House of Lords the figures were 386 to 26.

10.58 am

Sir William Cash: I am sorry to have to say it, but I am wholly unconvinced by the Government's reply. That is not surprising, as I put forward a case that, coincidentally, is on the same lines as the opinion poll published today. That shows that 60% of all voters in the UK are against the proposal in one shape or form. That is a pretty significant poll. The whole question of relative costs, compared with other demands on the UK budget, such as defence, public services, the NHS and the rest, quite clearly demonstrate that HS2 is a white elephant. I do not believe that it has any proper justification. I will leave it at that.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered High Speed 2.

Shale Gas Exploration: Planning Permission

11 am

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered planning permission for shale gas exploration.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I thank all those attending and all those who have come along to speak. It is fantastic to see so many people in this Chamber for a 30-minute debate on fracking; it demonstrates the importance of this matter and the particular importance of the proposals before us.

Today I will talk about the current consultation, which the Government started and which will conclude in November, on the proposals to permit shale gas exploration through the permitted development scheme and the proposals to permit shale gas production through the national significant infrastructure projects scheme.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Lee Rowley: If hon. Members will bear with me, I will do one to two minutes of introduction and then I will be happy to take interventions.

I will set out my stall immediately: I stand here today to highlight my concerns on both those proposals and an industry that is highly controversial as a form of energy extraction, has a chequered history in the United Kingdom, has not been proven at scale and has, in my part of the world, caused the greatest amount of opposition that I have ever seen in my 15 years of experience in politics.

John Howell (Henley) (Con) *rose*—

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con) *rose*—

Lee Rowley: I will give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight).

Sir Greg Knight: I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this debate. The Government talk a lot about localism. Does he agree with me that, if that means anything and is not just meaningless waffle, it should mean that decisions taken by local planning committees should be the final say on the subject of extracting shale gas, and that those decisions should not be subject to being overturned by some faceless inspector who does not have to live with the consequences of his or her decision?

Mr George Howarth (in the Chair): Before the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire continues his speech, it is right and proper that the Minister has 15 minutes to respond. The hon. Gentleman indicated he was willing to take interventions, but I should warn him that they need to be very limited in number, or he will have no speech of his own left.

Lee Rowley: I appreciate the Chair's guidance and I will seek to conclude by 11.15 am, with any interventions that I have taken.

I thank the Minister, who has been incredibly kind to me in hearing my comments on this and has spent some time with me already to talk about it. She is fully aware

of my views both on fracking in general and on these proposals; I do not think anything I say today is new. I know there is a range of views in this Chamber on fracking. That is a discussion for another time. I am on record as being hugely sceptical of the merits of fracking. I do not think it will achieve its objectives and I wish we would move on to something else in our energy policy.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Lee Rowley: I will not take objections. What we need to debate here is the proposals on permitted development and NSIP. Whatever one's views on those, my concern is exactly as has just been outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire. The proposals before us for permitted development and NSIP do one main thing, and one main thing only: they take people out of a process that it is vital for them to be part of so that they have their opportunity to speak and to highlight why things are appropriate or inappropriate for their local area and why their environment will be so affected if these things go ahead.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I have had five sites in my constituency; one is currently being developed and a second one is before the planning inspectorate. Does my hon. Friend agree that, were we to go down the permitted development route, the concerns raised by residents about traffic planning at Roseacre Wood, which will probably kill it as a suitable site, would not be considered, and that the proposals the Government have laid before us are quite frankly bonkers?

Lee Rowley: My hon. Friend has a way with words, and he sums up the real concern within and without this House about the proposals. I understand the consultation is under way and is open; I hope that the Minister will highlight that she and the Government have an open mind on this. If I may demonstrate for a moment my experience in my constituency, I have had a planning application for exploration in Marsh Lane, which is the reason I became interested in this and the reason I have soured massively on fracking as a whole. That application simply to explore, which would be allowed under permitted development rights, would mean the imposition of heavy industrial equipment for five years. It would be the equivalent of pouring two football fields' worth of concrete into an area that has not been changed since the 1695 enclosure Act, and putting a 60 metre-high drilling rig up there for six to nine months.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Lee Rowley: I will not give way for the moment. It is not just the 60 metre-high drilling rig; it is the industrial equipment that would stay there for a period of five years just for the exploration. From my planning application, that is a 2 metre-high perimeter fence, a 4.8 metre-high combination of bunding and fencing, two to three cabinets of 3 metres in height, acoustic screening of 5 metres in height, four security cameras of 5.5 metres in height, a 2.9 metre-high power generator, two water tanks of 3 metres in height, a 4.5 metre-high Kooney pressure control, a 4 metre-high blowout prevention and skid and choke manifold, 9 metre-high lighting and a 10 metre-high emergency vent. That is the wholesale industrialisation of the Derbyshire countryside for what is not a temporary period—and that is just exploration.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): On the Island we have great problems as well, because we are one of the most geologically unstable parts of northern Europe. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is very poor precedent for the Government effectively to force through something that is locally unpopular in many areas, because they could do so with many other things in future, including housing targets? Overall, as well as fracking, this is poor democratic accountability on the part of Government.

Lee Rowley: I concur with my hon. Friend's statement on that matter.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Lee Rowley: I will give way in one moment. This is the point about permitted development. On the NSIP proposals for actual production of fracking, having read the consultation I am unsure how this can be put into NSIP, even if it was a good idea. The consultation itself seems to confuse major shale gas production with shale gas production, but I have not seen a definition of major versus minor. Ultimately, the point about shale gas is that it happens in many places. Either we are defining a single well pad as major and sticking individual well pads into the NSIP regime—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Lee Rowley: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) and then to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner).

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this important debate. As he knows, I am far more positive about the prospects for shale gas exploration than he is. Nevertheless, I and the Select Committee that I sit on have raised genuine concerns about the permitted development process, the clarity around it, and whether it relates to simply drilling a hole on an existing well pad or the construction of an entire well pad, which is heavy industrial construction and could literally go anywhere in any one of our constituencies. There are real concerns and we need clarity on that specific point.

Lee Rowley: I agree completely with my hon. Friend.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, people from Mosborough were on the march that we had in Bolsover. We approach fracking in a different way from what he has described today. It is no wonder that the richest man in Britain, the head of INEOS, who has 60% of the shares, is very much into fracking. He is fracking in our area and he is fracking in the North East Derbyshire area. People from as far away as Scarborough came to that rally and the truth is that most of Britain is against fracking. Why does the hon. Gentleman not do the same as I have done and tell the Government, "I am against fracking wherever it happens."?

Lee Rowley: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's involvement in this. This is my second debate on this question, and I welcome his attendance. I have been making the case strongly for North East Derbyshire and strongly against fracking in North East Derbyshire since I had the

[Lee Rowley]

privilege to be elected to this place, and I will continue to do so. The hon. Gentleman is a former miner and I have a huge amount of respect for him. I am the grandson of former miners who probably worked with him in the last decades that we were in the mines. One thing that unifies us—we are on exactly opposite ends of the political spectrum—is fracking. We are products of the soil and the toil and the mines in our area, which we have been proud to be part of for generations, and we do not think that fracking is the right way to go.

To continue my NSIP point, the Planning Act 2008 put down a series of criteria that large-scale infrastructure projects should meet. I looked at them in preparation for the debate. Some examples are quite close to what we are talking about, such as gas reservation projects and liquefied natural gas reception facilities. For those to meet the NSIP regime criteria they need to hold 4.5 million cubic metres of gas a day. An individual fracking well and an individual fracking pad would be less than one hundredth of the size required by those criteria. That is the fundamental problem: the NSIP regime was not designed for this project and we should not use it.

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman will have seen the recent research about the dangers of fracking near abandoned coalmines. Does he agree that there should be a moratorium until this has been properly investigated?

Lee Rowley: As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the impact of shale gas—the right hon. Gentleman is also a member—I am extremely concerned by issues that Professor Styles suggests could occur in mining areas like ours if fracking goes ahead at scale.

I will try to wind up as I want to ensure that the Minister has time to speak. As I said at the beginning, the fundamental problem with permitted development and NSIP is that it takes local people's voices out of the discussion. Nearly 4,000 people in North East Derbyshire have been involved in the discussion because they are hugely concerned about this project. Whether people agree or disagree with it—I disagree—we have to give people the opportunity to voice their opinions. The consultation on the table, "Permitted development for shale gas exploration", says that

"the Government will strengthen community engagement by consulting on whether developers should be required to conduct pre-application consultation prior to shale gas development."

There is no point in conducting pre-application consultations if these things will be approved no matter what.

Fundamentally, if we have a problem of a lack of public consent for fracking, which we do—we clearly do in some parts of the country, such as mine—we should treat the problem either by not bothering with the policy or by trying to change people's views. My view is that it should be the former, not the latter. We should not try to treat the symptom by taking people out of the process. I hope that, at the end of the consultation, the Government will listen and this will not go forward. Taking people out of the process is why the proposals for permitted development and NSIP for fracking are fundamentally wrong, and I hope that they do not go ahead.

11.13 am

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth, and to see so many engaged colleagues in the Chamber. I remain grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley), whom I have met on many occasions to discuss at length his facts versus other facts. I will continue to engage with all Members; as they know, my door is always open to discuss any issue relating to energy policy.

As all Members know, given Ministers' quasi-judicial role in the planning system, I am not at liberty to comment on any particular applications or any local mineral plans.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Will the Minister give way on that point?

Claire Perry: I will make a little progress and then I will happily give way. To be clear, Government Members stood on clear manifesto commitments to develop a shale industry in this country and to bring forward proposals to review permitted development rights and the NSIP regime. We put together an extensive, long-running consultation so that all views, which are profoundly held on both sides, had an opportunity to be expressed.

Several hon. Members rose—

Claire Perry: As I said, I will make a little progress and then I will give way. I welcome a longer debate on this issue because I am a passionate advocate of convincing people of the scientific evidence for climate change. Everything that my Department has done has been based on scientific evidence. I find it profoundly disturbing that, when it comes to exploring the potential of an industry, we refuse to accept the science. I have met—*[Interruption.]* I am not giving way.

Mr George Howarth (in the Chair): Order. If the Minister chooses to give way, she will do so. In the meantime, Members need to behave with a little bit of decorum.

Claire Perry: Thank you, Mr Howarth. Decorum is always the watchword.

I have met, and continue to engage with, many of the scientists who have put out studies relating to fugitive methane emissions and the seismicity question, which is of course concerning. I find when talking to those scientists that, behind that, they have a fundamental aversion to using any form of fossil fuel. Indeed, the briefing that many Members received today, and which I have seen, says that fossil fuels should stay in the ground.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Indeed.

Claire Perry: When the hon. Lady goes home and turns on her energy supply to cook her children's tea, she will probably turn on—

Caroline Lucas: I have a solar panel.

Claire Perry: She says she has a solar panel. *[Interruption.]* Can I please make some progress? Some 70% of homes in this country—maybe more—rely on gas to cook children's teas. We also rely on gas for a substantial proportion of our energy supply. We have a choice: we can continue to import increasing amounts

of foreign gas and effectively be at the behest of other nations that do not share our interests, or we can soberly, calmly and scientifically assess whether we can develop the shale gas industry.

I refer all Members to our superb Committee on Climate Change, which will tell them that, in every single scenario for reaching our carbon dioxide reduction targets, gas is in the mix. I am happy to debate the safety and responsibility of the industry in terms of doing that correctly, but I will not set this country's energy policy based on an ideology premised on using 100% renewables now, which cannot be delivered at the right price. If Members accept that—*[Interruption.]* No, I will not give way; I will respond to the points from my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire.

Members will have received data today suggesting that the vast majority of the British public are opposed to shale gas exploration. That is not true. The data suggest that 13% of people strongly oppose it, almost 50% of people do not have a view, 15% support it and 2% strongly support it. Most people do not have a view on this because they understand that being at the behest of a foreign gas provider is probably not great for British energy sovereignty. Many coalmining communities also understand the value of high-value jobs and economic investment in their areas. That is why I urge all Members—*[Interruption.]* I am not giving way.

Mr George Howarth (in the Chair): Order. The Minister has indicated that she will not give way, certainly for the time being. Members standing up and asking her to do so after she has said she will not does not make a lot of sense. Perhaps she will indicate at some point if she is willing to take interventions.

Claire Perry: I will move on to the substance of the debate and respond to the points from my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire on the decision-making process.

It is in no one's interest—in Government, in local government or in a community—for the planning process to be where it is today. We are stuck in a morass of protest and countervailing information. Frankly, I pity any local councillor who gets an application on their desk, because they will shortly have a travelling circus of protestors to deal with, most of whom do not hail from the areas where these sites are located. We then have policing issues and protestors blocking roads and preventing young children from getting to hospital. That is an entirely unacceptable way to express democracy in our country. *[Interruption.]* I will certainly not give way to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) at any point.

Mr Skinner: What about me then?

Claire Perry: I will certainly not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

As set out in our manifesto, we intend to consult on what can be done to the planning process. As well as looking at moving production rights into a national regime, as we have done for other complicated energy sources, we have considerably increased the level of support for local authorities and local decision makers. We have set up training; we have provided funding. I will shortly appoint a shale gas commissioner, who will have deep and extensive constituency knowledge of the

issue and will be out there, helping local residents to understand some of the challenges that exist. To put the myth-buster in place again, we are not overriding local decision making; there are plenty of opportunities for decision makers to express their views in the pre-consultation stage, as is done for other complicated and difficult energy policies.

There is another myth I want to bust, after which I will be happy to take some interventions. Some talk as if we are not in a country that prides itself on environmental regulation, but we have the strongest environmental regulatory regime for offshore oil and gas production in the world. I find it perverse that political parties north of the border promote offshore oil and gas and those regulatory controls with gusto, but when it comes to applying exactly the same—indeed, more rigorous—regulatory standards onshore, those parties suddenly turn a blind eye to energy sovereignty and cheap sources of fuel that are entirely consistent with Britain's global low-carbon leadership. We will not have energy policy in this country set by politics and ideology; we will deliver cheap energy, low-carbon energy, and energy that is consistent with energy sovereignty.

Several hon. Members rose—

Claire Perry: I will happily take an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire.

Lee Rowley: I am disappointed by the Minister's response so far. I put on the table some clear views about planning, but she has spent the first eight minutes of her speech not talking about planning. The reality is that people need to be heard, and people are not being heard with this speech.

Claire Perry: I am sorry, but I did begin by saying to my hon. Friend that I could not comment on individual planning applications. The purpose of the consultation is to get as many views as possible, particularly from those who are engaged in the planning process, about what the rights should look like. The floor is open for my hon. Friend to express his views, and all the things he has said today will be fed into the consultations.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): A vast majority of respondents to the consultation on the national planning policy framework were opposed to fracking, as the Government's own response set out, yet you are going ahead regardless. How can anyone have faith in any consultation process that this Government launch on fracking?

Mr George Howarth (in the Chair): Order. Before the Minister resumes, the hon. Lady has said that I am going ahead, but I am not—the Minister is.

Claire Perry: You are a master of restraint as always, Mr Howarth. The hon. Lady has been in politics for a while, and she will know, as we all do, the click-and-paste nature of so many responses to consultations.

Ruth George indicated dissent.

Claire Perry: The hon. Lady shakes her head, but she should check the number of responses she will get. As I have set out, based on the public polling data, the vast

[*Claire Perry*]

majority of people do not have a particular view on this issue. Many people understand, especially after the “beast from the east” and the Salisbury poisoning, that being reliant on foreign energy sources is not a great place for us. If the hon. Lady shares my faith in the Committee on Climate Change and its view that gas is an important part of a low-carbon future, she will know that many responses come from organisations that are profoundly opposed to ever burning a molecule of fossil fuel. That is not a sensible place for our energy policy to be in.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): The constituency I represent has a history of coalmining; it once powered a nation. However, the people I represent do not think that fracking is an alternative to a meaningful industrial strategy. Why should my constituents be asked to take a huge leap of faith on behalf of fracking companies?

Claire Perry: I am sure that the hon. Lady engages extensively with her constituents. I spend a lot of time talking to communities, and to the representatives of former coalmining communities. In many cases, they are convinced that shale gas exploration could bring high-value jobs and economic development safely to parts of the country that have been left behind by successive Governments.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I will expand on comments made by the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron). My constituency is an area that can be fracked, and has a rich history of mining, especially in the village of Allerton Bywater. Because that history of mining is so long, there are many unmapped mine shafts and mine workings in the area, and a great many of my constituents are gravely concerned that, with the injection of water and the other things that are going on, there is a real possibility of geological movement and sinkholes. We are talking about a planning issue, and it is vital that the Minister hears on behalf of my constituents that the situation of communities varies hugely. Where there are former mine workings, there are real concerns about the geological impact of so many unmapped mine shafts.

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out the complexity of the geology. He is absolutely right that local geological knowledge and seismic management and measurement are, and will remain, a vital part of any exploration or production site. However, many of his constituents will have been told that there are massive seismic risks from any form of shale gas exploration. In fact, our environmental standards are so tight that if there is a seismic tremor less than that brought about by the rollercoaster on Blackpool seafront, that well process—

Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): Come on.

Claire Perry: It happens to be true: the well process will have to be paused. I refer back to the fact that we have the toughest environmental standards for oil and gas extraction in the world. Other countries are coming to us and saying, “Could we use those standards, because we also recognise the opportunity presented by shale gas extraction?” Frankly, if anyone in this room believes that the UK, with its proud history of environmental regulation, would want to do anything to endanger its green and pleasant lands, they need to go away and have a nice cold drink.

Mark Menzies: As I have said, I have been working on this for eight years, and the Minister is absolutely right to highlight some of the progress that has been made, such as the traffic light system. I urge her to listen to the concerns of Members about permitted development and planning changes. I urge the Government to work with us in a constructive way to address those concerns, as they have in the past.

Claire Perry: I thank my hon. Friend for his measured approach. He is looking at these developments in his constituency and working very closely with his local communities. He is absolutely right, which is why we have launched an extensive, extended consultation to ensure that we hear from as many people as possible.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her comments. It is quite clear that we need to be assured of what steps the Minister and her Department will take, and what criteria will be in place, to ensure safety is paramount. When doing shale gas investigation or mining in former mining areas, safety has to be paramount. Can the Minister give an assurance that it will be?

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman is quite right; that is why our environmental regulatory regime is already the best in the world. Colleagues will see from various write-rounds that we are bringing together the regulators to form one virtual regulator, so there can be no doubt about what regulatory matters apply to which communities.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I accept that there is tight regulation on below-the-ground issues, but, above the ground, planning permission is currently required for non-conventional drilling. That will not happen if there is permitted development, and the ability of local authorities to regulate lorry movements, for instance, will be taken away. There is huge concern about that, and I invite the Minister to look again at the proposals, because I do not believe there is a parliamentary majority for them.

Claire Perry: I will always accept my right hon. Friend’s advice on these points.

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Claire Perry: I will give way shortly. I want to assure my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) that the challenges presented by waste water and traffic movements are driving innovation and investment in the industry. The industry is working with the National Physical Laboratory to innovate, to reduce those challenges and to create something that we can export to other countries that are desperate to improve.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Claire Perry: I promised to give way to the hon. Member for Bury North (James Frith).

James Frith: Thank you, Minister; you have been very generous with your time. To me, this strikes at the heart of a community’s ability to determine its future. Local democracy is undermined if Whitehall is seen to

be undermining it with a consultation that, in the case of Bury, ignores votes that have already taken place about whether we want fracking in our town. We determine the investment; we determine the plans for jobs and homes interpreted by Government targets; and we have already rejected the Government's plans for fracking. Will the Minister take seriously the voice of the people on this issue?

Claire Perry: There has been an unprecedented level of decentralisation of decision making under this Government. The hon. Gentleman referred to homes and business involvement; all of those issues are being devolved.

The challenge in this space remains that there are far too many people shouting fact-free nonsense about the process. I was at the conference of the parties in Germany last year. Germany has turned its back on nuclear power—a policy that some in this Chamber agree with—and as a result, its emissions are going up as it burns more coal. That is a country in hock to ideology. In this country, we make energy policy to drive down our emissions, keep costs down for consumers, and create a competitive advantage and energy sovereignty. That is why we are going through the process of consultation.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Colombia Peace Process

[MR LAURENCE ROBERTSON *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the peace process in Colombia.

Although my visit to Colombia earlier this year was sponsored by ABColombia, I have not yet been able to register the fact, because I do not yet have the figures. It is not the case the case that ABColombia wants me to say something on its behalf—I am not lobbying on its behalf—but it certainly paid for me to visit. I went with the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), and we had a very productive visit, but I want to make the position clear from the outset.

As I think all hon. Members will know, the conflict in Colombia has been one of the most disturbing of the past 100 years. It is not much commented on, particularly in the British press or on British television, but it is a simple fact. It has gone on for 50 years. There have been 220,000 casualties; 177,000 civilians have been killed, more or less; and 25,000 others have disappeared—nobody knows where they have gone. Some 45,000 children have been killed in the conflict.

Perhaps one of the most shocking statistics is that between 5 million and 6 million people have been displaced. In a population of 50 million or 55 million, a phenomenal number of people have had to leave their lands. They have been forced off their lands and moved to other places. Often they have been forced into complete and abject poverty. Having lived on land where they were able to achieve subsistence by growing crops and looking after animals, they have suddenly found themselves in urban populations with no means of making a living and without a home, so they rely on begging.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. The tragedy of Colombia is that half of the 7 million or so refugees have been forced to go and live in slums in cities, which has just increased the problem, both for the Colombian Government and for the rest of the world.

Chris Bryant: Indeed. We were in La Primavera, a small town in one of the more remote districts in the north-east of Colombia, and it was striking that a lot of the campesino population, who 10 or 15 years ago would have had a few hectares per family on which to grow crops and have their livelihood, had suddenly found themselves begging on the streets in La Primavera. Of course, the urban townsfolk and the local authorities get quite racist about this, frankly—that was the impression we got. People being forced into poverty when they had a richness in the way they lived previously is one of the most distressing elements of what we are talking about.

The massive exodus that we are seeing from Venezuela at the moment is also an enormous problem for Colombia. In the past I have been very critical of President Uribe, who I think sometimes used the ideological confrontation with Venezuela as a means of bolstering his own political support inside Colombia. Indeed, President Santos's first and most successful job was to restore proper relations between the two countries. However, the fact

[Chris Bryant]

that between 1.5 million and 2.5 million Venezuelans are leaving Venezuela because of the extraordinary problems in that country and their fear for the future is causing a real problem for Colombia. The Spanish President was in Colombia a couple of weeks ago and commented on the fact that it is an extraordinary success that Colombia has managed to accommodate so many people. But inevitably, with so many people who are in effect economic refugees, there are enormous dangers.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that part of the terrible human loss has come from the targeting of trade union leaders and human rights defenders? Just this year, 123 leaders and human rights defenders have already lost their lives as a result of assassinations.

Chris Bryant: I think that the figure of 123 is just for the first six months of the year. One difficulty, which I will come to later, is that it is very difficult to get precise numbers. The mixture of different military and paramilitary organisations engaged in the conflict over the 50 years has meant that very often the Government, or people sponsored by the Government, have effectively been killing human rights defenders. Sometimes it is a genuine mistake but, I think, very rarely. This is often referred to as false positives by the Colombian authorities, but I think that actually, in many cases, we could see that sometimes a presidential decree, certainly under previous Presidents, or somebody being referred to as a political undesirable, would mean that somebody would take it into their mind a few weeks later simply to bump them off. The number of incidents is still growing. This year there have been very significant numbers, and it shows no sign of stopping. I will refer later to some of the things that I think could be done.

One problem is this. Everybody knows about the FARC, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, but there are many other groups, such as the ELN—Ejército de Liberación Nacional—and the paramilitary groups that have collapsed into dissent. Some of them are much less co-ordinated and structured. The fact that many of them resorted to the illegal cocaine trade to fund their military activities has meant that they have become addicted to that trade. In the end, in many cases, there is very little difference between the criminal—the pure criminal—and these paramilitary organisations. In particular, in the most difficult-to-reach parts of the country, such as in Chocó, there are still significant numbers of these groups, such as the Black Eagles and the AUC, which are still quite clearly engaging in intimidation, assassination, torture and murder.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this really important debate. Does he agree that there are some areas where the FARC were previously in control and have been moved out as part of reincorporation, so there is now a space for these dissident groups to fill and that is creating the sorts of dangers and the climate whereby criminality and the number of murders are rapidly rising? There seems to be no Government control or police control over those areas.

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The issue of land ownership, which I will come to, is a really important part of trying to resolve the long-term issues from the conflict, because where the space is theoretically owned by nobody, it is almost certain that somebody, usually with criminal or paramilitary intent, or both, will step in to fill the vacuum.

Let me give just some characteristics of the conflict. Obviously, there has been the murder of human rights defenders and trade union activists, which has already been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), and I have referred to the stand-off with Venezuela. The corruption of judges has meant that it has been very difficult to secure convictions of those who have been involved in all this. I am enormously grateful to the British Government for all the work that they have done to try to restore, or help to restore, the criminal justice system in Colombia to a more secure form of justice. I very much hope that will continue. If more money needs to be put into it, it should be. I note that the European Union is putting in €35 million for a fund to help Venezuelans acting as refugees in Colombia. It would be good to know whether the UK will be contributing anything towards that. I hope that the Minister will be able to answer that question later.

The single biggest element of the conflict, which makes it so different from others, is the massive consolidation of land ownership that has occurred. It is not just that, as a result of the colonial past, lots of people have big farms—far from it. Some 1% of the largest farms have 81% of the land, and the 0.1% of farms that are over 2,000 hectares have 60% of the land. That is a phenomenal consolidation. It is considerably worse now than it was even in the 1960s. In 1960, 29% of farms were over 500 hectares; in 2002, 46% were over 500 hectares; and in 2017, 66% of farms were over 500 hectares. One factor behind that extraordinary consolidation is that British-funded agribusinesses want to plant vast acres of oil palms, which often leads to significant deforestation and the taking of lands that had previously been used by campesino and indigenous peoples.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I am very impressed by my hon. Friend's speech. Does he know which British corporations are doing this? It would be extremely helpful to the House if he could name them.

Chris Bryant: I might need a bit more notice to answer that question, if that is all right. There is a point here for all of us, whether we run a big industry or not. If we want to rely on palm oil, and if there is an enormous demand for palm oil in British supermarkets, the temptation will be to cover all of Colombia with oil palms. It is good that some supermarkets have said they will not use palm oil products at all. I hope we move further down that route.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North and I flew over large chunks of Colombia. At one point we were in a heavy thunderstorm, which was quite frightening—the aeroplane, which was only a six-seater, was wobbling all over the place. I was quite nervous, until I looked at the pilot, who was on WhatsApp on his phone throughout the whole flight, which sort of reassured me. The most extraordinary thing, having flown over Colombia and seen all the acres devoted to palm oil, was to learn that

Colombia can no longer feed itself, yet it has some of the richest agricultural lands in South America. We think that we know what an avocado is, but there are 50 different types of avocado in Colombia. In the past, people grew to eat, but increasingly they grow to provide for an external market. I understand why Colombia wants to earn a living in the world, but it is crazy that such a country is unable to feed itself. Of the 43 million hectares devoted to agriculture in Colombia, 34.4 million are devoted to cows and only 8.6 million to crops. That means that 1 million campesino families have less land to live on than a single cow.

I pay tribute to a succession of wonderful Colombian ambassadors to the United Kingdom, who have sometimes had to pick their way through very difficult subjects. In my experience, they have all been impeccable. I am not sure whether Néstor is leaving soon, but if he is I hope that anybody here who knows him will send him our best regards.

If I could say one thing to the Colombian Government, it would be that we in the United Kingdom want to do everything we can to help in the process of land reform, because that is the essential element of the peace accord. It is good that everyone sits around the table and all the rest of it, but clause 1 of the peace accord refers to land reform. In La Primavera and El Porvenir we met a variety of different communities, including the Sikuani indigenous people, and we met campesino families in Cajamarca. Their biggest concern is that they do not have land to live on. If they do not get secure title, they will simply move in ever greater numbers into the big cities, which will exacerbate all the problems of poverty.

We visited the Sikuani, who were wonderful. I think they trained themselves in Spanish to be able to talk to us better, as it was not their first language. They were thrown off the lands they used to occupy by the FARC and then by other paramilitaries. They have tried to get the land back, but they need legal title to feel secure on that land. Only a few months ago, some people—it is difficult to know exactly who they were—accompanied by Colombian police officers, who were photographed, came to try to throw them off their lands again and destroyed some of their sacred grounds.

Clearly, across Colombia, but particularly in the more remote areas, there is a deliberate intention, sometimes sponsored by members of the police and the armed forces, to try to intimidate campesino and indigenous people off their lands. That can be changed only through the much faster acceleration of the process of restitution of land, the declaration of title and the granting of baldios. The word “baldio” in Spanish usually means wasteland, but it also refers to the large amount of land in Colombia that does not have proper legal title, which the Government theoretically own. The peace process was meant to deliver to every campesino family enough baldio land to live off, and that is the most secure path towards peace. That has been limited to certain areas of Colombia, and I hope the Colombian Government will consider looking at other areas as well in the next phase of the peace process. They have tried to put a time limit on the process, which I think is a mistake. The process is still remarkably slow, and many indigenous and campesino people simply do not have access to their land.

There has been a peace accord with the FARC, as I mentioned. We met some members of the FARC, who have handed in their guns and turned to peace. They are

desperate to ensure that the peace process is fulfilled. It was a difficult process to arrive at. One element of the peace process is incomplete: a deal with the ELN. The Spanish President was trying to encourage the new Government of President Iván Duque to sit around the table with the ELN. The ELN is not as co-ordinated, structured or—some might say—principled as the FARC. There is not a single organisational structure in the ELN. Thus far, it has not been part of the peace accord. I note that the day by which Duque said that the ELN had to surrender its last 17 hostages has now passed. I do not know whether anything has happened today, but yesterday Colombian Government Ministers were saying that they will not sit down at the table until those hostages have been surrendered, and the ELN was saying that it cannot surrender those hostages, because of Government military activity in the areas where they are.

We all know from our experience in Northern Ireland that politicians sometimes have to say one thing in public and scurry away into the background to do something completely different. Mrs Thatcher—or the British Government at the time—was having conversations with terrorist organisations, just as John Major did long before it was publicly known. In the same way, a former Colombian ambassador to this country, Mauricio Rodríguez, was deployed by President Santos to have initially secret conversations with the ELN. I hope that the same is happening at the moment. Some of the attacks on human rights defenders and others in Chocó and other parts of the country are undoubtedly being committed by dissident groups alongside the ELN. If there is to be peace, in the end, everybody will have to sit round the table.

On the issue of human rights defenders, we had a productive meeting, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North will agree, with the people from the National Protection Unit. They genuinely want to protect everybody who comes under threat and intimidation, but I still do not think that they have the resources to do the job properly. We heard about one woman who had full protection measures up to the point she got out of the car and walked half a mile down the drive to her house, which was obviously the most dangerous place. Those issues are really important. Women, in particular, are being attacked and need much greater protection.

Colombia is a great country of phenomenal riches. In Cajamarca, we saw La Colosa, which is a mountain that a British-registered company wants to turn into a gold mine. The people of Cajamarca, some 18,000 of them, organised a plebiscite—a public consultation, as they call it—under state provision, and more than 93% of people came out against the mine. As a representative of a former mining constituency, I am not opposed to all extractive industries—I am quite in favour of mining—but for people to get a chunk of gold out of the place they are talking about, they would have to take half the mountain away. It is right at the top of a series of valleys, and two wetlands come together at the top, so all the water for large numbers of communities down the river could be damaged and become impossible to drink. I am not an expert, but it seemed to the hon. Member for Glasgow North and me that whoever came up with the idea of taking away a mountain and the drinking water of hundreds of thousands of Colombians did not have any real idea of how to go about business.

[Chris Bryant]

I very much hope that we have an opportunity to meet the company, AngloGold Ashanti, and say that that mine is not going to happen. The people of Cajamarca have a right to have their consultation honoured. I am not a fan of referendums—they can go terribly wrong—but when the people have spoken with a definitive result of 93%, that has to be honoured.

Over the last 200 years, our country has been closely related to Colombia, and we want to continue to do an enormous amount of trade in the future. For many politicians in this country, it would be a joy to see the proper fulfilment of the whole peace accord in Colombia. There is a famous book, “Open Veins of Latin America”, and this feels like one of the last remaining open veins in Latin America. It would be good to sew up that wound.

2.54 pm

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): This is a hugely interesting debate on a subject that has increasingly become part of my intense interest in politics. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on securing the debate and on raising issues that have stimulated that interest. I need to know a lot more about land ownership and land reform in Colombia, and I shall be going away to find out exactly what has happened.

My interest in the issue started with my family: my son married a Colombian girl. I did not know much about Colombia, so I simply wanted to know, and I suddenly realised that so much about this wonderful country is not known to the British population at all. I wanted to try to change that in different ways.

My knowledge has greatly increased, because I spent most of August in Colombia. I spent a week in the capital, Bogotá, and almost a week in the second city, Medellín. I also spent time in the rural area of Boyacá, where my family originate from and where some of them still live, and I had a few days of relaxation in Anapoima. I now have greater knowledge of the country, but it is so huge that there is still much to learn. That is why I welcome today's debate.

My trip coincided with the inauguration of the new President, which signalled a substantial change in the country. There was also the attempted assassination of the President of next-door Venezuela, which also had a huge impact. When I was driving around, I saw so many Venezuelans walking along the road, on the backs of lorries, or thumbing lifts—just leaving the country and moving into Colombia in very large numbers.

The most relevant part of my visit for today's debate was the five days that I spent in Medellín, the second city, and not because a flower festival was taking place—probably the best flower festival in the world—but because of the way in which that city has dealt with a history of violence. I was grateful to the Mayor of Medellín for organising a day for me to understand exactly what has happened in the city. Throughout the 1990s, it was the murder capital of the world, with 25,000 murders in 1992 and 27,000 in 1993, but when I was there, I could not believe that that had been the case. In my Sunday newspaper about two weeks ago, I read that it had dropped out of the 30 most murderous cities in the world. What astonished me was that the people had decided that they wanted an end to the scale

of the violence—it was done through people power. The level of forgiveness that was needed in the population to deliver that result is truly astonishing.

I will touch on two issues of inevitable concern. First, the rumoured approach and direction of the new President, Iván Duque. The hon. Member for Rhondda, and others in interventions, have mentioned the continuing murder of human rights defenders, which is quite shocking. As has been outlined, Colombia experienced serious internal conflict from 1964 to 2016 when the peace accord was agreed and signed by Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC. The whole world celebrated the accord and thought it was wonderful, so there was inevitably some concern—which I shared because of my developing interest—during the election campaign, when the favourite to win suggested that the agreement needed to be changed in certain ways. The worry was that that might produce some negatives. However, the new President has now been in place for five weeks and most of what I have managed to glean from the comments that have been made so far seems to me to be incredibly encouraging.

The first issue was who was appointed to the various positions, but the appointments have been generally welcomed. They have shown a streak of independence. One of the concerns was that it was thought the new President would be too influenced by Álvaro Uribe, a previous President, who really was not a great supporter of the peace agreement or of the FARC coming into Government. The independence shown by that is important and, as I say, the appointments seem to have been welcomed.

Chris Bryant: I am afraid I make a rather different reading of all of this. I have met President Uribe—in 2010, I think—and he was very opposed to the peace process and the peace accord, and I think that it is still to be seen whether President Duque will decide to go his own course and be an independent man. However, with some of Duque's Ministers, including in some of the key departments, the strings are undoubtedly being pulled by Uribe.

Glyn Davies: That is not the impression that I have been receiving, but it is a perfectly valid point and I certainly think that that is how Uribe is seen. Nevertheless, I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is welcome if the new President is seen as having a degree of independence and being his own man, because he was sponsored, or at least supported, by Uribe in the election; we should welcome that independence.

The inauguration was only five weeks ago. I have written down one or two things that I have gleaned since then. Duque has reiterated a commitment to the peace process, which is good; everybody will think that is to be welcomed. There is an open invitation, and a public open invitation, to FARC combatants to continue their involvement in the reintegration process. There is a reassurance that committees established in the peace process will continue. There have been no modifications at all to the terms of the peace agreement; it had been feared there would be. Who knows what may happen in the future? As of now, however, there certainly have not been any modifications. There is a new high commissioner for peace, a new presidential councillor for stabilisation, and a commitment to work with the international community, including with the UN, the US and indeed the UK, which are also to be welcomed.

Catherine West: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that commitments are all very well but until the Government get on top of the paramilitary situation we will still see assassinations of human rights defenders, trade unionists and others who are really trying to represent the working people and the average citizen in Colombia?

Glyn Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention and I do agree; indeed, that is the point I will now come to. Clearly, the new President faces some real issues that cause concern, and that concern is shared by everybody in the rest of the world who has a regard or a love for Colombia.

One big issue is the control of the drug trade, and there is also the murder of human rights defenders in increasing numbers. What has been happening is completely unacceptable to the whole world and it is a huge challenge for the new President. I think he will want to satisfy the world community that he is looking at the situation in Colombia and taking seriously the need to defend the human rights defenders. As I say, that is a challenge, but a measure of his success as President will be that he reduces the number of murders; one murder is too many and there are clearly far too many murders in Colombia.

Most of the murders in Colombia are probably drug-related. Those who dominate the drug trade are seeking to prevent people interfering with that trade. The drug trade certainly caused all the murders in Medellín in the 1990s and it is probably a significant reason why we are seeing human rights defenders being murdered, which no civilised person could possibly agree with.

The new President faces some massive challenges and I cannot imagine anybody in this Chamber not wishing him well. Clearly, the development of the drugs business and the export of drugs to the rest of the world is a huge issue. The amount of cocaine coming out of Colombia is probably increasing. The President has got to stop that; the high number of murders has got to be reduced; and the peace process has got to continue. At this stage, however, I think we can be encouraged by the President's first five weeks. Let us hope that at the end of his four years in office we can look back and say that they were a very successful four years. I am still hopeful that they will be.

Colombia is a wonderful country. Anybody from Britain who spends time there realises that it is very different from what we are used to. It is a truly spectacular and wonderful country, I think it has a wonderful future and I rather hope that, at a personal level, I can play some part in helping that process. And we, as a British Government, should play an important part in that process as well.

3.5 pm

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again today, Mr Robertson. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on securing this debate at a really important time. I do not think that I can emulate his Spanish accent, but his speech really was excellent.

I should say that I visited Colombia last month alongside Justice for Colombia, which paid for my visit—I, too, am waiting for final details to update my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

It is good to see the Minister for Europe and the Americas in his place today. I thank him again for meeting me just before the summer recess and for his offer last week of a further meeting following my visit to Colombia.

As we have heard today, Colombia is a country of contrasts. It is the most beautiful of countries, but it is also a country scarred by decades of civil war, during which hundreds of thousands of people were disappeared, murdered or tortured, including—in fact, predominantly—trade unionists, human rights defenders and social leaders, and Colombia still is the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist.

That is why the signing of the peace agreement in November 2016 was such a moment of hope for Colombia, for those of us in Westminster Hall today and indeed for everyone around the world who has a specific interest in the country. It was an agreement to end the armed conflict through a ceasefire, with disarmament by the FARC; a new special jurisdiction, courts and a truth commissioner; political participation by the FARC as a legal political party with seats in the Congress and the House of Representatives; land reform, which my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda talked about; and the substitution of illegal crops with legal ones, with time-limited subsidies to peasant farmers. Overseeing all of that would be a United Nations verification mission.

Nearly two years on from the signing of that historic agreement, and nine years after I first went to Colombia, I went back there last month with colleagues from Parliament, trade union leaders, lawyers and one of the Northern Ireland human rights commissioners, as part of JFC's peace monitoring delegation. I know the Minister is very aware of the work of JFC, and I place on the record today my admiration for the incredible work it has done since it was set up by the trade union movement in 2002.

JFC has supported Colombian civil society in defence of human rights, labour rights, peace and social justice. Over the last few years, it has seen the involvement of the Irish trade union movement and politicians from the entirety of the island of Ireland. Those politicians have shared their experiences of the Good Friday agreement, including how they negotiated that agreement and dealt with its implementation, which has been of considerable benefit to the Colombian Government and the FARC as they learn how to construct and deliver a peace agreement.

When I first went to Colombia, I was a trade union lawyer, and I was struck by the fact that doing that job in Colombia would have put my life at risk; even now, as an Opposition MP, I would probably still be in the same situation. The people I met in Colombia in 2009 sparked my long-standing interest in the country, which is why I was really desperate to return this year. In particular, I wanted to see how the peace agreement is progressing.

I arrived in Bogotá the day after President Duque was inaugurated. He ran his election campaign on a promise to dismantle parts of the peace agreement. I hope that that promise will not be seen through by his Government—I suspect he will have more problems delivering that dismantling element of his manifesto than he originally thought. The agreement is fragile, and the progress of its implementation is slow—based on what I saw in my time-limited visit, I am sorry to say that some of it is non-existent.

[Jo Stevens]

In addition to meeting members of all the opposition parties, the UN, diplomats and trade union leaders in Bogotá, our delegation travelled to meet people in rural regions in the north and the north-east of the country, on the border with Venezuela. In the oil-rich region of Arauca, we visited one of the 26 zones in which former FARC combatants and their families are being reintegrated into civil society. In Colombia they call it “reincorporation”.

On the journey we took from Bogotá to Filipinas, we went on a plane—not as little as the one that the hon. Member for Rhondda went on—and then on a bus. What we saw during that journey, and what we heard and saw when we got there, was a clear demonstration of how what was promised and agreed in the peace agreement had not materialised, because of the failure to provide the basic resources necessary for reincorporation to succeed.

One reaches Filipinas by a dirt and rubble track that is strewn with huge craters and that becomes impassable in the frequent heavy rain. It took us five hours to travel 70 miles. People in Filipinas cannot access education, and some have died trying to get out of what is essentially a camp to get medical treatment. The small amounts of fresh produce that people can grow simply will not survive the journey along the track from the camp to the nearest town—by the time it gets there, the crop is destroyed.

One former FARC combatant explained to me that they managed to build some homes, but that, because of the rain, the homes flood. So they have water pouring in from the roofs of their homes, but they do not have any water in the toilets, because there is no mains water.

The lack of access to education and the inability to make a living not only make life very difficult but create an area of criminality, which is the only option for some people because they cannot survive through legal means.

The camp in Filipinas was only partially constructed. People there explained to me that they have the skills to build and complete the houses and infrastructure, but that because of the bureaucracy involved in getting the funds from central Government to local authorities and approved contractors to carry out the work, and because of the endemic corruption in Colombia, very little of the funding gets through. That is why infrastructure is not getting built. Will the Minister consider discussing with his colleagues in the Department for International Development whether the UK Government could provide specific funding or assistance that could be ring-fenced to target things such as building a 70-mile road that would make a transformational difference to communities?

Likewise in Tibú, just 12 km from the Venezuelan border, I met many campesinos—peasant farmers—and social leaders. We repeatedly heard evidence about how the voluntary crop substitution programme is not working. Many families have signed up for the programme, but, again, the funds are not coming through and the implementation of productive projects is not happening. I met the head of the chocolate farmers’ co-operative, who said that hundreds of families had signed up to the crop substitution programme because there is huge internal demand for chocolate in Colombia—I have tasted it, and it is the most fantastic chocolate. Never mind the internal demand, they want to be able to

export that fantastic product and grow the industry, but they cannot do that because of the lack of implementation of the agreement.

In both the rural regions I went to, the challenges created by the arrival of people fleeing from Venezuela, which has already been touched on, are a huge concern. I travelled through Cúcuta, the main entry point into Colombia from Venezuela, which more than a million people have passed through, either staying in Colombia or moving on to other Latin American countries. Many of those people are second-generation Colombians who fled Colombia because of the dangers to them, but who are now returning as economic refugees from Venezuela. People in Arauca said to me, “We want to welcome them back. We want to help them. We have shared our food with them, but we have no money. We have so little food, we can barely feed all the people in our zone, never mind helping those who are arriving.” That naturally creates tensions, so I am really concerned. Of all the problems Colombia has had, and still has, in implementing the peace agreement, the problem with Venezuela and the arrival of more than a million people is the one that could, on its own, scupper it.

Colleagues have already talked about the murders, and I will not repeat what has been said, but I want to make the point that, there was a real spike in assassinations during the two-stage presidential elections. In the first month of President Duque’s Administration, 33 social leaders have been murdered, and more than 80 FARC members or family members have been killed since the start of the peace process. After a peace agreement, there is always a really dangerous period initially and an expectation that there will be problems, but the situation is tragic, and we really need to help Colombia all we can to prevent such problems.

I have mentioned the dissident guerrilla groups moving into previously FARC-controlled zones, where there is, effectively, no policing. The army cannot operate there, so there is no protection for the people who live there. During my visit I asked the police, the army and the UN about the numbers of prosecutions and convictions that have taken place since 2016, based on the hundreds of murders. I was not told about a single conviction since that date. The Minister is aware of the long-standing problems created by the culture of impunity in Colombia. I hope he will address in his response what steps the Government are taking to impress on the Colombian Government, and particularly the Fiscalía, that impunity must stop if there is to be any chance of the agreement succeeding.

I want to turn now to one of the most important elements of the peace agreement: political participation. As part of the agreement, the FARC has 10 seats in Congress for the two electoral periods starting this year. When Congress opened in July, only eight of the 10 Congress men and women-elect were able to take up their positions. Two of them, Jesus Santrich and Ivan Marquez, could not. Jesus Santrich has received his official accreditation as a member of Congress, but has been unable to take up his seat, because he has been held in prison since April under threat of extradition to the United States. Ivan Marquez, who was the head negotiator for the FARC during the peace talks, left Bogotá in the aftermath of Santrich’s arrest because of his concerns about the lack of guarantees that he will not be subjected to political and legal persecution.

On 17 August, I visited Jesus Santrich in his maximum security prison, La Picota, in Bogotá. After a couple of hours going through the various checks, fingerprinting and questions, we arrived in a wing in a very large, noisy prison, where he is kept in isolation. He has a small cell with a bed, a light, a toilet and nothing else. He is a former FARC leader who was involved in the drafting and negotiation of the peace agreement with the Colombian Government negotiators. He is the subject of a US extradition threat based on an allegation that he conspired to smuggle 10 tonnes of cocaine out of Colombia on an aeroplane. He categorically denies the allegation.

Jesus is blind. He suffers from a degenerative eye condition that has become so severe that his sight is almost non-existent. He has other major health problems. No evidence has been presented to him, his lawyers or any court in Colombia to back up the allegation. He is essentially in administrative detention, prevented by the Colombian Attorney General from swearing in as a member of Congress, despite a constitutional right to do so.

Jesus has been denied any equipment to help him cope with his disability in prison—no Braille pen, no audiobooks, no voice recorder. He cannot have anyone read to him. He cannot have a radio or a television, unlike all the other prisoners, who can also have a visitor on a Wednesday to bring them some food. He is not allowed any contact with other prisoners. He has been on a 41-day hunger strike to protest against his treatment. He is very frail, still losing weight and obviously showing the strains of nearly five months' incarceration. Previously he had been locked in his cell for 24 hours a day. Shortly before we visited, that regime was changed to allow him out for one hour every 24 hours.

Jesus is entitled to have his case considered by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, known as the JEP, established under the agreement. On the day I was there, he had been told that there had been a decision by the constitutional court that the JEP must be allowed to review any evidence against him. However, there are widespread concerns, which have already been alluded to, about the court's ability to operate free from Government interference. It is worrying that one of Jesus Santrich's lawyers for the transitional justice process, Enrique Santiago, has on two occasions been denied entry to the prison to speak to him. Enrique hopes to visit him on 17 September, and I shall follow that up to ensure that due process, and Jesus's fundamental right to access to his lawyer, are respected.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. I have not been to Colombia, which is something I hope to put right in the near future. Is my hon. Friend concerned, as I am, that American extradition is used as a threat against people who are part of the peace process? Will she, through the Minister, appeal to the Americans to review the use of extradition as a threat to people who have played an active role in bringing the peace process to the point it is at today?

Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair): Order. There are two further Members who want to speak, and I want to start the Front-Bench speeches at 3.30.

Jo Stevens: Thank you, Mr Robertson. I will wrap up with a few questions to the Minister. I agree with the point made by my hon. Friend, and I hope that the Minister will address it. It was one of the things I was going to ask him about.

I have three questions. Will the Minister make representations to the Colombian Government about the conditions in which Jesus Santrich is being held, and particularly about the lack of access to disability aids? Will he also impress on them the absolute right of lawyers to visit, to prepare a case for the JEP? I take on board the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford). Finally, Senator Victoria Sandino, another FARC senator, is visiting the UK at the end of the month. She led on gender and equality aspects of the peace agreement. A request has been made to the Minister's office for him to meet Senator Sandino. If he could say something positive on that, it would be welcome.

3.22 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson.

I visited Colombia nearly two years ago, with my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West). My trip was sponsored by Justice for Colombia, and I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I must admit that, given that we had gone there for the ratification of the peace deal through the Colombian Congress, perhaps naively I expected to encounter hope and excitement about the peace deal as it made its way through, and the consequent agreements and measures. However, we found a situation far from hopefulness. We saw and encountered the consequences of a sharp uptick in paramilitary activity. We visited many of the areas mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) and for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), where we heard testimonies from people whose families had been tortured, kidnapped or murdered. Many of those people lived in areas that had previously been controlled by the FARC; after it moved out, paramilitaries moved in.

Many of the people we met also described their fear—their absolute belief—that the paramilitaries were an arm of the state security services, and were deliberately being employed to undermine the peace process. As has been mentioned, during the peace process there was a huge increase in the number of murders of human rights leaders and social and community leaders. We met the army after hearing many of those testimonies, and expressed the concern that the paramilitaries were just another wing of the state security services. Obviously, we met flat denial on that point; but also, shockingly, we met flat denial that the paramilitaries even existed in Colombia. We were told that the paramilitaries had not existed since the '90s and that all the killings were in fact the doing of the ELN, under the name of the paramilitaries, to undermine the army and the Government. To my mind, that underscored and reinforced the concerns we already had about their being linked to state security forces. Those we spoke to were in complete denial about the reality on the ground.

We also met ex-FARC combatants, FARC political prisoners, and people living in FARC-controlled territories. We heard concerns about the zones—my hon. Friends also expressed such concerns—in relation to what would happen after the peace process, with the FARC surrendering its weapons and moving into those zones. They were promised accommodation, education, food and water and democratic participation in those zones. They worried that they risked everything in committing themselves to the peace deal, and that the promises would be broken.

[Louise Haigh]

Going by visits that have been made, and the testimony of some of my hon. Friends today, those promises have been broken.

I am sure that the story of the Mothers of Soacha is familiar to many Members. The story they tell is about the consequences of a presidential declaration by President Uribe when he was in power. He told members of the army in the armed conflict that they would be given time off, and extra holiday and pay, for presenting dead guerrillas. That declaration led directly to the army, posing as recruitment agencies, advertising work in poor rural areas. Young men in those areas came forward to apply for the work, and the army tortured, kidnapped and murdered them, dressing them up in guerrilla combats and presenting them to their senior officers in return for pay and extra holiday. We met the mothers of those young men who had been kidnapped, tortured and murdered, and who have been slandered as having been guerrillas in the armed conflict. Some of those involved have been convicted and imprisoned, but the sentences were pitiful. I mention that because there are serious concerns that civilians who committed crimes as part of the armed conflict—those who were truly behind those heinous crimes—will not come before the transitional justice courts, and that there will be reliance on the criminal justice courts, which, as we have heard, have not been sufficient in delivering justice.

I have given those examples because I want to raise two concerns with the Minister. What progress can he report on the system of justice, truth, reparation and non-repetition and on the matter that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green raised—the establishment of a body to examine and dismantle the paramilitaries? I fully accept that the UK Government cannot take responsibility for the matter, and cannot make change happen; but the Colombian people need to understand that the international community remains foursquare behind the peace process and the measures and agreements that came from it, and that the UK will use all its influence, through trade, diplomacy and the membership of any international organisation, to drive change and help the Colombian people move towards peace.

3.28 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I was not going to speak, Mr Robertson, but there are a few minutes before the Front-Bench speakers begin. I wanted to make one appeal. Everyone has highlighted the number of murders of community leaders, trade unionists and human rights activists. Disturbingly, many of those murders happen in rural areas where people are trying to diversify away from the growing of the coca plant. Clearly, there are people, whether paramilitaries or the armed wings of narcotics traffickers, who are trying to maintain the drug trade and the trafficking of drugs from Colombia. That has an impact on our streets, and in America.

As I pointed out in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), there is an issue for the Americans, to do with their foreign policy and the way they apply it in Colombia—and particularly the way in which law courts in Colombia use the threat of extradition. People who have been mainstays of the peace process—movers and shakers—have

been targeted. I draw attention to the plight of Simón Trinidad, who is held in confinement in America. He has been extradited. There has been no court case or proven case against him, but he has spent several years incarcerated underground in a US prison. I urge the Minister to make representations on his behalf.

In this short speech, I wish to stress to the Minister the issue of US foreign policy towards Colombia. People have spoken highly of his dedication to that issue and his understanding of the peace process in Colombia, so will he use his good offices to draw to the attention of the United States the implications of some of the actions that it has taken in undermining the peace process, and thereby facilitating drugs trafficking from Colombia?

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair): Order. I would like to leave two minutes at the end for Mr Bryant to wind up the debate.

3.30 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson—it is something of a rare pleasure for me to be in Westminster Hall these days. I declare the same interest as that of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), because I took part in the ABColombia visit, which I will register in due course. I had some familiarity with Colombia even before then because I worked for the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, which is one of the funders of ABColombia, and I had therefore had the immense privilege of meeting many visitors and human rights campaigners who had travelled from Colombia to Scotland and the United Kingdom. It was a privilege to have the opportunity to travel to Colombia this year—it seems that the British embassy has been kept pretty busy with visiting UK parliamentarians, but it has been on a cross-party basis, even if from a kind of Celtic fringe.

What I saw, and what has been described in the debate, is a country in transition that stands on the brink of two potential futures. As the hon. Member for Rhondda said, Colombia is lush, verdant and fertile. We ate fruits that do not have names in English because they are so exotic, and they were incredibly tasty. At the same time, as Members have said, the legacy of the conflict is visible everywhere, with burnt-out houses, the risk of land mines, and the displacement that we have heard described.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) was right to talk about the progress that has been made, but one thing that was said to us—perhaps these were words that we put into people's mouths—was the idea that things in Colombia are better than they were 10 years ago, but not necessarily better than they were five years ago. That, in a way, sums up a lot of what I came away with, and this debate has brought out the overall sense of contradictions and clashes between what the reality on the ground ought to be, what the rules, agreement and constitution state it should be, and how that reality is actually experienced. That could involve a clash of constitutional rights. We heard about a potential mine in Cajamarca where, even though a local plebiscite has made it explicitly clear that the local population do not want it, plans continue, applications are lodged and concessions granted. We hear that constitutional rights exist for indigenous people and

campesinos to reclaim their territory and get those land titles, but at the same time the Government declare that land to be a zone for special economic development that they are prepared to hand over to multinational companies for monocropping.

We heard powerful testimony from the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) about Jesus Santrich. He has the right to be sworn in as a member of Congress, yet he is also being kept in administrative detention by that same Government. We heard from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) that in some cases officials are completely in denial about the very existence of paramilitary groups, so there seems to be a real tension and contradiction in terms.

We heard about the human rights defender who was dropped off from her bullet-proof car and left to walk the last, most dangerous, half mile in the dark. Again, there is a right on paper and alleged institutional support, yet it does not seem to be being fulfilled. When we met young campaigners—I was struck by how young many of the human rights campaigners we met were—we could understand that sense of frustration. They had begun to question things. They said that they were trying to use all legal routes available to them, and to defend the rights written into the constitution and international agreements, yet they got nowhere. That is where the sense of frustration comes through, and that is where the risk of backsliding, even inadvertently, into violence raises its head. The Colombian Government and their institutions must respond to that challenge.

There is also a challenge for the international actors, which for our purposes starts with the UK Government. I am grateful to the UK embassy, which hosted us and which has presumably hosted many delegations over the years. A lot of work is clearly going on, and I have lodged written questions—and will continue to do so—to get a sense of the kind of work going on. Members have asked what more the Department for International Development can do, but it has withdrawn from Latin America, which is slightly disappointing. I wonder whether at the very least expertise could be shared, or whether there is a way to leverage some of the skills and knowledge that DFID has built up to find ways to re-engage with Latin America, and Colombia would be a good place to start.

As we have heard, there is a responsibility on multinational companies, many of which are headquartered, operate out of, or are listed on the stock market in the UK. AngloGold Ashanti is just one of those—a mine called La Colosa cannot possibly be a small-scale artisanal project. It threatens vast communities, yet those companies are signed up to the Ruggie principles—the UN's guiding principles for business and human rights—which must be adhered to. Such environmental degradation and further displacement of the population by multinational companies will only add to instability.

We heard about the impact on human rights defenders and the threats that they are under, and one in three murders of human rights defenders around the world over the past year or so took place in Colombia. Collectively, global human rights defenders have been nominated this year for a Nobel peace prize, and I hope to see that progress. As has been said, we as citizens and consumers have a role to play because our demand for precious minerals, palm oil, and rubber is driving the monocropping, and we should also consider our own practices.

The young people, campesinos and indigenous groups who we met are not looking for a static or historical existence; they want to produce for their country and the wider world. They want commercialisation of their crops, but it does not have to be one size fits all. Production can be sustainable and co-operative. People can produce for themselves and their communities and sell to the wider world, with the right kind of institutional backing and infrastructure. Today is Back British Farming Day, but perhaps we should also back sustainable and sensible Colombian farming. Gold can be taken out of the ground only once—once the top comes off a mountain, that is it, but if land is sustained and cultivated, it can produce for generations to come.

We went to a conference for pastoral and social care bishops in Colombia, and it was Pope Paul VI who once said:

“If you want peace, work for justice”.

The key to peace is stability and prosperity, and Colombia is a country of vast potential. That was my first visit—I hope it is not my last—and I look forward to hearing how the Minister will respond to all the different questions and recommendations that have been made to ensure that Colombia and its people can reach their full peaceful potential.

3.38 pm

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Robertson. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on securing the debate and on his excellent introduction and thorough understanding of the situation. He detailed the long conflict, the deaths and displacement caused, and the recent further destabilisation caused by large numbers of refugees from Venezuela, as well as the inter-relationship with the drug trade and the fundamental injustice of landownership in Colombia, which, as he pointed out, has been getting worse over the past 50 years. He pointed to the role that we as consumers can play in the UK, and we should pay more attention to that. He also pointed out how well represented Colombia has been in this country. Indeed, His Excellency Néstor Osorio Londoño recently made a great visit to Durham to talk about the peace process and consider the connections between the UK and Colombia.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) spoke about his visit to Medellín and his worries about the violence. I am deeply grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) for her long-standing commitment to the issue, for the speech she gave today and for her bravery in going into that prison to meet the key people suffering in the peace process. That is extremely important and vital work, and I salute her for what she has done. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), who pointed to the horrific trail of violence and the emotional legacy that leaves for people. It is not enough to say that the Uribe Government were in power some time ago, because people have to live with the consequences.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) spoke about the problem of drug trafficking. Some 30 tonnes of cocaine come into this country every year, and the volume doubled in 2015 and 2016. It is a problem that we need—pardon the pun—to crack. We have an interest in doing that, but our overriding concern is that

[Helen Goodman]

the people of Colombia live in a more peaceful situation. The spokesman for the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) pointed out that the country is in transition and that if the provisions of the peace process are not adhered to, there will be frustration, backsliding and a risk of even greater violence.

With all that in mind, I want to point out a couple of further issues and ask the Minister a few questions. Those chapters of the peace process that cover crop substitution for the campesinos, land redistribution and special courts to try former FARC fighters are extremely important. It is worrying that in his campaign to become President of Colombia, Iván Duque rejected some aspects of the deal, particularly the special jurisdiction for peace and the participation of former FARC members in politics.

When the Colombians were seeking to secure the peace process, they deliberately went to the international community to get its backing. That strengthened the Colombians' hand and enabled them to present to both sides a degree of neutrality and authority that they would not otherwise have had. One question I have for the Minister is whether the British Government, in their continuing engagement with the process, are drawing on our experience in Northern Ireland. What are we doing in practical terms on that front?

My colleagues asked a question about the support that we have been giving through EU funding programmes, which I repeat. They also raised the issue of DFID funding. I know that the Government are doing some work to try to improve good governance in Colombia. I had a meeting recently with the person who had been seconded from the National Crime Agency to help the Colombian police improve their anti-drugs work, but what are we doing to support reform of the criminal justice system? A properly independent criminal justice system is extremely important in this process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham spoke about the role of the Americans. What representation has the Minister made, not only to the Colombians but to the Americans, about the powerful role that they can play for good or ill? To what extent are the requests for extradition well-founded? It would be a matter of extreme concern if those extraditions are politically motivated. If the people being threatened with extradition are not seeing the evidence for why they are being threatened with extradition, that puts a big question mark over the process.

The British Government have a continuous dialogue, I am sure, but what representations has the Minister been able to make to the new President about the importance of sticking with the peace process? There was a very interesting editorial in the *Financial Times* recently, and I want to read a paragraph from it. It states:

"Mr Duque has said he will be outspoken about Caracas's egregious failings... Venezuela is a genuine threat to international stability, too often ignored by too many for too long, and Colombia is on the frontline. But responding to it requires a multilateral effort that Mr Duque needs to cultivate by extending, rather than overturning, the international goodwill built up by his predecessor."

That speaks directly to our role in supporting the international peace process. The Minister knows that the Government are the penholder for Colombia in the

Security Council. What initiatives has he taken? What initiatives has he asked our representative in New York to take in that role?

Everybody in this House is keen to support the Colombian peace process. We know that the contribution we can make from this country is small, but it may none the less be significant. I urge the Minister to continue on a positive path.

3.46 pm

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on initiating the debate and thank him for sharing with us his insights from his recent visit. If this were the BBC's "Mastermind", it would be his specialist subject. I appreciate the input from Members here today, who have enthusiastically developed exceptional knowledge of the situation. It is one of those areas where once someone gets stuck into it, they get very emotionally involved and just want to stick at it. I commend the efforts people are making. Their enthusiasm is shared by all parts of the House. I do not think there is any difference between us in what we are trying to achieve.

I want to give our assessment of the direction of the peace process and what we know about President Duque's Government, which is only four or five weeks' old. I would also like to say something about the impact on human rights, which I know many Members follow closely. I will also respond to some of the specific questions that have been raised, particularly on land reform, Jesus Santrich and DFID. I will come to that in a minute.

It has been less than two years since the signing of the historic peace agreement between the Government and the FARC. What has been achieved? Perhaps most significantly, the FARC are no longer an armed group, but are now a legitimate political party with members in the Congress. Earlier this year, they took part in elections for the first time. As far as peace processes go, that is a significant achievement in a very short time. With regard to the agreement itself, 353 of the 578 commitments made by both parties in the final deal are now in different stages of implementation, including important changes to Colombia's legislation. The constitution has been amended to allow FARC political participation and to set up the legal structures of the special jurisdiction for peace.

It is perhaps the more practical elements of the commitments, affecting ordinary Colombians, where progress has been rather more uneven. More than 13,000 former FARC combatants and militia have formally registered for reintegration into civilian life, but slow progress on training, fear of reprisals and simply the time spent waiting for reintegration has seen more than 1,500 of them slip away to join dissident groups and criminal elements. That risks undermining improvements in security. Colombia has seen its lowest numbers of recorded homicides for more than 40 years, which is at least something to be welcomed.

In terms of security, this year's elections have been called the safest for decades, with record numbers of people voting. That was no doubt aided by the end of FARC's military campaign, and by temporary ceasefires announced by the National Liberation Army, or ELN.

The ELN, which was not party to the 2016 peace agreement, has continued its campaign of violence since the end of a temporary ceasefire in January that was agreed with former President Santos. Just this week, the ELN rejected President Duque's new conditions for a return to talks in Havana.

The ELN and criminal gangs, so-called BACRIM—bandas criminales—have embarked on a campaign of violence and intimidation in communities where the FARC have withdrawn. That is largely aimed at controlling the underlying and continuing problems that we know about, such as the record levels of coca production, extortion more generally, and illegal mining. In 2017, fighting between those groups caused 61 major displacements, forcing at least 12,000 people from their homes. The British ambassador recently discussed with the new Defence Minister our specific concerns about new cycles of violence in the Pacific coast region, with its largely Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities.

Those who speak out for the rights of local communities are also often singled out for attack. The UN reports that at least 121 human rights defenders and community leaders were killed last year, and Amnesty says that Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world for human rights defenders. I have discussed with my Colombian counterparts our concerns about violence against human rights defenders, and the steps that are needed to protect them. During Colombia's universal periodic review of human rights, which took place in May, the UK stressed the need for new protection measures for human rights defenders and support for victims of conflict-related sexual violence. I am pleased to say that all the UK's recommendations were accepted by the Colombian Government, but more work remains to ensure that human rights are prioritised by the new Administration.

Turning to that new Government, President Duque was inaugurated on 7 August. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend. I would have liked to have had the opportunity to discuss the incoming Administration's policies for peace and security, and all sorts of issues that we have been discussing today. During the election campaign, the President shared an insight to his ideas about the peace process. We know that he wishes to change some aspects, and we understand that he will do so only through the proper congressional and legislative procedures. It is also worth noting that in recent weeks President Duque's position appears to have softened in contrast to his earlier statements, and he has said that he wishes to work for unity, not polarisation, in the future of the peace process.

We are working with the new Government to understand their priorities at this early stage. The Prime Minister spoke to President Duque in August, shortly after his inauguration, and said that he could count on the UK's continued support for the peace process. The Foreign Secretary also spoke to the new Foreign Minister, Carlos Holmes, in New York a few weeks ago, and shared our pride in the UK's role as penholder for the peace process at the UN Security Council. Indeed, we will help to renew the mandate for the UN special political mission in the coming weeks.

We of course provide support for the peace process, including through our £34 million conflict, security and stabilisation fund. UK-funded projects are strengthening the rule of law in post-conflict areas. They are rehabilitating

former child combatants and reforming the Colombian police. Other programmes are helping to record and investigate cases of conflict-related sexual violence, and provide training to victims in how to access justice. The UK is also the largest donor to the UN trust fund, which is supporting the implementation of the peace agreement. We have also provided financial support to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Organisation of American States peace monitoring mission.

I will turn quickly to some of the specific issues that were raised. A very big—perhaps the biggest—issue is land reform, which is very complicated. We have vigorously supported land reform, and raised it with the former Government continually. It is very much at the heart of the peace agreement and must remain a top priority for the Colombian Government. Over the last two years the Colombian Government have formalised 1.6 million hectares of land for farmers—pretty well the size of Northern Ireland. The former Government started a pilot for registering land in rural communities. The legislation is still to be passed, but it is an important step that needs to be taken.

Progress has been made, but there is more to do, because only four in 10 campesinos have legal titles. One Government agency, Fondo de Tierras—my pronunciation is not as good as that of the hon. Member for Rhondda, but he can give me lessons—which was set up under President Santos, aims to give 3 million hectares of redistributed land to campesinos within 12 years.

The question about the Department for International Development I can answer only in respect of my experience as DFID Minister a few years ago. Hon. Members are right that DFID pretty well withdrew from Latin America. It focused on the most impoverished countries in the world. Although my understanding is that Colombia is eligible for official development assistance, there are no direct programmes there. However, there will be programmes that benefit from contributions that we have made to multilateral organisations. As a rule, DFID does not do much infrastructure directly; it supports large infrastructure projects through multilateral organisations—although when I was Minister I was pleased to open a bridge across a ravine in Nepal. That was an example of an infrastructure project that DFID had sponsored; they benefited from my very effective ministerial decisions. However, I have to say that the question of DFID involvement in the continent is thrown into stark relief by the growing collapse of Venezuela next door.

On the arrest of the FARC leader Jesus Santrich, there is always a conflict between wanting to re-embrace FARC leaders and bearing down on any continuation in drug smuggling. When the two collide, as they appear to have done at least in the optics of the arrest, there is obviously a dilemma. It is the first case of its kind to be considered by the transitional justice mechanisms set up by the peace agreement. It is essential that due process is followed. I must also say that I, too, admire the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) for making that prison visit.

I would say a bit more about our general bilateral relations, but I have run out of time. We should all commend Colombia for the progress it has made over the past two years. We recognise that more needs to be done, and we look forward to working with the Colombians

[Sir Alan Duncan]

as a reliable partner, and ensuring that the UK does everything it can to support the continued success of the peace agreement.

3.58 pm

Chris Bryant: I am grateful to all hon. Members. There is clear concern across all political parties that the peace process should not now founder, and we want justice for all the people of Colombia.

I am enormously grateful, as I think is the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), to Louise Winstanley, who organised our trip to Colombia—although she is a very hard taskmaster, because we were getting up at ludicrous times in the morning. Colombia often listens to the international community. I was struck that one of the hotels we stayed in was called the Hotel Lusitania. It is unusual for a hotel to be named after a ship that was sunk. The links between the United Kingdom and Colombia are very strong. Of course, some of those links are quite dangerous, not least in relation to the cocaine trade and, I would argue, to palm oil as well.

We are engaged and involved in the situation in Colombia. It is very early days in the presidency of Iván Duque, and we wish him well. I note what the Minister said about the softening of the tone. It may well be that he does exactly what President Santos did, which was to get elected under the Uribe umbrella but then storm off in an entirely independent direction. I very much hope that is what happens.

I will end with the most sobering comment that I heard from one campesino family. They said that their grandfather had been told by the paramilitaries, “Either you will give us your land, or your widow will.” That is the injustice that still has to be put right.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the peace process in Colombia.

Criminal Justice System: Veterans

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered veterans in the criminal justice system.

It is good to be holding this debate under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank you for the support I know you will give me throughout the debate. On several occasions, I have had the opportunity here in Westminster Hall to highlight the amazing, innovative work with offenders at Her Majesty's prison Parc in my constituency. The Parc Supporting Families initiative has changed lives. It has brought a focus on being alcohol and drug free and on the impact on families, friends and communities. It has built relationships with families and taught prisoners parenting skills. It includes substance misuse programmes, prisoners reading with their children and making visits more family friendly, as well as building links between the schools of prisoners' children and the prisoners, so that the children are largely protected from the impact of their parents' sentences.

Many of the ideas successfully launched at Parc were picked up by the Farmer report and have been applied elsewhere. This new holistic approach to offending, which places increasing responsibility on the offender to address their behaviour while professional staff support and enable change, has had a radical impact on offending. Parc has built on that and in 2015 opened the first ever ex-military offenders unit, Endeavour. I visited just before the recess and promised the staff and prisoners I met that I would seek a Westminster Hall debate to emphasise the impact of the work they are doing on themselves and the wider community.

I commend the work of the staff at the unit. They go beyond just going in to do their job. It is their whole focus, knowing the change that they can bring across Wales. I also emphasise the eagerness I felt from the veterans and their willingness to tackle the issues that had led to their offences, and I pay tribute to the wide range of partner agencies involved. The work has had a huge impact on the lives and futures of the 270 men who have passed through the unit since it was opened. I urge the Minister or someone from the Ministry of Justice to visit and see the work, and the leadership that the unit has from Janet Wallsgrove, the director of Parc, and Corin Morgan-Armstrong, the inspirational head of family intervention, custody and community—does that not just say exactly what prisons should be about?

We have to recognise the task the staff, the volunteers and the inmates at Parc are trying to do. They are tackling years of failure—failure of families and of the state, particularly the education system and the way in which, in this country, we do not teach emotional and relationship education. They are tackling quite a high degree of failure from the Ministry of Defence to address not only the problems that military personnel bring with them into the military, but the negative experiences that they may have had while serving that leave them ill-equipped to deal with life back in the civilian world. Those problems are then left for the

criminal justice system to deal with. Quite honestly, society has for far too long dealt with those problems by locking them and the people away.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend and pay tribute to her considerable experience in this area. Does she not think this is part of a wider problem in terms of society supporting, or rather not supporting, our military veterans? That is why it is vital that there is a question on this subject in the next census.

Mrs Moon: It is absolutely vital that we know how many veterans we have and where they are, but many veterans do not want to self-identify. There is a question of shame and not wanting to be identified, so there would have to be some nuancing around that whole question.

We are failing people who have served their country and that cannot be acceptable to anyone. Let us be clear: not every service leaver is likely to end up in prison, in the same way that not every service leaver will end up with mental health problems—I am deeply concerned that that image is being allowed to grow. For many, the transition to civilian life, while challenging, is successful. The MOD has improved its programmes, although it still lacks anything more than a one-size-fits-all approach.

A recent report from the Forces in Mind Trust and King's College London looked at data held by liaison and diversion services, and shows that we do not even really know how many offenders have served in the armed forces. I have seen figures for the last five years that vary from 2% to 9%. That has to change; we need better, more effective statistics, so that we know the problem we are dealing with.

Military life provides structure and comradeship, which many may have lacked in their lives before they joined the services. That comradeship and structure might not equip people with the education, skills and coping mechanisms that they need for transitioning into civilian life. Some may not have the emotional skills to cope with relationship issues or their change of status. Emotional issues had played a part in almost all of the cases of men that I spoke to, but all also talked of the trauma of going from hero to zero. One minute they are heroes, respected by family and community, and the next minute, they are nothing and nobody. For many of them, that trauma led in some part to their offending, which exacerbated the feeling of zero-ness, because they were totally rejected by family and community after offending.

Like many MPs, I have dealt with numerous cases of veterans who have hit hard times. In the majority of cases, it was not the veteran who approached me—it was their family and friends. Ex-service personnel are not good at asking for help. They are used to being problem solvers—indeed, that is what they are taught to be—but many also need training in seeking and accepting help. One of the men had been offered help and had turned it down because it was not exactly what he was looking for and he did not want to compromise. He made his life harder as a result.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The hon. Lady has mentioned HMP Parc and the excellent work done there. I have also visited the prison. Would it not be a proposal to have armed services support officers in every prison and every probation area?

Mrs Moon: Certainly, the military covenant has meant that individuals with an armed forces focus are spreading out across services. Among the prison service, there is definitely a wider acceptance and recognition of the need to look at ex-service personnel. That awareness is growing, but we do always need to do more.

We all know about post-traumatic stress disorder and mental health problems within the military and I do not intend to go through that again. We are seeing increasing numbers. We need to examine how many of those who are in our prison system and are exhibiting signs of mental health problems and post-traumatic stress have served, and where they have served. We need to do that research as we cannot work just on the basis of “we think”.

I appreciate that the Minister is having to respond to other Department's failures, but that goes with the job. The Forces in Mind Trust has summed the situation up well:

“more efforts could be made upstream of the” criminal justice system,

“for example during transition out of the military, when some of the risk factors for offending behaviour may be targeted. Interventions to improve employment, housing”—

a big issue, fundamentally important—

“mental health and alcohol and substance misuse outcomes could reduce the rates of offending following transition.”

Identifying veterans in prisons is not straightforward, as I said. Since January 2015, new arrivals in prison have been asked to self-identify themselves, but that relies on people being willing to do so, and not everyone is. The feeling of letting others down is significant, and they might not want that identification. Consequently, numbers vary. Before 2015, estimates of the number of veterans in prison varied between 3% and 9% of the prison population, as I said, but now we simply do not know. Will the Minister look again at how offenders who are ex-military are identified, and work with the Ministry of Defence to improve identification?

Identifying individuals is only valid, however, if we provide the right kind of help, so that veterans are not failed again. To quote the Forces in Mind Trust report again,

“veterans have a different profile of welfare, mental health, alcohol and substance-misuse, and general health needs than general population offenders.”

We therefore have to produce a different form of response.

Parc prison provides a good place for such work to start. In the past 18 months, 207 veterans have been identified, 153 of whom served in the Army—but there are likely to be more—19 were ex-Navy, 18 were ex-Royal Air Force and 17 would not disclose their service. Those in the group are serving sentences for a wide range of different offences but, among them, a disproportionate number have been sentenced for sex offences, 89; violence offences, 35; and drugs, or drugs and violence, offences, 24.

The role of the unit for the ex-military, as for other programmes at Parc, is to prepare prisoners to rejoin society successfully. That is what prison should be about. Considerable thought went into establishing the unit: 160 Brigade visited Parc to discuss the idea beforehand, and General Nick Carter visited and talked to the people in the unit, including the prison officers who support it, and I cannot begin to tell the House the boost that that gave to ex-service personnel.

[Mrs Moon]

Great efforts have been made to build partnership links with organisations appropriate to work with ex-military. There is a steering group and it provides a comprehensive programme to address everything from employment to housing. There are too many organisations to mention—although I have a list for the Minister—but they include SSAFA; the Royal British Legion, as one might expect; SToMP, or Support Transition of Military Personnel; Care after Combat; and Emmaus.

The practical aspects of civilian life are not the only ones that need to be addressed. Emphasis needs to be put on tackling relationship issues, and prisoners' personal lack of self-respect—low self-esteem was very apparent among the ex-military personnel I spoke to, with that sense of going from hero to zero. The partner organisations carry on the work started in the unit, providing vital continuity once a veteran is released. We cannot allow that transition from prison into the civilian world to fail, because if it does it is devastating for the ex-service personnel.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend lists myriad organisations that do excellent work in support of our veterans, but availability is scattergun, and it is almost a postcode lottery for many parts of the UK. Does she agree that the unit at Parc offers a national benchmark, the basis for a national programme?

Mrs Moon: That is exactly why I secured the debate. Prisons other than Parc are doing such work, but I have to say—with a sense of pride—that Wales is doing the best work in the UK with offenders who are ex-military. We are leading the way. Parc is an exemplar that I hope the Minister will look at to see how we can roll it out across the UK.

Not every veteran at Parc is in the Endeavour unit—39 ex-military sex offenders are in the vulnerable persons unit, and initially charities were reluctant to work with this group, but that has now changed, which I am pleased about—but its results are encouraging. In the unit, veterans look after each other. Interestingly, the old ethos of respect between prisoners and prison officers is back—it is like stepping back in time, say officers who served then—and there is a real sense of trust and looking out for each other. Individuals I spoke to during a visit said that they feel safe. Cells are left open, there are no thefts and there is a sense of working together to overcome problems. Comradeship is key to people feeling that they can keep working to confront some quite difficult things that have happened in their lives, and to deal with the tensions and fractures within their families.

Emmaus, for example, rehomed three ex-military offenders from the unit, with one of them gaining full-time employment as a store manager. Two veterans secured full-time employment following release from the unit, one of whom now even employs others.

All of the prisoners I spoke to were eager to re-enlist. All of them wanted to know something, and this was the big message that they wanted me to tell, although I appreciate that it is not the Minister's responsibility: they wanted an opportunity to serve. They wanted to make good on their failures. Somehow we need to look

at whether there is an opportunity, case by case, for individuals who have offended to re-enlist in the regulars or the reserves.

The MOD needs to work with the Minister to address when and where people served, and when and how they transitioned out. An awful lot of them seem to have been discharged from the military and so re-entered society with no support, so they moved into the criminal justice system, and wider society had to pick up the risks and the problems. A review of the military justice system needs to look at how we can make that process more effective.

Parc has a wraparound service, as is needed at the point of transition. Will the Minister look at what is being done at Parc? I also recommend that he looks at the excellent work at HMP Oakwood on peer-led veterans' life skills and support training. In brief, therefore, the issues are employment and employability; housing and support; capacity to re-enlist; relationship education; transitional issues to be addressed before leaving the services; and moving from hero to zero, or self-worth and self-esteem. May we have research into whether there is any correlation between those who have suddenly moved into our criminal justice system and those who formed part of the sudden reduction in the size of our armed forces in 2010 and 2011? There are concerns that that might be part of the issue, as well as Iraq and Afghanistan. There also needs to be a greater effort to tackle sexual offences in the military, and domestic violence.

The military justice system of course has a responsibility, and I appreciate that I have given the Minister a lot to think about that is not within his brief, but if we as part of wider society do not tackle the problem, we will only see it grow and continue.

4.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) for securing the debate and for her typically thoughtful speech on an important issue. I am sorry that we have so little time today for it.

I also pay tribute to all those who serve, or who have served, in Her Majesty's armed forces, and to the families that support them. The British armed forces are the best in the world; it is those who serve in them who make them so. The armed forces covenant reflects the huge debt that, as a society, we owe to all who serve. It is a pledge to all who have served, or are currently serving, that they will be treated fairly, looked after and not disadvantaged due to their service. I am proud to work alongside colleagues from the Ministry of Justice, across Government and on both sides of the Chamber in this important area. I particularly highlight the work of the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood). I will ensure that he is aware of the points the hon. Lady made for the Ministry of Defence.

Our criminal justice system is there to do a number of things: to punish and deter those who break the law; to provide redress for victims of crime; and to protect society—in many ways, the overriding aim. In that respect, we must focus on reducing reoffending through our system by providing effective rehabilitation. That applies to all those in our custody or in the criminal

justice system, regardless of background. We are determined to ensure that those in custody are held in safe and decent conditions and receive the support they need to meet their rehabilitation and physical and mental health needs.

In that context, it is right to recognise the sometimes very specific needs that former armed forces personnel in custody may have. The Ministry of Justice was pleased to welcome in 2014 the Phillips review of veterans in the criminal justice system, which looked at that issue. It highlighted that ex-military offenders have similar profiles to non-military offenders, but with multiple mental health and socioeconomic risk factors, including anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. We must seek to address those factors. The latest Ministry of Justice offender management statistics show that, across our 85,000 prisoners, around 3% of new receptions declared themselves as having served in the armed forces. This figure has remained fairly stable for several years.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): I commend the Minister on his very accurate speech. Self-declaration is a really serious issue. Care after Combat, which is in most prisons—frankly, the big charities were not in there doing the work the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) talked about—knows that the guys and girls who go to prison, for myriad reasons, will not self-declare, even though we know they have served, because their national insurance number has a marker. When I was a Minister and sat where the Minister is sitting, I called for that situation to be reversed so that, rather than people self-declaring, they have to declare that they do not want to be declared. We must address their safety in prison; it is not just pride—some of them are at risk. I commend Care after Combat, in particular, for going into prisons and not caring what people have done, just so that it can get people back out and not reoffending.

Edward Argar: My right hon. Friend makes a very important point. I pay tribute to him for his work when he was a Minister in the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Justice; if I recall correctly, he initiated the Care after Combat pilots, and I pay tribute to the work of that charity too. If I may, I will come on to that and the point about self-declaration shortly, because the hon. Lady made a powerful point about it.

We have begun gathering data on the percentage of veterans among the population of offenders in the community, because, although they are not in custody, we have an obligation to them too. The data is being analysed and will be available in due course. The statistics are important because they highlight that, although some have suggested there is an over-representation of former armed forces personnel in the criminal justice system, that does not appear to be the case. However, as the hon. Lady and others have highlighted, the statistics are vital; if we wish to help former armed forces personnel in our criminal justice system, knowing who they are and understanding them is the only way we can do that.

My strong belief is that we must emphasise that, for someone coming into the criminal justice system, their service connection is an asset, not a liability. As has been alluded to, the Ministry of Justice made changes in 2015 so that every individual coming into custody in England and Wales is asked if they have served in the

armed forces. A mandated self-declaration form is also completed by the national probation service. The hon. Lady and my right hon. Friend made a powerful point about the deep pride many former armed forces personnel have in their service and in who they are, which can sometimes inhibit them from making that declaration. The hon. Lady asked if I will have another look at that issue, and I am happy to tell her that I will look into it in more detail following the points she and my right hon. Friend made. It is important to these people's rehabilitation and reintegration into society that we know who they are, so that we can ensure that the services we provide meet their needs—for example, by addressing identified needs such as mental health issues or PTSD.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons noted in 2014 that 26% of ex-service personnel—those we knew about, to go back to the point about self-declaration—reported having a current mental health or emotional wellbeing problem in its survey. That statistic was similar in the general prisoner population. What was distinct for veterans in custody, however, was that they were more likely to report feeling depressed or suicidal on arrival—the figure was 18%, compared with 14%—and more likely to have a higher incidence of physical health problems.

If we do not understand the nature and extent of the problem, how can we possibly hope to address it? For an individual who has served, being able to disclose that is a step towards helping themselves as well as allowing us to help them. It opens the array of support networks available, and it draws down the social capital that that group has earned and invested in from their time in service.

Many talk about letting the services down by ending up in prison, but what lets these people down is not understanding them. A key principle in desisting from crime is that people should be able to define themselves positively. To see oneself as ex-service, not ex-offender, gives people a chance to have a positive self-view.

I am conscious of time, but I would like briefly to touch on a few of the wider changes that we are anticipating as a Government with regard to veterans generally, and on the importance of partnership working with other organisations. I also want to say a few words about Parc, which was the focus of the hon. Lady's speech.

The veterans population is changing, and the prison population is changing. The large cohorts of ex-servicemen and women who experienced the forces as part of their national service, or who served during the cold war years, are now giving way to a much younger group who have served in recent conflicts. A much younger veterans population has different expectations of how they want to be supported. They may be more open to asking for support—for mental health problems, for instance—and possibly less concerned about where it comes from. Across Government we will try to bond together and co-ordinate the support available, but we will rely on the first-hand knowledge of networks operating at grassroots level to look at trends, use data and keep us on top of how services should be shaped and designed in future.

The hon. Lady was right to highlight the hugely important and innovative work being done at Parc. I join her in paying tribute to the staff and the team there for what they are doing—I know her visit went down very well, and they were very pleased to see her. I hope to visit Parc soon as part of a tour of a number of

[Edward Argar]

prisons in Wales. Partnership working is key to what they do there, not just within Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service—I hope lessons from Parc can be learned across the system—but with forces charities.

I stand behind all those working in this area, and particularly the wide range of military charities that work across the criminal justice system to provide for the specific needs of veterans, in parallel with the ongoing provision available for all offenders. Those charities include, for example, SSAFA, Forces in Mind, the Royal British Legion and, of course, Care after Combat, which my right hon. Friend mentioned. I encourage those groups to continue their networks and their work, and particularly those specific pieces of work that show us where we need to go in future. It is through the knowledge and sharing experiences of voluntary sector and service charities that we are able to continue improving services for veterans. My door is always open to them to talk to me about their work.

I will conclude, to give the hon. Lady a minute to speak if she is permitted, Mr Hollobone.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. I am afraid that is not permitted. We really must get the message round all Government Departments that, in a half-hour debate, the Member leading the debate does not have the right of reply. The Minister has almost one minute remaining.

Edward Argar: I am grateful, as ever, for your sage guidance, Mr Hollobone.

I am clear that more could be learned from the Endeavour unit and the particular focus placed on targeted work with veterans. I welcome the benefits of the day-to-day peer support that former service prisoners can share, but I am cautious we do not go too far in separating individuals from the mainstream prison regime and the work that can be done in it. I am keen to explore what more can be done in this area to capture and share good practice.

I welcome the chance to take part in this debate and to play a role in representing the work that is being delivered so expertly across our prisons and probation services on behalf of those individuals who have stood up to serve their and our country. I am only sorry that time is so short. The need to work with and for that group is one that every person in this House, regardless of party, will acknowledge.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Historic Battlefields

4.30 pm

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): We now move on to a debate about the preservation of historic battlefields. I call Chris Skidmore, who is probably dangerously overqualified to speak about the subject, to move the motion.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the preservation of historic battlefields.

Thank you, Mr Hollobone, for your generous words and for chairing the debate. I chose this subject to allow other Members to contribute, as I am aware that there are historic battlefields, both on land and at sea, in or near many constituencies. This is a national issue, and it is right that it is given national attention by the Minister. However, I wish to turn my attention to a specific battlefield that is currently under threat. The battle of Bosworth is one of our nation's most historic and important battles. It is where the last English king to be killed fighting in battle, Richard III, fell. It is where the Tudor dynasty under Henry VII was born. It truly changed the course of English history.

I must declare an interest. As the author of a book about the battle of Bosworth itself and a recent biography of Richard III, I have spent years researching the battlefield. I went from climbing rickety ladders to the top of St Margaret's church in Stoke Golding to view the original site of the battlefield, to searching for original documentary evidence in the Vatican library. I was present at the 2010 conference at which a new location of the battlefield site was unveiled. It was demonstrated that the battlefield was far larger and stretched across a far wider area than previously thought. An expert archaeological team led by Dr Glenn Foard found nearly 40 cannonballs—the most ever found on a medieval battlefield—and the famous gilt silver boar badge, Richard III's insignia, demonstrating that Richard's men fought in a different location from previously thought. Those archaeological surveys of the battle, limited though they naturally were by time and resource pressures, provided a glimpse into what lies beneath the fields of Bosworth battlefield. More will surely be discovered if future archaeological investigation is allowed. Who knows what new technology will reveal in time?

The battlefield site, which is centred on Fenn Lane in what was then a marshy area known as Redemore, retains its rural setting and, crucially, provides us with an understanding of the contours and landscape of Henry Tudor's approach to the battle on the morning of 22 August 1485. Given that we know Henry himself remained at the back of the battle as fighting began—he had never actually experienced open combat—only for Richard III to spot his standards and charge with his household cavalry towards Tudor, who was surrounded by his men, it is also likely that the final phase of the battle took place around the location of Fenn Lane.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. I also congratulate him on growing a beard over the summer, in true Tudor fashion. I have received a host of emails about this matter, from Ricardians and non-Ricardians alike, which

shows how much the preservation of the Bosworth battlefield matters to the public. As I think he will agree, the battle marked the transformation of this country from the middle ages to the early modern world, with all that means for our national story.

Chris Skidmore: I could not agree more. I know that, aside from representing a constituency in relative proximity to the battlefields of the midlands, my hon. Friend is himself an historian and scholar and has read several books about the battle. We have talked privately about the matter, and I appreciate his input to the debate.

Henry VII was crowned at Stoke Golding and instituted a battlefield chapel at St James church in Dadlington. That indicates that the battle of Bosworth was fought in that area rather than in the traditionally accepted area of Ambion Hill, where Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre is based. Ambion Hill seems more likely to have been Richard III's encampment the night before the battle. The fact that recent archaeological and documentary evidence demonstrates that the site of the battle was far wider and in a different place—around Fenn Lane—from the previous registered battlefield location overwhelmingly proves the need for caution in preserving the existing battlefield area and its surroundings.

However, that need is not being heeded. As the Minister will be aware, a recent planning application for an 83-acre driverless car testing track in Higham on the Hill, adjoining the Fenn Lane area, has been the subject of intense local and national opposition. Earlier this week more than 12,500 people had signed an online petition against the application, and hundreds of written objections have been submitted to the official planning process. A final decision on the application by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council has been deferred to 25 September.

I am fully aware—I am sure the Minister will remind me—that that is a local decision that will be made by the council. I am sure the council will reflect on the overwhelming number of written submissions and the huge petition that will be submitted later this month. I want to put on the record my gratitude to the people and organisations who have been in touch with me since I secured the debate. I thank in particular the Battlefields Trust and Julian Humphrys; the historian Michael Jones; Richard Mackinder, who has been integral to some of the archaeological work on the battlefield site; and of course the Richard III Society, for their kind input to my speech. Their voices, along with those of the thousands who have expressed deep concern about what may happen to an area of the Bosworth battlefield, should be listened to closely. I hope councillors do so, for the sake of future research and knowledge about the battle. The application threatens to destroy precious historical material that I believe should be preserved.

We must recognise the national precedent that the local application risks setting, and ask ourselves how we managed to get into a situation in which a battlefield of historic national importance is threatened in this manner. It is worth considering the current national framework for the recognition and preservation of battlefields. Battlefield sites in England are material considerations in the planning process, and they are designated by Historic England and put on the register of historic battlefields under powers conferred by the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953,

as amended. Although that legislation does not confer a specific responsibility to create a register of battlefields, one was created in 1995 by a joint project of English Heritage, the National Army Museum and the Battlefields Trust. In 2011 that register was incorporated into the national heritage list for England, which is administered by Historic England.

In Scotland, an inventory of historic battlefields was introduced in 2009. It is compiled by Historic Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Ministers under the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2011, which followed the Scottish historic environment policy of July 2009. Further guidance was issued in March 2011.

Since 1995, 47 battlefields in England have been designated as registered battlefields by Historic England—previously called English Heritage. Under planning legislation, the effect on the site and setting of a registered battlefield should be a material consideration for any proposed development. Planning policy statement 5, “Planning for the Historic Environment”, states that there should be a presumption in favour of the conservation of designated historic assets, and that local authorities should assess whether the benefits of an application for development outweigh the disbenefits. It also recognises that many historic assets are not currently designated and that, despite that, there should be a presumption in favour of conservation such that substantial harm to, or loss of, the battlefield should be “wholly exceptional”.

Several issues with the legal status quo deserve to be reconsidered. Substantial harm to a battlefield location should be “wholly exceptional”, but what of “minor harm”? Notwithstanding that those definitions are entirely subjective, a series of planning applications granted over a period of time may individually be defined as causing only minor harm, but in combination may cause incremental damage that is defined as substantial harm. The culture of permissiveness in our planning process allows for historic sites to be substantially eroded without the law ever being broken. Over time, subjective decisions that encroach on an historic battlefield site create an objective reality of destruction. No one would suggest that to take a single stone from Stonehenge would be considered minor harm, for clearly that would not be the case. One stone of many, once taken, would permanently alter the appearance and the historic preservation of the site.

Perhaps one of the long-standing issues with getting battlefield preservation taken seriously is that so much of it is not visible to the naked eye. The dead, their remains and their relics are buried, so we are faced with what is unknown rather than what is known. If we knew what was there hidden beneath the fields, we would preserve it; yet not knowing currently allows for battlefields to be thrown into the mix of the planning process. To argue that just 1% of a battlefield might be affected by a development is entirely to miss the point. That could be the 1% of a battlefield that witnessed the most important stages of combat or may yield archaeological treasures of national importance, just as the discovery of the Bosworth boar demonstrated.

In the past, planning and development were dealt with with consideration for battlefield heritage by the then English Heritage battlefields panel, a non-executive specialist panel that advised the organisation on policy and practice and included membership of organisations such as the Battlefields Trust. Yet following the establishment

[Chris Skidmore]

of Historic England, that specialist panel was disbanded. Will the Minister consider either writing to, or convening a meeting with, Historic England to see whether the panel could be re-established? Will he also investigate whether the Battlefields Trust could be registered as a statutory consultee when it comes to any planning applications within the area of registered battlefield sites? Currently it is not, which has resulted in the trust becoming aware of the planning application at Bosworth only at a very late stage, placing the battlefield at risk. It would have made sense for it to have been consulted and indeed advised earlier on in the planning process.

Finally, there is the issue of the boundary of the registered battlefield site to consider and whether the register meets all of the preservation needs of historic battlefields. Bosworth battlefield has been on that register since its inception in 1995, originally as an area of 632 hectares. That has been expanded to 1,072 hectares, together with an extended area of newly located battlefield agreed by the English Heritage battlefields panel in July 2011 and formally adopted in June 2013 following an extended consultation period.

In addition, the battlefield has its own conservation plan—effectively a form of local plan—drawn up by Leicestershire County Council and approved by the local planning authority, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, for use as part of the evidence base for its local plan. The conservation management plan includes a set of guiding principles and policies intended for those involved in the management of the battlefield area, including those dealing with recreational activity, land management and planning matters.

It is interesting to note that in the plan, policies were drawn up to

“ensure that topographic views across the Battlefield and within its setting are conserved and managed in order to protect significance enabling understanding and interpretation”

and also to ensure that

“any new development within the area and its setting does not have an adverse visual or landscape impact on the special qualities of the area, and that existing development which detracts from the area, where appropriate, is mitigated”.

One might ask whether that conservation plan was not being mitigated by the current planning application, which indeed seems to run contrary to those policies. That is for Hinckley and Bosworth borough councillors to decide on 25 September, but councillors can be responsible only for implementing and adhering to existing legal guidance and frameworks as they stand in the national planning policy framework.

The current guidance and frameworks clearly do not afford historic battlefields adequate protection against development and destruction; hence we are faced with this important test case at Bosworth. I have called this debate today because this issue is of national significance. It is time to think again and revisit the entire topic of how battlefields are protected through the register of historic battlefields, and indeed the spatial limit in which the register itself self-defines battlefields. The register was first created over 23 years ago, and it is perhaps worth reflecting on the massive advances in battlefield archaeology and heritage studies since then. A review of how we could best preserve our historic battlefields and landscapes should be considered. Just as we have areas of outstanding natural beauty, it is

worth considering whether for the future we should be creating areas of national historic importance that would recognise historic sites and their surroundings as areas that we wish—and need—to conserve for the future, just as we do with parks. I urge the Minister to consider my suggestion for a review. Perhaps he would be kind enough to consult his Department and see whether that might be possible.

Bosworth is the battlefield under threat today but, while the current legal framework continues, no doubt there will be others. To build over one part of a battlefield site threatens to set a precedent of permissiveness that could erode our ability to protect our battlefields across the country. We should plant our standard squarely on preserving Bosworth and its heritage, both past and yet to be discovered.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. The debate can last until 5.30 pm. I am obliged to call the Front-Bench speakers no later than seven minutes past 5. The guideline limits are five minutes for the Scottish National party, five minutes for Her Majesty's Opposition and 10 minutes for the Minister. If the Minister would leave three minutes at the end for the mover of the debate to sum up, that would be great. Four Members are seeking to contribute and we have 20 minutes, so I impose a five-minute limit.

4.46 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) on bringing the issue to Westminster Hall. I feel strongly about the preservation of culture and history. As an Orangeman, as a member of the Royal Black Preceptory and as an Apprentice Boy of Derry, I have a sincere and real interest in our history. The Chamber will be glad to hear that I will not sing the historic song “The Sash”, but I will refer to the four important battles that took place to enable King William to overthrow the pretender James and his Jacobite army in what was then Ireland at the battle of the Boyne.

“It was worn at Derry, Aughrim, Enniskillen and the Boyne.”

I could sing that, to everyone's pleasure—but I am not sure that is the right word, so I will not do it.

There has been European funding successfully to preserve and build on the history of these monumental battle sites at the Boyne, with an incredibly impressive museum and guided tour of the site providing lots of information for the tourist and the historian alike. There are also museums aplenty in Londonderry to mark these historic events. However, in my opinion in Enniskillen we do not do justice to what was surely a turning point in the Williamite wars. In Enniskillen, armed Williamite civilians drawn from the local Protestant population organised a formidable irregular military force. The armed civilians of Enniskillen ignored an order from Robert Lundy that they should fall back to Londonderry and instead launched guerrilla attacks against the Jacobites. Operating with Enniskillen as a base, they carried out raids against the Jacobite forces in Connacht and Ulster, plundering Trillick, burning Augher Castle and raiding Clones.

A poorly trained Jacobite army of about 3,000 men, led by Viscount Mountcashel, advanced from Dublin. McCarthy's men were mostly recruits, but on 28 July 1689

McCarthy's force encamped near Enniskillen and bombarded the Williamite outpost of Crom Castle—better known as Crom. Two days later, they were confronted—and vastly outnumbered—by about 2,000 Williamite Enniskilleners under Colonel Berry, Colonel William Wolseley and Gustav Hamilton. The Jacobite dragoons under Anthony Hamilton stumbled into an ambush, taking some 230 casualties. Mountcashel managed to drive off Berry's cavalry with his main force, but unwisely McCarthy halted and drew up his men about a mile south of Newtownbutler.

Many of the Jacobite troops fled as the first shots were fired, and up to 1,500 of the 3,000 were hacked down or drowned—500 tried to swim across the lough, but only one survived. Four hundred Jacobite officers were captured and later exchanged for Williamite prisoners. The other Jacobites were killed. Mountcashel was wounded by a bullet and narrowly avoided being killed. He went on to command the Irish brigade in the French army. That victory at Newtownbutler ensured that a landing by the Duke of Schomberg in County Down in August 1689 was unopposed.

That pivotal battle in the history of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and what was then Ireland deserves a museum. The hon. Gentleman made his case for Bosworth, and I am making mine for Enniskillen. When I was first elected to this place, my parliamentary aide was particularly excited just to walk around this place. She loves history, as I do; in all honesty, it was probably the only subject at school that I excelled in and enjoyed. With two little ones at home, she does not find the time to do that now, but when she comes over here she particularly enjoys it. The history of what is now Northern Ireland is just as rich, yet it is not marketed well. We must do more to attract people to the area. Enniskillen has some of the most beautiful landscape—aside from, of course, my own Strangford constituency—and its history is rich, but when we do a Google search of the battle we find no links whatever to anything that would draw people there.

We can do better. While we must physically preserve, we must also preserve interest, and that is done by making it interesting to new generations. The Orange Order, of which I am a proud member, does its part, but I believe there must be more funding available to commemorate such important sites, and interactive learning to make them as compelling to young people now as they are to this old boy here—I was a young boy at one time. It is important to do that.

I think of the Americans, who love coming over to enjoy the history and to celebrate their short history, when they look toward Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland for their historical background. I think how rich we are in culture and heritage, and it excites me to think what else we can do. I look forward to the Minister's contribution and his endorsement of all the historic battle sites across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I put it to him and his team that they must determine the next steps not simply of preservation, but of enhancement of our history and our culture. The battles of Derry, Aughrim, Enniskillen and the Boyne were important battles. The battle of the Boyne was the one that changed history for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but Enniskillen has never been looked after.

4.51 pm

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): I speak as the Member for the constituency concerned, as I have been proudly for 30 years, when I say to the House that this is a battle between ancient and modern; it is about preserving the old or progressing the new. The old that we are talking about is only 1% of the battlefield, and the boundary of the battlefield was recently moved. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), whose excellent book "Bosworth: The Birth of the Tudors" I happen to have with me as a guide, is a historian and spoke passionately for the nation as a whole on changing the rules, but I must tell him that local opinion is not with him on this question.

I applaud Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council for calling this in to see what is possible, but we must be clear about this. The MIRA technology park, which has 35 international companies and will employ 1,000 engineers over the next seven years, needs the connected and autonomous vehicle testing track. I was there on 28 July for the Queen's Award for Enterprise. It was a memorable occasion, since it is not often one sees a Lord Lieutenant in a yellow jacket driving a JCB; we had a very entertaining day, and I was able to talk to the senior employees, some of whom had flown in from Japan, about the importance of the project. I am not sure I see how that new track can be built anywhere other than at the location currently designated.

I point out to my hon. Friend that Historic England has agreed that the site will have no physical impact on the key parts of the battlefield. There is apparently limited harm to the varied archaeological sites there. There have already been 10 pieces of work, including geological surveys, trial trenching, metal detecting and an assessment of the battlefield setting. I would not object and I am sure MIRA will not object to looking at my hon. Friend's suggestions; nevertheless, studies have been undertaken. Furthermore, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, in connection with the county council and other authorities, is looking at a nature trail with six points throughout the battlefield to explain what happened there, which is an important part of our national heritage.

We must also bear in mind, however, that at MIRA, which is on the A5 boundary and almost straddles the east and west midlands, we have an £80 million investment twice over from Horiba. I spoke to both Takeshi Fukushima, the chairman of MIRA, and Masayuki Adachi, the president and chief executive officer of Horiba. We must understand that this is a multinational business, developing batteries and computer-aided connected and autonomous vehicles all across the world. It is critically important for the future not just of my constituency, but of the east midlands, the west midlands and the nation as a whole that this goes forward.

Today I was at a breakfast meeting at quarter to 8 at the Department for International Trade, at which the Secretary of State pointed out that we are still the fifth biggest economy in the world and the world's fastest growing and most successful high-tech market. He also talked about TP11—the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership—in connection with post-Brexit trading arrangements; I know my hon. Friend who is chairing this debate will be pleased to hear about building trade deals with 11 Asian countries. We have to be the centre here; we do not want it to go

[David Tredinnick]

anywhere else. I am indebted to local people I know well who have said to me that local people want it. I quote a friend of mine, Stan Rooney, a former borough councillor who is now chairman of a parish council, who said:

“A technology ‘war’ is being fought currently to develop the technology and only this week Chrysler Automobiles US have announced they are to build an identical facility costing £23m.”

That is, identical to MIRA. I agree with him when he says:

“Time is of the essence!”

4.56 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I commend the hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) for securing the debate. He was right to talk at the start about the need to preserve our historic battlefields not only on land, but at sea. I feel that I have strayed into a very polite tussle between two Conservative Members, so hon. Members will be pleased to hear that I wish to restrict my remarks to talking about protection of other historic battlefields, including those at sea and in particular shipwrecks, rather than taking a side in this most polite of fracas.

The area I represent has its own historic battlefield in Freedom fields, where Plymouth parliamentarians fought off the cavaliers in the Sabbath Day fight, ensuring that Plymouth remained on the side of the parliamentarians in the English civil war. We also have many memorials to those sailors who died at sea. In particular, I will talk about the wrecks from the first and second world wars as part of our historic battlefields theme, because it is important that those people who died far away from our shores are remembered with the same fondness and receive the same level of protection as those who died on UK soil.

The issue of historic wrecks was picked up by the Defence Secretary over the summer, and his intervention was very welcome. Since entering this place last June, I have been raising the issue of HMS Exeter in particular, a Devonport-based warship that was sunk with a number of other Royal Navy warships in an engagement with the Japanese in the Java sea during the second world war. When she sank, some of her crew were taken to a Japanese prisoner of war camp, and their experiences after that are well known, but there are many people who died on board HMS Exeter, in sealed compartments. She sank to the bottom of the sea and that was supposed to be where she would rest.

That has not been the case, however, because there has been illegal salvage of HMS Exeter. We no longer have an HMS Exeter in the Java sea, because she has been completely salvaged and completely removed, including the remains of the Royal Navy sailors who died on board. There have been many stories in the press over the past couple of years about the remains of those people who perished on board HMS Exeter, as well as her sister ships, HMS Encounter and HMS Electra, being thrown into mass graves or discarded overboard when she was lost. The same focus on protecting our historic battlefields must also apply to those that are far from our sight, particularly in areas where we previously had a presence but no longer do, in order to keep up the protection of those sites.

The Dutch Government have done much work on the protection of the flotilla that HMS Exeter was part of, because of the loss of a number of Dutch warships, and

the Dutch Parliament in particular has been putting pressure on its Government to do that. We in this place can learn a lot from them about how we can keep pressure on Ministers, because I do not believe that the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign Office have been as thorough as their Dutch counterparts in protecting those wrecks. In particular, teams that went to investigate reports of British sailors being dumped in mass graves were sent by the Dutch Government, not the UK Government. We have a lot to thank our Dutch cousins for. I particularly thank Captain Smitt, the Dutch defence and naval attaché in London, for his correspondence and for keeping us informed of how those remains are being preserved.

The simple truth is that we do not know where the remains of the sailors who died on HMS Exeter are. They could be on the seabed around her previous site, or they could have been taken on land when the sealed compartments of HMS Exeter would hoisted on to salvage vessels—we simply do not know. My challenge to the Minister, as part of a discussion of how we protect our historic battlefields, is to make sure that we monitor those lost wrecks not only for oil pollution but for illegal salvage. That should be a cross-departmental joint endeavour between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office.

Can we also start to create public awareness of historic battle sites, either on land or lost wrecks—both from the Royal Navy and, importantly, from the merchant navy, which lost many more ships at sea? Will the Minister think about creating an equivalent of UNESCO's register of at-risk world heritage sites for wrecks abroad? Several UK bodies keep a list of our wrecks and those that are in danger, raising awareness of at-risk wrecks and, importantly, where the remains of Royal Navy sailors who died in service to our country on those ships may be disturbed or not treated with dignity or respect. That should be looked at, and I will be grateful if the Minister will cover that in his response.

5.1 pm

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank and pay tribute to my very good friend and constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), for securing this important debate and, predictably, for an interesting and brilliant speech.

I am an ardent lover of battlefields and their powerful history. Whenever I travel to Europe and the middle east, for instance, I invariably end up looking for an historic battle site. I enjoy searching for them and relish finding them. They are inspirational places of heroism, honour and sacrifice. The United Kingdom has a wonderful native array of battlefields from across the span of history. Historic England lists 47 battlefields on its national heritage list, but the Battlefields Trust calculates that there are more than 500 battlefields or sites of conflict across the United Kingdom. They range from the obvious—castles and city walls—to culturally important targets of Viking raids, such as monasteries and ports, and from well-defined battle sites to more vaguely understood sites where there is record of a conflict.

Indeed, Little Solsbury Hill, overlooking Bath—about 12 miles from my constituency—has been identified by historians as a possible site for the battle of Badon Hill,

in which, during the 5th century, a British Arthur-like figure led the resistance to the Saxons invading from the east. It is a beautiful site and it is well worth a walk to the top of the hill.

The castles and cities that saw important sieges and struggles, from the Norman conquest, through the wars of the roses and into the civil war, are already well protected from inappropriate development or destruction. However, although battlefields are just fields, they are culturally significant and are often filled to the brim with interesting and vital archaeological remains, but as we saw with the recent proposal to build on part of the site of the battle of Bosworth, people do not always treat them as valuable, historic sites.

More than that, battlefields have a number of concerns that built history does not, and it is not only the physical location of a battlefield that needs protection. Visitors and researchers alike can gain a wealth of information from visiting the site of a battle. To truly preserve them, we need to preserve the topography, the fields of view and the setting of the field. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood said, all those features were of great importance to the armies and commanders who fought on the field, and all are of interest to anyone seeking to understand how and why they fought where they did and the impact of territory and strategic points. As Winston Churchill said, one must “tread the terrain” to really understand a battlefield.

That is true of Lansdown Hill, the closest of the Historic England battlefields to my constituency. The 1643 battle there was a key part of the parliamentary defence of Bath, and so the whole strategic defence of our capital. Royalist forces and Cornish pikemen sought to force parliamentarian forces from the hill. I hope the parliamentarians here are pleased to hear that they failed against the steep slope and the protected position that parliamentary forces held on the top of the hill. Both sides retreated under darkness but, importantly, Bath was saved.

There is already a monument to Sir Bevil Grenville—erected before enlisted soldiers were commemorated—but the value of the battlefield is much greater than just the monument. To understand the history of Lansdown Hill, one needs to be able to see that it overlooks Bath, how steep the ascent was for men who had spent the day harassed by fast-moving cavalry and how easy it was for armed men to shelter at the top of the hill.

Lansdown Hill is not at any immediate risk. Historic England's entry on the national heritage list for the hill makes for reassuring reading:

“The landscape of 1643 had much in common with that of today... Two key viewpoints are publicly accessible and a complete circuit can be achieved from public highways and footpaths.”

That is what the protection of battlefields has to look like: not only access to a restricted section of history, but freedom to enjoy and experience historic landscapes as they were used by the people—the men—who literally put them on the map.

The case of Bosworth Field is shocking not only because of the potential ruination of a battlefield, but because of the key role that that particular battle played in our nation's story, and because it ignored the warnings of recent history. As my hon. Friend said, any building on recognised battle sites will disturb archeologically important remains, whether bodies, weapons or just

material evidence of the armies that fought there. That not only is a risk to academic research into these battles, but will damage education across the school system. The new history GCSE encourages children to understand our nation's history better and includes a requirement to study a local historic site, explicitly including battlefields.

I hope that hon. Members will forgive me, because I have cut a lot out of my speech. I hope that the battlefield at Bosworth remains protected and undisturbed. I also very much hope that the Minister will acknowledge that some larger good could come out of this, with developers and councils all across the country coming to value our incredible heritage more and understanding why it has to be preserved.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): We now come to the first of the Front-Bench spokespeople. The guideline limits for speeches are five minutes for the Scottish National party and for Her Majesty's Opposition.

5.6 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is, as always, a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Hollobone. I commend the hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) for securing the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) was due to respond on behalf of the Scottish National party but has unfortunately been called away on constituency business, so I am afraid that the House will have to contend with my response.

It has been a thoughtful debate, and it has been very interesting to observe. It started with the contribution from the hon. Member for Kingswood, who is clearly a well-respected historian and author—I think you said he was perhaps “dangerously overqualified” to speak in the debate, Mr Hollobone. It was a real pleasure to listen to him. He spoke very passionately about the situation in Bosworth and the number of people who objected to the development there. The hon. Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) obviously takes a different view. It is difficult enough to comment on what is essentially a live planning application, but when two hon. Members from the same party disagree on the issue, it is very much a debate in which I wish I could take a step back.

There was then an interesting contribution from hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is a very dear friend of mine. I was somewhat relieved when he decided it would probably be in his best interest not to recite “The Sash”. As a western Scotland politician, I will make no further comment on that. None the less, he spoke passionately about Enniskillen and the battle of the Boyne.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) spoke passionately about HMS Exeter and made what I thought were fairly reasonable asks of the Minister, which I am sure he is hoping for a positive response to. I do not think it is beyond the wit of man for the Minister to look at those. We also heard from the hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti), who spoke about his love of battlefields and who waded in a little to support the hon. Member for Kingswood. Based strictly on how many Members spoke to it, the cause of the hon. Member for Kingswood is probably winning.

[David Linden]

The SNP is committed to the stabilisation and preservation of all archaeological and historic sites, and we encourage all their owners and managers to contribute towards the improvement of their condition. Last year Scotland celebrated the year of history, heritage and archaeology, marking the country's rich historic environment and past. Scotland's first historic environment strategy was published in 2014 and set out a vision, definition and desired outcomes for a rich, historic environment, and it provides a framework within which organisations can work together to achieve positive outcomes. Historic Scotland also provides grants and funding to projects that aim to protect and promote Scotland's historic environment.

I will not comment on the situation with the A9 and Killiecrankie battlefield, because the issue is ongoing and the Scottish Government are giving it consideration. However, if hon. Members have not made one already, I would strongly recommend a trip to the Bannockburn heritage centre in the constituency of the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr). There is great debate about where that battle actually took place. I think that most historians would acknowledge that it did not take place on the site where the heritage centre is, but it is well worth a visit.

I am conscious of time and of perhaps being a bit of an intruder in this debate, so I will conclude by saying that we must always ensure that we preserve and cherish our historic battlefields for the generations to come, because to do otherwise is historical and archaeological vandalism, which in my view is unforgivable.

5.10 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): We have had a very good debate—at least for the part that I could hear above the sound of the noisy heater directly behind me, which I am told engineers are being sent to try to fix for future debates. I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) on securing the debate. We all know of his expertise in this subject and are all greatly informed whenever he makes an intervention about historical matters in the House. We all would have enjoyed, I am sure, hearing much more about his research and not just the planning difficulties around the Bosworth Field site. He made the very good suggestion that it was perhaps time to review the subject again and think about creating areas of national historic importance, and I know that the Minister will want to reflect on that.

We had a very good contribution, as ever, from my good friend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who once again informed us in some detail about the historical background to the situation in Ulster. We heard from the hon. Member for Bosworth itself (David Tredinnick), who, perhaps surprisingly to some of us, was not in favour of the points made by the hon. Member for Kingswood, but made his own points about the important economic contribution that the development proposed there would make to the area.

We had a very good contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), who rightly reminded us of the importance of battlefields at sea and made the very good and sensible proposal of an at-risk register for wrecks. Again, the Government should consider that. Finally from the Back Benches, the hon. Member for Filton and Bradley

Stoke (Jack Lopresti) told us about important battlefields around his constituency, including around Solsbury Hill, that very beautiful area around Bath, and described how brave British warriors all those years ago—centuries ago—tried to see off European invaders known as Anglo-Saxons, who are still with us to this day, despite those brave efforts at the time.

It is a great pleasure to me, as a former history teacher, to speak on this subject, but I am very grateful to my work experience student, Sophie Lewis, who will shortly be going to Oxford to study history and English, for her help in researching for today's debate.

Battlefields act as a visual reminder of events in the past that have shaped our culture. Winston Churchill once described battles as

“the punctuation marks of history”.

The presence of historic sites such as Bosworth reminds us that we are ultimately a product of all those past events and conflicts. Our heritage as a nation enriches our culture, underpinning so much of who we are and how we think of ourselves today. These are places that should, wherever possible, be preserved so that we can visit them and ponder on the meaning of them to us today.

As we have heard, however, battlefields are vulnerable to modern-day pressures. The most recent publication of the “Heritage at Risk” register, in 2017, showed that 8.7% of 46 registered battlefields in England are at risk—eight battlefields are under threat from development, 16 sites are endangered by arable cultivation, and 10 sites have been subjected to unregulated metal detecting. As we have heard, the establishment of the register of historic battlefields in 1995 was a very important step in the protection of our battlefields. As has been mentioned, the work of the Battlefields Trust and English Heritage, as well as the agencies in the nations of the UK, has been significant in advocating for the preservation of battlefields, but local authorities have a role to play, too.

The economic and historical consequences of neglect of battlefields should not be ignored. Tourism is closely linked—directly linked—with heritage sites, so preserving them will encourage the tourism industry and there are economic benefits to be considered. In addition, historical inquiry and archaeological study give us a greater insight into anthropology, providing us with a more complete understanding of the battles that forged our history and the people we are as a result. The revolution in archaeology in recent times has extended our knowledge, so we must allow room for that to continue.

Our own political role here in the Houses of Parliament has been influenced by these battles, including during the civil war. In my own constituency of Cardiff West, an important battle of the second civil war took place at St Fagans in May 1648, when parliamentary forces, I am glad to say, routed the royalists, killing 200 troops and taking 3,000 prisoners. In the space of 20 years, Britain experienced regicide, a republic and military rule. Things culminated in the trial in this very building of King Charles I and his execution just a quarter of a mile up the road from here. These events are reflective of wider issues that we face today: the fight for representation and democracy and disagreements on policy and the devolution of power.

In the case of Bosworth Field, the hon. Member for Kingswood has raised his concerns as a historian about the application to construct a connected and autonomous

vehicle testing track. In Shakespeare's version of the battle, Richard III cried out in anguish:

"A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!"

He did not cry, "A driverless car, a driverless car, my kingdom for an autonomous vehicle." Technological progress is important, but not at the expense of our essential heritage. When the Welshman Henry Tudor landed at Milford Haven and marched through Wales under the standard of the red dragon to seize the English throne from Richard III, he ushered in what others have said is the modern era of our history. I hope that, in considering that application, the local authority will take that longer view. This site of a major turning point in history should not be tarmacked over to create a literal turning point for cars and lorries with no one at the wheel. As the Minister in theory is at the wheel here today, can he tell us what he will do to protect our heritage in this case and for historic battlefields in general? He ought not, as the hon. Member for Kingswood said at the outset, to consult and see whether it is possible to do something, but do what Ministers should do: act, and instruct his officials to do so.

5.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Michael Ellis): Thank you, Mr Hollobone, for your chairmanship today. My sincere thanks go to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) for introducing the debate on this important issue and to all hon. Members for their valuable input and contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood is, as has already been said, a world-class expert in this area. His opinion is extremely authoritative; of that there is no doubt.

As the Minister responsible for arts, heritage and tourism, I am always heartened to see the passion and vigour that our nation's heritage evokes. England—in fact, the whole United Kingdom—is fortunate not to have borne frequent witness, if one can put it that way, to the many pitched battles that have marked so many other landscapes worldwide, but that means that our historic battlefields are all the more precious and unique. Wherever they are located, historic battlefields provide an important anchor to the evolution of this country. They are a reminder of our past.

The conservation of historic battlefields is therefore integral to understanding this country's heritage. They are currently conserved, of course, through our planning system. Their significance is highlighted by their inclusion in the register of historic battlefields, maintained by Historic England. For inclusion on that register, an historic battlefield must be historically significant and its location and boundaries should be well attested and beyond reasonable doubt. The determination of planning proposals that may impact on registered battlefields is the responsibility of local authorities across the country, unless, of course, the decisions are called in by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. It is imperative that local decisions and solutions, tailored to the unique circumstances, are reached in a way that is accountable and accessible to local residents. It is a local issue *prima facie* and one that local authorities should be accountable for.

Any appeals to the planning process are made to the Planning Inspectorate and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. While I am extremely

interested in the future of our registered battlefields, it would be inappropriate for any Minister to comment on individual planning decisions at this stage. None the less, I want to assure hon. Members that the current scheme for registered historic battlefields is robust and affords these battlefields a good degree of protection.

The national planning policy framework indicates that local planning authorities should give great weight to the conservation of heritage assets of the highest significance, such as registered battlefields. Any proposals there may be should seek to avoid or minimise, wherever possible, any conflict between conservation and development. The NPPF indicates that substantial harm or the total loss of registered battlefields should be wholly exceptional. Where a development proposal involves less than substantial harm to such a battlefield, the relevant local planning authorities should weigh that harm against any public benefit of the proposed development. We have heard different viewpoints in the debate, which exemplify the issue of harm and benefit. Short-term benefits are not, were not and will never be an acceptable reason to damage our national heritage.

The aim of the register of historic battlefields is to ensure that reminders of our past are sustained and enhanced, to preserve them for generations to come. I am therefore delighted to report that, of the 47 registered battlefields, the vast majority—43—are not deemed to be at any risk at all. I am proud to say that, in the past two years, two battlefields have been removed from the list of those at risk, due to the diligent and effective collaboration between Historic England and local authorities.

Chris Skidmore: I appreciate the Minister is delivering a speech. He had my speech in advance so that he was able to reflect on my points. I would be grateful if he would address some of the specific questions I asked of him in terms of being able to look at the expertise, because it is clear from my speech that Historic England does not have that expertise and that we need to restore the battlefield committee.

Michael Ellis: Given the allotted time, I will address those points in a moment.

Historic England offers its expertise pre-application and once a planning application has been made. In all instances, it ensures that a thorough and complete assessment of any risk to the battlefield is made and provides that advice to the local planning authority. It then lies with the local planning authority to make a decision.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood spoke about the recent application to expand a test centre for autonomous vehicles near Bosworth battlefield. I reiterate that, while it is inappropriate for me to comment on local planning matters, I trust and expect that, in every case, the local planning authority will carefully balance the benefits of development against the harm. That said, I hope he will be pleased to hear that Historic England and Leicestershire County Council were able to agree a comprehensive new conservation management plan in 2013, which has helped to ensure development with limited public benefit has been avoided, while allowing improvements to the visitor centre and other features that enhance the historic appreciation of the battlefield.

[Michael Ellis]

I fully understand the concern hon. Members have for the other battlefields deemed at risk by Historic England. I want to reassure the House that Historic England has engaged with local authorities wherever our national heritage is under threat and continues to do so. While it is ultimately the decision of local planners, I commend the collaboration between Historic England and local partners that resulted in two of the at-risk battlefields—Stamford Bridge and the site of the first battle of Newbury—being removed from the register in 2016.

I note my hon. Friend's comments on a possible review around the future preservation of historic battlefields, which I aim to discuss with my officials and Historic England. On his point about the previous existence of a register, the panel was amalgamated some years ago, which is why we are where we are now with the register of historic battlefields. So I think that issue is covered, but we will continue to look at it.

I will talk to my officials about my hon. Friend's request concerning the Battlefield Trust's role as a statutory consultee and ask them to discuss the proposal with colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Additionally, I am happy to look at the proposals for areas of national historic importance, and I will write to him about that.

I am conscious of my hon. Friend's point about incremental change causing harm to battlefields and the point made by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) about other sites. It is crucial that sites, including maritime sites, are respected, cherished and revered. While my hon. Friend is right to be concerned about incremental harm, the scale of proposed development does not mean that its impacts are downplayed.

I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. I have every faith that our historic battlefields will continue to be conserved in an appropriate and steadfast manner. Where issues arise, I expect local authorities will seek to conserve our treasured national assets and ensure they are protected for future generations to enjoy. I hope we can work together to conserve and advocate for these important, cherished reminders of our national heritage.

5.27 pm

Chris Skidmore: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), who has been incredibly gracious in allowing me to have this debate on what could be considered a constituency matter. We have spoken about it, and it is obviously also a matter of national significance. I am grateful for his permission to speak today. I also thank the hon. Members for Strangford

(Jim Shannon), for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), for Glasgow East (David Linden) and for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), as well as my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti). It is indicative of the passion that our heritage brings out across the entire United Kingdom that most of the major parties have been present.

When it comes to the Scots, I remind the hon. Member for Glasgow East that 500 Scots fought on Henry Tudor's side under Bernard d'Aubigny at the battle of Bosworth, but Scots also fought on Richard III's side, so they were fairly canny in splitting their allegiances. A Scot called MacGregor stole Richard III's crown the night before that battle.

We have had an important debate, and I am grateful to the Minister for taking away some of the points I have raised. I will not repeat myself, but I underline that there are inadequacies in the legal framework as it stands. Most of the land in my constituency is protected by having the status of green-belt land, so no development can take place on it, yet a battlefield of historic national importance does not have the same protection in the planning process. I wonder whether it is time to revisit that. These sites are a crucial part of our heritage. Once they are gone, they are gone—once they are built over, they are built over—and we will no longer have the ability to look archaeologically at what might have taken place there.

I urge councillors to vote down the planning application on 25 September, but if it goes through, I hope that they will hold MIRA to account in ensuring that there is the maximum possible investment in archaeological surveys, which have not been fully conducted—there need to be a minimum of two full archaeological surveys on that land—and extra investment for a possible digital recreation of the battlefield site. That is very much a second-best option; I am still absolutely determined that the site of the battle of Bosworth should be protected.

The issue is about what we value in this country. When it comes to the dichotomy between the future and the past, there is money to be made in heritage. Leicester City Council estimates that £45 million was raised as a result of Richard III's body being dug out of the tarmac, and I find it bizarre that having dug up a king and generated a huge amount of tourism revenue in the city, we are now about to tarmac over part of the battle of Bosworth, which I would argue against.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the preservation of historic battlefields.

5.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 12 September 2018

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture Bill

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): Today, I am introducing the Agriculture Bill into the House of Commons, fulfilling the Government's promise to deliver a green Brexit. The Bill marks a decisive shift in our support for farmers. It ensures we will reward them properly at last for the work they do to enhance the environment around us. It will help them grow more high quality food in a more sustainable way, and it will ensure public money is spent more efficiently and effectively.

Nearly three quarters of England is farmland. For too long, Brussels has set the rules on how we maintain and enhance our distinctive environment, and how we grow crops and improve food production. The European Union's common agricultural policy has held back Britain, economically and environmentally. Bureaucracy has stifled innovation. Subsidies have been paid based on the size of individual land holdings, not the contribution farmers make to society. Habitats have been lost and soil health eroded.

The Agriculture Bill sets out our new policy of paying public money for public goods. Its framework for investing money in wildlife habitats, clean air and water, and healthy soil—natural assets upon which our wellbeing and economic prosperity depend—will help reduce flood risk, prevent and mitigate the effects of climate change, and ensure that the public enjoy easier access to our countryside. The Bill will help us leave the environment in a better state for future generations, as set out in the Government's 25-year environment plan.

On this, Back British Farming Day, the Agriculture Bill also sets out how we will support a profitable sector producing high-quality food, encourage innovative new entrants to this way of life, and help farmers get a fair price for their produce. In order to provide certainty, farmers will be supported over a seven year transition period as we leave the EU's common agricultural policy (CAP). The Bill includes measures to incentivise more long-term thinking and investment, and help farm businesses become more resilient and productive. And we will be introducing transitional support schemes to enable on-farm investment, for example in equipment and technology to deliver public goods and to support new entrants to get into farming. This is an ambitious Bill—representing the first new domestic farming policy in nearly 50 years—which ensures that our farmers' contribution to maintaining our countryside and producing healthy food will be greater than ever before. It is the first step towards a brighter, better and greener future for farming and our natural world outside the EU.

[HCWS954]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

EU Foreign Ministers Informal Meeting (Gymnich)

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the

bi-annual informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers (known as the Gymnich) on 30 and 31 August in Vienna, Austria. The Gymnich was hosted by the Austrian Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, Karin Kneissl, and was chaired by the High Representative and Vice President of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. Discussions centred on the Middle East, transatlantic relations, the Western Balkans, and multilateralism.

Foreign Ministers of the candidate countries joined EU Ministers over dinner on 30 August and during the morning of 31 August.

The format of the Gymnich is designed to allow EU Foreign Ministers to engage in informal discussion on a number of issues. In contrast to the Foreign Affairs Council (the next of which will be held on 15 October), Ministers do not take formal decisions or agree conclusions at the Gymnich.

Middle East

Ministers held a broad discussion on the Middle East that covered the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP), Syria and Iran. Ministers reiterated that a two state solution was the only realistic option, confirmed the EU's support for the United Nations' and Egypt's work on Gaza and commitment to continuing support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). On Syria, Ministers voiced concerns about possible military action on Idlib and the resulting humanitarian impact. Finally on Iran, Ministers agreed on the need to preserve the nuclear deal but voiced concerns about Iran's actions in the region including in Syria. My right hon. Friend spoke about the risk of regional tension and the role of Russia in Syria.

Transatlantic relations

Ministers noted that the EU and United States of America (USA) were close partners on a number of areas, and shared the same values. There were some policy differences but these should not overshadow other areas on which there is excellent co-operation. My right hon. Friend shared his thoughts following his recent visit to Washington.

Western Balkans

Ministers discussed the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia that the EU is facilitating with the aim of reaching a legally binding agreement. Ministers noted the forthcoming elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina; they hoped the results would not cause a vacuum and the EU could continue to support work on the reform agenda there.

Ministers also touched on the referendum in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and expressed their full support for the agreement that was reached between Athens and Skopje on 17 June.

Any other business (AOB)

Under AOB Ministers briefly discussed the situation in Venezuela and Operation Sophia.

Multilateralism

The Foreign Ministers of the Candidate countries joined EU Ministers for this working session. Ministers reaffirmed the importance of multilateralism given current risks to the rules-based international order, and the example the EU can set in this regard.

[HCWS950]

Non-Lethal Border Security Support to Jordan

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt): In November 2015 and April 2017, my predecessors the Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) respectively, issued written ministerial statements setting out our plans to improve security along the border between Jordan and Syria by providing training and equipment to groups selected from the Moderate Armed Opposition (MAO) in southern Syria. That support enabled the interdiction of Jordanian citizens illegally entering Syria; stopped smugglers carrying money, weapons and narcotics from Syria to Jordan; and disrupted Daesh fighters operating across the border region, thereby denying them the freedom to (re)enter Jordan.

Since July 2018, the security situation in southern Syria has prevented us from providing additional support to the MAO. We intend, therefore, to re-direct existing resources to improve the security of Jordan's borders from within Jordan itself. The grant in kind in this case is to the Jordanian armed forces.

The UK intends to grant to the Jordanian armed forces a number of vehicles and other equipment, acquired for the MAO's border forces in southern Syria but now unable to be delivered to them. These include: unarmoured vehicles, day/night observation devices, radios, detectors to find and avoid improvised explosive devices, medical packs, uniforms, and load carrying/protective vests, to a total value of £5,061,028.46. These non-lethal capabilities are configured and optimised for border security, and it is for this purpose that the Jordanian armed forces have undertaken to employ them. The granting of this equipment and infrastructure will support the UK's existing programme of support to the Jordanian armed forces. This option is most cost-effective to the taxpayer given that the vehicles are already stored in Jordan.

The assets have been scrutinised as required to ensure that their provision to the Jordanian armed forces is consistent with export controls and complies with our international obligations.

[HCWS949]

Westminster Foundation for Democracy: Tailored Review

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): My noble Friend, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Lord Ahmad), has made the following written ministerial statement:

I am announcing today the start of a tailored review of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), an Executive Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB), sponsored by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

The principal aims of tailored reviews are to ensure public bodies remain fit for purpose, are well governed and properly accountable for what they do.

Established in 1992, the focus of the WFD's work has been on strengthening democracy in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

Since its last review in 2014, WFD has expanded this focus to include open government partnership, civil society strengthening, electoral assistance, inclusive politics and women's political empowerment.

The review will provide a robust scrutiny of and assurance on the continuing need for WFD—both its function and its form. If this process finds the Foundation should be retained in its current form and status, it will then consider how WFD can deliver on its core mandate more effectively and efficiently. It will also assess the control and governance arrangements that are in place to ensure that WFD and the FCO are complying with recognised principles of good corporate governance. The structure, efficiency and effectiveness of the WFD will be considered throughout the review.

In conducting this tailored review, officials will engage with stakeholders across the UK and overseas, including across the UK Government, devolved Administrations, civil society, as well as with Westminster of Foundation for Democracy's staff and management.

The review will follow guidance published in 2016 by the Cabinet Office: Tailored Reviews: guidance on reviews of public bodies': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tailored-reviews-of-public-bodies-guidance>. The terms of reference for the review can be found on www.gov.uk.

I shall inform the House of the outcome of the review when it is completed and copies of the report of the review will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS953]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Learning Disabilities Mortality Review Programme Second Annual Report

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): I am today announcing the publication of the Government's response to the recommendations of the second annual report of the Learning Disabilities Mortality Review (LeDeR) programme. The response is attached.

The LeDeR programme is the first national mortality review of its kind. It was established in June 2015 to help reduce early deaths and health inequalities for people with a learning disability. It does this by supporting local areas in England to put in place robust processes to review the deaths of people with a learning disability and to ensure that the learning from these reviews is put into practice. The programme is led by the University of Bristol and commissioned by the Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership (HQIP) on behalf of NHS England.

The University of Bristol published its second annual report of the programme on 4 May 2018, which covered the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 November 2017. During that time, 1,311 deaths were notified to the LeDeR programme and 103 reviews were completed and approved by the LeDeR quality assurance process. In 13 of the cases reviewed, the individual's health had been adversely affected by external factors including delays in care or treatment; gaps in service provision; organisational dysfunction; or neglect or abuse.

As I outlined to the House on 8 May (*Official Report* 8 May 2018, Vol. 640, Col. 545), the report makes a series of national recommendations that are aimed at NHS England, as well as health and care commissioners and providers.

The Government accept the review's recommendations and we are publishing today our plan for making progress against each of them. The Government are already taking action, alongside its system partners, to address the concerns raised in the report. We need to promote universal awareness among health staff of the needs of people with learning disabilities, and we are taking steps to make this happen. By March 2019, we will complete a public consultation on proposals for mandatory learning disability training for all health and care staff.

This Government are committed to reducing the health inequalities that people with learning disabilities face, and reducing the number of people with learning disabilities whose deaths may have been preventable with different health and care interventions. The LeDeR programme was introduced to ensure local, evidence-based action is taken to improve support for people with a learning disability, and while we clearly have a great deal further to go to improve outcomes, it is resulting in commissioners focusing their attention on their local mortality rates and the reasons for them.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-09-12/HCWS951>.

[HCWS951]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Housing Land Supply in Oxfordshire

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): In March this year the Government committed to the Oxfordshire housing and growth deal, to support ambitious plans to deliver 100,000 homes by 2031. The Oxfordshire-wide joint statutory spatial plan to be adopted by 2021 will be supported by £215 million of funding to help deliver more affordable housing and infrastructure improvements to support sustainable development across the county.

Paragraph 217 of the national planning policy framework sets out that the Government will explore potential planning freedoms and flexibilities, for example where this would facilitate an increase in the amount of housing that can be delivered. Such freedoms and flexibilities are to be considered by the Government on a case-by-case basis. In this instance the Government have worked closely with the authorities in Oxfordshire to agree planning freedoms and flexibilities that will support the ambitious plan-led approach through a joint spatial strategy and the housing deal.

As part of the housing deal, Oxfordshire sought flexibility from the national planning policy framework policy on maintaining a five-year housing land supply. This policy supports the delivery of housing by ensuring sufficient land is coming forward to meet housing need. However, we recognise the ambitious plans in Oxford to deliver above their housing need in the long term. The Government want to support this strategic approach to supporting housing delivery through joint working. We have therefore agreed to provide a short-term flexibility which will support the delivery of the local plans for the

area and ensure that the local authorities can focus their efforts on their joint spatial strategy. The Government recognise that in the short term this will result in fewer permissions being granted under paragraph 11 of the national planning policy framework but the Government believe that it is important to support these ambitious plans that will deliver more housing in the longer term.

Having considered the responses from a local consultation, which closed on 12 July 2018, I am today implementing a temporary change to housing land supply policies as they apply in Oxfordshire.

For the purposes of decision taking under paragraph 11(d), footnote 7 of the national planning policy framework will apply where the authorities in Oxfordshire cannot demonstrate a three-year supply of deliverable housing sites (with the appropriate buffer, as set out in paragraph 73). This policy flexibility does not apply to the housing delivery test limb of footnote 7 of the national planning policy framework nor plan-making policy in paragraph 67. If a local authority intends to fix their land supply under paragraph 74 they will still be required to demonstrate a minimum of five-year supply of deliverable housing sites, with the appropriate buffer.

This statement is a material consideration in planning decisions and applies to those local planning authorities in Oxfordshire with whom the Government have agreed the Oxfordshire housing and growth deal, namely Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council. This statement applies from today and remains in effect until the adoption of the joint statutory spatial plan in each area, provided the timescales agreed in the housing and growth deal are adhered to. I will monitor progress against these timescales and keep the planning flexibility set out in this statement under review.

[HCWS955]

TRANSPORT

Road Scheme Update

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): England's road network is a huge national asset and a cornerstone of our present and future economic prosperity. Across the country the Government are investing in this network, in order to open up new opportunities, improve productivity and connect people and businesses.

As part of this, after considerable consultation and review, the Government are announcing today the preferred corridor for the new Oxford-Cambridge expressway, accepting the recommendations of Highways England.

The expressway, which fills a major gap in the national road network, will work together with the proposed East West Rail link to revolutionise east-west connectivity. In so doing, it will help unlock the commercial development of up to 1 million new homes.

The expressway is projected to take up to 40 minutes off the journey between the A34 south of Oxford and the M1, so that hundreds of thousands of people will be brought within reach of high-quality jobs in centres

of rapid growth such as Oxford Science Park. The preferred corridor identified today runs alongside the planned route of East West Rail, so that consumers have a variety of road and rail travel options.

This decision determines the broad area within which the road will be developed: the process of designing a specific route will now get under way, involving extensive further consultation with local people to find the best available options. Members of the public will be able to comment on the full set of front-running designs in a public consultation next year, and the road is on schedule to be open to traffic by 2030.

The choice of this corridor means that the Government have ruled out construction in the area of the Otmoor nature reserve, underlining their desire to protect the natural environment.

The Government also recognise that no one corridor can support every proposed development across the area. It is therefore commissioning England's Economic Heartland to carry out a study of how to provide better connectivity across the wider area, so that places outside of the preferred corridor enjoy the benefits of growth as far as possible.

Between 2015 and 2021, the Government are investing £15 billion to improve the UK's busiest roads. Already, it has opened the first all-motorway link from Newcastle to London; and after 45 years without change the Department for Transport is working with Transport for the North to develop three upgrades to capacity across the Pennines.

The Government are also spending billions to transform connectivity in the south-west with the dualling of the A303 and A30, and to create better access to and from our ports and airports through projects such as the Lower Thames crossing and upgrade of the A14 link between the Midlands and Felixstowe.

The common theme linking all these projects is the need to create and upgrade the UK's infrastructure. So too it is here with the new Oxford-Cambridge expressway. [HCWS952]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendment) Regulations 2018

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): On 12 July 2018, *Official Report*, column 47WS, I made a statement to the House about laying the child support regulations.

I wish to give notice that I intend to re-lay these regulations to clarify some minor points in regulation 2.

These are that:

The non-resident parent (NRP) can be either the sole, or one of a number of beneficiaries to an asset for the purpose of assuming a notional income from it.

The Secretary of State would make the decision as to whether the sale of an asset would be unreasonable or may cause hardship to the child of a NRP.

A minor amendment to the definition of virtual currency; and

The definition of asset will now include assets owned jointly by, or held in the joint names of, the non-resident parent and another individual or individuals. This is to ensure that a provision which was intended to offer protection to third parties cannot be exploited by an NRP by transferring assets into joint names.

The regulations are subject to the affirmative procedure and I look forward to discussing them with colleagues in due course.

[HCWS956]

Petitions

Wednesday 12 September 2018

PRESENTED PETITIONS

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

The petition of residents of Brighton Pavilion,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Caroline Lucas.]

[P002266]

OBSERVATIONS

EDUCATION

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

The petition of residents of West Worcestershire,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place

an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Harriett Baldwin, *Official Report*, 11 September 2018; Vol. 646, c. 21P.]

[P002264]

Observations from the Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):

The consultation “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” closed on 2 July 2018. The relevant documents can be found at:

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/home-education-call-for-evidence-and-revised-dfe-a/>.

As well as the call for evidence, the consultation includes draft versions of two guidance documents on the current arrangements for home education. These are intended to replace the Department for Education’s current non-statutory guidance for local authorities, which is to be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education>.

The Department discussed home education with stakeholders in the normal course of business up to the launch of the consultation on 10 April.

All responses to the consultation will be considered before publishing the finalised guidance documents. At no point has the Department stated an intention to publish them as final versions without revision in the light of responses received to the consultation.

Representations on whether the contents of the two draft guidance documents breach Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (right to private and family life) or the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (as embodied into UK law in the Data Protection Act 2018), will be taken into account as we consider responses to the consultation.

The documents in their draft form contain no reference to remedies for behaviour by local authorities. This is because no special provision for this is necessary in respect of home education. The Education Act 1996 already contains general provisions for this purpose relating to local authorities. However, the Department will consider whether the finalised versions of the guidance documents should contain specific information on this.

This Department does not recognise the suggestion that consultation has been flawed or inadequate. Several thousand responses, the majority of which have come from home educating families, have been received, as well as a substantial petition, and there has been considerable opportunity for detailed comment and input from such families. Following the consultation and consideration of the responses, the two guidance documents will be published in the autumn of 2018 in their revised and finalised form. In addition, a formal Government response document analysing responses to the call for evidence, and setting out next steps, will also be published in the autumn of 2018.

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 12 September 2018

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Idlib

The following is an extract from the statement on Idlib on Monday 10 September 2018.

Stephen Doughty: What will be the consequences for Assad, Putin and other belligerents if these violations of international humanitarian law continue, whether through the use of chemical weapons, barrel bombs or cluster munitions, all of which are equally wrong? What assessment has the Minister made of the potential for such attacks to be carried out? What sanctions have been issued against individual Russians and others who command responsibility for operations in Syria?

Alistair Burt: In terms of consequences and accountability, sanctions are already in place against **Russian** entities and that will continue to be the case.

Last week at the Security Council, the permanent representative read through details of the units of the Syrian army that were involved in the Idlib operation, together with the names of their commanders, and made it very clear that accountability would follow. I think that that was a bold and necessary step. [*Official Report, 10 September 2018, Vol. 646, c. 465.*]

Letter of correction from Alistair Burt.

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) during the statement on Idlib.

The correct response should have been:

Alistair Burt: In terms of consequences and accountability, sanctions are already in place against **Syrian** entities and that will continue to be the case. Last week at the Security Council, the permanent representative read through details of the units of the Syrian army that were involved in the Idlib operation, together with the names of their commanders, and made it very clear that accountability would follow. I think that that was a bold and necessary step.

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**not later than
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