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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Wednesday 1 May 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Venezuela

1. **Mr Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that UK aid reaches its intended recipients in Venezuela. [910640]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to pay a brief tribute to Dr Richard Valery Mouzoko Kiboung, who was working for the World Health Organisation to fight Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo when he was killed in an attack on 19 April. Richard was working in the frontline of the response to save lives, and I am sure that the whole House will want to send our condolences to his family, friends and colleagues at this difficult time and to reiterate that health workers are not a target.

The UK's humanitarian assistance is underpinned by strict principles of neutrality and impartiality, and it is targeted to meet the needs of those affected by the crisis.

Mr Dunne: I associate myself with my right hon. Friend's remarks in supporting all those who are fighting the battle against Ebola in Africa.

After last night's disturbing scenes on the streets of Caracas, what does my right hon. Friend say to those who retreat to their ideological comfort zone, blaming US imperialism rather than calling out the socialist Venezuelan regime for the humanitarian disaster that it has inflicted on its own people?

Penny Mordaunt: I wholeheartedly agree with my right hon. Friend. Let me be clear that this is a man-made crisis, caused by years of reckless mismanagement by the regime. Yesterday evening, while my right hon. Friend and others in this House were watching those terrible scenes of armoured military vehicles slamming into civilian protestors, I understand that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) was defending Maduro and his regime.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Change UK): Is it not now clear that there needs to be maximum solidarity internationally—from European Union countries, the United States and Latin American countries—with Juan Guaidó and the people of Venezuela, as the final days of the Maduro regime approach?

Penny Mordaunt: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman, who has been consistent in his condemnation of the regime. We are working through the Lima group; it is absolutely right that we should give support to the region as well as Venezuela in particular. I call on all Members to support and call for swift presidential elections so that we can let the country move on.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): The emergency £6.5 million UK emergency aid package to Venezuela was announced in February. Will the Secretary of State outline the priorities for that, especially given reports that up to 80% of Venezuelan households are without a reliable food source and the World Health Organisation's suggestion that there has been a stark increase in maternal and infant mortality, and in malaria, tuberculosis and many other infectious diseases?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are prioritising healthcare and nutrition needs. We will keep monitoring the situation, as those needs will change over time. This is an emergency, and people are in life-threatening situations.

Development Co-operation: EU

2. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): What progress the Government have made in determining the future relationship of the UK and the EU on development co-operation. [910641]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): The political declaration recognises our shared commitment to tackling global challenges and achieving the sustainable development goals. We have proposed a future development partnership that allows the UK and the EU to work together to maximise development impact, where it makes sense for us to do so.

Tom Brake: I thank the Secretary of State for her response. Bearing in mind that our leaving the European Union could result in fundamental changes to development, is she aware of the concerns of organisations such as Bond, which say that they are not involved enough in what the future arrangements might look like? What more could the Government do to ensure that such organisations are indeed involved?

Penny Mordaunt: The EU's development programmes will be the poorer for not being shaped by the UK and not making use of British and UK non-governmental organisations. I have provided a guarantee to all British suppliers, whether in the private or charitable sectors, so that they can continue humanitarian work on EU programming that has already been put in. I encourage the Commission to lift its eyes and enable us to co-operate on development. That is what we want to do; it is the block to that.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when we leave the EU, it will be easier for us to strike trade deals with developing nations around the world—creating jobs for those nations, thus enabling their economies to grow, as well as ours?

Penny Mordaunt: I do agree. We should remember that we must ensure that we deliver on the referendum result. It is not just going to offer new opportunities for us and our trading relationships; it could also be a catalyst for changing the way the world trades and helping developing nations trade themselves out of poverty.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): The UK has long played a leadership role within the European Union in shaping its development and humanitarian response. Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that even outside the European Union we will maintain close co-operation, so that the world's poorest do not suffer as a result of Brexit?

Penny Mordaunt: I can give the hon. Gentleman those assurances. We want to continue to co-operate with our European partners. We would like to have a sensible development partnership with the EU going forward. Currently, the EU is not as keen on that as us and other nations outside the EU. I hope its programming in the future will be open.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that across the world the UK is seen as a development superpower? Does she agree that our leaving the EU will have no effect on that?

Penny Mordaunt: That is quite right; it will have no effect on our ability to be able to do things and to work with partners. I hope that the European Commission, and in particular its legal department, will see sense and recognise that 20% of the non-governmental organisations it currently uses are British because we are world-class. Its programming will be poorer if it does not continue to use world-class organisations.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): With time running out, the Government need to arrange a large volume of trade deals in a short period of time—deals they said would be easy but are not. There is a concern that to do so they may promise aid spending as an inducement to a favourable trade deal. Will the Secretary of State today commit to aid spending continuing to be untied and always being based on need alone, rather than for our own commercial and trade ends?

Penny Mordaunt: Yes, I have always said that and we will always do that.

Climate Change

3. **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): What support her Department provides to help developing countries tackle climate change. [910642]

12. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What support her Department provides to help developing countries tackle climate change. [910654]

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): Tackling climate change is a priority for the Government. We have committed £5.8 billion to help developing countries to reduce emissions and to manage the impacts of climate change. To date, our support has helped 47 million people cope with the effects of climate change and supported 17 million people to gain access to clean energy.

Craig Tracey: The latest round of funding for the Darwin Initiative has committed £10 million of funding for 52 international projects. Can the Minister confirm that those projects will support and enhance biodiversity and the natural environment right across the globe?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome the way in which the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has allocated that money. Of course, it is overseas development assistance money that helps to support and enhance biodiversity in countries that are eligible for overseas development assistance.

Huw Merriman: It is very welcome that the Government are doing more to help developing countries with climate change, but the reality, as I have seen for myself, is that the Chinese are leaving a very large carbon footprint in African countries. What more can the Government do to persuade the Chinese to do better in Africa?

Harriett Baldwin: I know that my hon. Friend is an aide to the Chancellor and I know that the Chancellor was in China this week emphasising in his remarks the importance of taking into account the sustainable development goals in development projects. I am very pleased to see that 78 countries, including China, have issued green bonds here in the City of London, with eight different currencies raising \$24.5 billion towards sustainable development. The UK has really shown leadership on this initiative.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Further to that question by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), does the Minister concede that we must all do what we can to reduce the impact of climate change, but that very significant pressure must be applied to those at the very top in that regard, such as China and some African countries?

Harriett Baldwin: It is really important that we all recognise that the world has signed up to sustainable development goals. Part of that sustainability means that any new investments should avoid fossil fuels as much as possible. We have shown leadership on that recently. For example, the recent round of bids from the Green Climate Fund, which we helped to fund, has led to a lot of renewable energy projects in Africa and elsewhere.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Given the growing climate crisis, should it not be the Department's top priority to ensure sustainable development, diversification, the end of deforestation, public transport, clean energy and everything else?

Harriett Baldwin: Of course that is a very important priority. Humanitarian assistance continues to be what we spend most on, but the emphasis of that can also be sustainability. We do a great deal to ensure that.

The £5.8 billion that we have so far contributed to international climate finance gives an idea of the level of our commitment to this issue around the world.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I have seen for myself how Tearfund's programme of providing solar technology in countries such as Bangladesh has transformed the lives of young people, so I am pleased to hear that DFID will extend those efforts into Africa. Does the Minister agree that young people having the chance to study under light at night will help to improve their life chances significantly?

Harriett Baldwin: It is so important that we recognise access to electricity and that we encourage it to be through renewable sources, including off-grid. We recently held a big event here in London for African Energy Ministers, to show them their options on things such as sustainable and clean mini-grids. The UK can do a huge amount in offering both technical and financial expertise.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): We all heard amid last week's climate change protest that low to middle-income countries will be hardest hit. The UK Government continue to tell us that they are world-leading in helping those countries to tackle climate change. However, in 2017-18, fossil fuels made up not 60%, 70% or even 80% but a shocking 99.4% of UK Export Finance's energy support to those countries, locking them into dependency on high-carbon energy. Does the Minister agree that all this talk of commitment to cutting greenhouse gases is nothing more than simply hot air?

Harriett Baldwin: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will want to raise questions about UK Export Finance when he has the chance to question our colleagues from the Department for International Trade. DFID's focus is very much on encouraging access to electricity from renewable sources. So far some 17 million people around the world have gained access to clean energy thanks to our investment.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I wonder whether the Minister will today commit to auditing and publishing UK aid spending on fossil fuels through the CDC, the prosperity fund and multilateral organisations?

Harriett Baldwin: I am pretty sure that a lot of that information is already in the public domain. I can confirm to the hon. Gentleman my understanding that the CDC has made no new investments in fossil fuels since 2012.¹

Dan Carden: The Labour party has committed to divesting DFID of all fossil fuel projects, which directly undermine the global goals on climate and sustainable energy.

"It's time we admitted that there's more to life than money, and it's time we focused not just on GDP but on...general wellbeing."

Those are not my words but David Cameron's. GDP is a crude indicator that tells us nothing of people's wellbeing, inequality levels or the health of our planet. However, this Secretary of State seems concerned only with increased competition and mobilising private finance to deliver the global goals. Is it not time that the Government woke up to the need for new policies and measures that focus on people and planet?

1. [Official Report, 8 May 2019, Vol. 659, c. 8MC.]

Harriett Baldwin: In that case, I am sure the hon. Gentleman welcomes the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is the human capital champion at the World Bank. He will be aware of the extensive impact that our spending has on both health and education around the world. We are taking part in the voluntary national review of the sustainable development goals. I am sure he will welcome that, according to a recent UN study, the UK has actually become a happier country and has increased its happiness in the world.

Tibetan Refugees

5. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): What support her Department provides to Tibetan cultural programmes for Tibetan refugees living outside China. [910645]

The Secretary of State for International Development (**Penny Mordaunt**): DFID provides funding to the UN Refugee Agency, to prioritise the greatest humanitarian and protection needs of refugees globally. This includes Tibetan refugees in need of urgent life-saving assistance.

Tim Loughton: I hope to attend the seventh world parliamentary convention on Tibet together with the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), which will mark 60 years of the invasion and oppression of the Tibetan people, the 1 million lives lost and the oppression of the culture, language and human rights of those people. Many are refugees in Dharamsala and in desperate need of our help to keep the spirit of Tibet alive. Can we do more to help those refugees through the culture and education programmes that they value so much?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Clearly, DFID's funding is very much focused on education; but it is also focused on humanitarian assistance and support for refugees. I undertake to talk to my colleagues in both the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Foreign Office to see what more we can do to support culture and heritage for the Tibetan people.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I am very glad that the Secretary of State is taking an interest in Tibet, but can I urge her, reflecting on an earlier question, to look at the impact of climate change on what is often dubbed the third pole—on the melting of the Himalayan glaciers? It is having a huge impact on the Tibetan area but is overlooked when we talk about climate change.

Penny Mordaunt: It is absolutely right that the hon. Lady should raise that point. Of the areas where Britain can contribute most to the 17 global goals, I personally think that some really stand out: the key three being healthcare, climate change and partnerships. The hon. Lady knows that the Prime Minister, who is the UN Secretary-General's climate resilience champion, will be doing much more on this in the coming months.

Plastic Pollution

6. **Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle plastic pollution throughout the developing world. [910646]

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): DFID is committed to helping developing countries tackle the problem of plastic pollution. We are spending up to £39 million to help poorer countries find practical ways to improve waste management and identify ways in which manufacturing processes can reduce plastic pollution.

Rebecca Pow: Does the Minister agree that we should increasingly put sustainability at the core of all our funding, particularly around plastics? For example, Tearfund is running projects that enable people to earn a living while cleaning up the planet. This is the direction we should be going in.

Harriett Baldwin: Of course, all our work is designed to achieve the sustainable development goals, so sustainability is crucial. Tearfund has done some amazing projects, and I am delighted today that we are announcing that we will match fund a WasteAid project in Cameroon that will help with exactly what my hon. Friend refers to—people earning a living from cleaning up plastic and stopping it going into our oceans.

UK Companies: Contracts

7. **Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): What proportion of contracts her Department has awarded to UK companies in each of the past five years. [910647]

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): DFID has awarded more than 80% of its contracts to UK-registered companies in each of the last five years.

Sir Hugo Swire: One of the achievements this Conservative party can be most proud of is its aid budget and the fact last year Britain was the only member of the G7 to meet the UN target of spending 0.7% of GDP on foreign aid—an astonishing £13.9 billion. Of course, this attracts criticism in some quarters. Does the Minister agree that one way to negate some of the criticism of the perceived largesse of taxpayer money would be to encourage proactively more British companies to win some of those contracts, without of course contravening state aid rules?

Harriett Baldwin: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight this point. In fact, I think we are the only country in the world to have put that 0.7% figure into statute. He will see from the numbers that in open competition 80% of our contracts have been awarded to UK-registered firms, but of course we would like to see more and smaller companies, and our procurement team has been out on a range of regional tours across this land to encourage more people to bid for our contracts.

Occupied Palestinian Territories

8. **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of the effect of restricted humanitarian space on the work of non-governmental organisations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. [910648]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): DFID recognises that restrictions on humanitarian space can impede the work of NGOs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, particularly Gaza.

Richard Burden: I think the Secretary of State will be aware that the Government of Israel are attempting to deport Omar Shakir, the country director of Human Rights Watch, for highlighting the impact on the welfare of Palestinians of doing business with illegal Israeli settlements. I welcome the fact that the UK is a party to a statement made to the UN Security Council on Monday asking Israel to allow Human Rights Watch and Mr Shakir to carry on their work unimpeded. Will she echo that call?

Penny Mordaunt: I am happy to echo it. The UK did sign and endorse that statement at the United Nations Security Council, and, as a friend of Israel, we continue to make it clear that a strong, vibrant civil society is in its own interest.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Hamas recently launched a crackdown on dissent against its regime in the Gaza strip. How can we ensure that the human rights of human rights defenders in Gaza are protected?

Penny Mordaunt: Both my Department and, in particular, the Foreign Office do a tremendous amount of work to support human rights defenders. At the recent Bonn conference, DFID published a paper on how we can support civil society and the governance that surrounds it.

Topical Questions

T1. [910655] **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): This is World Immunisation Week, and polio is on the brink of becoming the second human disease in history to be eradicated. The United Kingdom remains committed to that effort, helping countries such as Pakistan to reach every child with life-saving vaccinations. I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing deep sadness at the recent attacks on polio workers in Pakistan, which resulted in the deaths of two police officers and one polio vaccinator. Those tragic deaths highlight the immense personal bravery displayed by the people who deliver immunisations, and their commitment to ensuring that every child can be protected.

Sir David Amess: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating my constituent Unathi Ndlwana on setting up the Funda Trust to improve educational opportunities for young people in South Africa, in memory of the loss of her child? Following the excellent meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister for Africa, any help that the Department could give us would be excellent.

Penny Mordaunt: I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in commending the work of the trust. My hon. Friend the Minister for Africa has told me about that meeting, and the Department will be in touch shortly to talk to him and the trust about how we can support its ongoing work.

T2. [910656] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): There is real concern that not enough is being done to help the people of Mozambique, particularly now that

Cyclone Kenneth has struck. What is the Minister doing to ensure that global communities step up their response to the first cyclone relief fund, and do all that they can to remedy this humanitarian disaster?

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): The hon. Lady is right to raise this issue, but I think we can be very proud of the work that the UK team in Mozambique is doing to deal not only with Cyclone Idai but, now, with Cyclone Kenneth. The team has been at the forefront in providing practical and financial assistance. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State held a meeting at the World Bank the week before last to look into attracting other donors to make longer-term reconstruction investments in Mozambique.

T3. [910658] **Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): It was World Malaria Day last week. Will my hon. Friend update the House on the UK's contribution to the global fight against this preventable disease, which kills hundreds of thousands of children every year?

Harriett Baldwin: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his leadership in this area. He has personally visited victims of malaria, and I know that he champions the UK's leadership role and the £500 million a year that we are spending on preventing this terrible disease, which leads to the death of a child every two minutes in our world.

T4. [910659] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Is the Secretary of State proud of the fact that the Home Office has denied a visa to the father of the chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council, which means that he cannot travel from Afghanistan to see his son receive an honorary doctorate at the University of Glasgow? What message is sent to developing countries and developing democracies when the UK routinely denies visas to people who want to contribute to our society and tackle poverty around the world?

Penny Mordaunt: If the hon. Gentleman would like to give me the details of the case I should be happy to look into it—I think it is often possible to resolve such cases by talking to the relevant Minister.

T5. [910660] **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): On a recent trip to Jordan, I was lucky enough to see a fantastic British-funded project at the UNESCO world heritage site of Jerash, where a stonemason from Barnsley was training Jordanians and Syrian refugees to restore ancient monuments. Does the Secretary of State agree that cultural aid, including continued support for UNESCO, is an important part of her Department's budget?

Penny Mordaunt: I absolutely agree that supporting culture and heritage matters is incredibly important, not least because it helps generate and support a tourism economy and provides nations with further ways to alleviate poverty and grow their economies. The Department has a new initiative called Great Partnerships, which is pairing British expertise, as my hon. Friend outlined, with those who can benefit from that, and he has given a great example.

T6. [910661] **Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): With the continuing humanitarian crisis in Yemen, it is vital that the pledges of aid from Gulf countries and others that have been made are delivered. Will the Secretary of State do all she can to ensure that these notoriously bad payers actually cough up?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and I regularly have discussions with counterparts in those nations to encourage them to disburse funds, most recently with my Emirati opposite number; I had discussions with her about precisely that point this week.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): A large number of Israeli and Palestinian non-governmental organisations pursue partisan and divisive agendas in the west bank, many of which exacerbate tensions for their own ends. Does my right hon. Friend agree that NGOs that advocate boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel, which the Government have taken firm action on, should be opposed?

Penny Mordaunt: We want to ensure that any partner we work with is exhibiting all behaviours needed to get good things to happen, so, absolutely, that is our policy and it is the policy of the organisations we work with.

T7. [910662] **Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): I am sure you are aware Mr Speaker, that the newly elected President of the Gambia is an avid Arsenal fan, but can the Secretary of State tell us what country-specific direct support she is giving to help the Gambia rebuild its economy and democracy?

Harriett Baldwin: Many Presidents across many African countries support a range of different teams, and this is a huge part of the work we do because it touches on so many young people as well. In the light of Soccer Aid last year, I pay tribute to the President of Gambia. Of course DFID has a range of programmes in Gambia, but through Soccer Aid we were able to raise lots of money from football fans, and I think everyone should welcome that.

Mr Speaker: A wonderfully diplomatic response on which the Minister should, I am sure, be congratulated.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is right to draw attention to the dangers of the anti-vaccination campaigns. In addition to thanking health workers across the world for their bravery in countering them, will she ensure the UK leads a vigorous response internationally to turn back a tide that is threatening not only those who would be vaccinated themselves but the communities around them, as we all depend on vaccination for our common safety?

Penny Mordaunt: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend and would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to him for leading the humanitarian work in my Department and for his tenure as Minister for the Middle East. I recently commissioned new programming to look at how we can help communities have trust in immunisation programmes. We are so close to eradicating polio from the earth and it would be appalling if we pulled back and rolled back from that now.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The medieval guardianship system, whereby a woman is owned by her closest male relative, means women in Saudi Arabia cannot travel, play sports or do a whole range of things we take for granted without permission from their male “owners”. Given that women who seek any level of gender equality and human rights face unprecedented danger and abuse in Saudi Arabia, will the Secretary of State condemn Saudi Arabia for treating women as mere chattels?

Penny Mordaunt: It is absolutely right that we call out behaviour that does not support or empower women or enable them to make the choices they want to in their lives. I am proud of the work that not only my Department but other Departments have done on that, and we will continue it. I call on all nations to make sure that at every opportunity we ensure women’s rights are in summit communiqués and absolutely everything else, and are a core part of every activity we do.

Mr Speaker: Order. The students and staff of Fitzwarren School in Wantage, which I had the pleasure of visiting recently, are attending Prime Minister’s questions today and I feel sure that Members across the House will want to welcome them. In particular, I extend a very warm welcome to Charlie Butler and his twin brother Tom, who celebrate their 13th birthday this Sunday.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [910625] **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 1 May.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I am sure that Members across the whole House are always pleased when young people take an interest in and attend the proceedings of this Chamber, as those from Fitzwarren School are doing today.

I am sure that Members across the House will also want to join me in sending my best wishes to the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), and her husband Sandy, following the birth of their daughter Rosamund. I also congratulate everyone who took part in the London marathon on Sunday, including Members of this House, parliamentary staff and Lobby journalists. I would particularly like to congratulate my Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), who completed the marathon with the fastest time of any Member of Parliament—[*Interruption.*] Just for those who are suggesting otherwise—no, I was not chasing him at the time.

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.

John Lamont: I associate myself with the Prime Minister’s comments, and I promise to train much harder for next year.

On this day in 1707, Scotland and England came together to form the United Kingdom. Does the Prime Minister agree that this Union has served our country well? Most people in Scotland agree with that. Does she further agree that, rather than obsessing over independence, Nicola Sturgeon should get on with her day job and end her neglect of Scotland’s NHS, schools and economy?

The Prime Minister: First of all, I congratulate my hon. Friend on running the London marathon and on all the money he raised for Marie Curie on his run. I also thank him for highlighting this anniversary. I am sure that all Members across the House will want to join me in marking it. He is absolutely right to say that under the Scottish National party in government in Scotland, we are seeing public services getting worse because the SNP is focusing on holding another independence referendum. As my hon. Friend says, it is time the SNP stopped ignoring those millions of Scots who do not want another independence referendum and got on with the day job of focusing on the issues that matter to people, such as schools and the economy.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in congratulating all those who ran the London marathon. I think that the shadow Health Secretary getting a personal best shows just how fit the Labour Health team is.

I should like to take this opportunity to wish the House and people across the country a very happy May Day on International Workers Day.

Tomorrow, many people across England will go to the polls to vote in local elections. For many of them, the Government have delivered nothing but failure. On her first day in office, the Prime Minister promised to fight against the “burning” social “injustices” that plague our society. Yesterday, an independent Government body confirmed that inequality was entrenched in our society from birth to work. Will the Prime Minister now admit that her Government have completely failed to take action to tackle the burning injustices?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman did not take the opportunity to welcome the anniversary of the Union between Scotland and England. I have to say that I think this is the first time that he has not welcomed or congratulated a union in this House.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about social mobility, so I remind him that Dame Martina of the Social Mobility Commission said yesterday in relation to the report that she sensed that there is a “real commitment” in Government to try to make a difference in this area. I want everyone to have the opportunity to reach their potential whatever their background, and that is why we are improving education, helping to create higher-paid jobs and boosting home ownership. What would the right hon. Gentleman’s party offer young people? Failed policies, broken promises and piles of debt—just a millstone around their neck.

Jeremy Corbyn: The reality is that social mobility is going backwards and things are getting worse under this Government. I will give an example: life expectancy in Britain is falling for the first time since 1945. Where does the Prime Minister think this Government have gone wrong when we have reached the point where people now expect to live shorter lives than others did in the past?

The Prime Minister: It is not the case that people now expect to live shorter lives than in the past. We have been ensuring that we provide for people at every stage of their lives. For young people in particular, we are ensuring that they have the opportunities to lead full and healthy lives into the future. That is why all the actions we are taking across the board are ensuring that there are jobs for people, ensuring that those jobs are better, ensuring that people are encouraged to get into the workplace, and ensuring that we provide for them not just through the welfare system but with our long-term plan for the national health service. At every stage of life, we are ensuring that we as Conservatives are improving people's lives. In so many of those areas, the right hon. Gentleman has done nothing but vote against the policies that this Conservative Government have produced.

Jeremy Corbyn: Life expectancy has fallen by six months, and infant mortality is up and rising. This month, we also learned that a record 1.6 million food parcels were given out last year alone. Under this Government, things are getting worse. Does the Prime Minister agree with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions that this Government's policies have meant that, in one of the richest countries on earth, food banks are now handing 14 million meals a year to people, some of whom are in work, who simply do not have enough to eat?

The Prime Minister: The best route out of poverty for people—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The House must calm itself. We are at an early stage. The question has been put, and the answer from the Prime Minister must be heard.

The Prime Minister: The best route out of poverty for people is to be in the workplace. We want to ensure that more, better-paid jobs are being created for people in this country, and that is what we are seeing under this Government. Record numbers of people are in employment, real wages are rising for the first time in a decade, and this Government are taking decisions that are helping people to keep more money in their pockets. Tax cuts for 32 million people, an increase in the national living wage, and a freeze in fuel duty have all been of major benefit to people, and what did the right hon. Gentleman do? He voted against fuel duty freezes and tax cuts over a dozen times.

Jeremy Corbyn: Many of those people receiving food parcels, the number of which has increased by 600,000 in four years, are actually in work, and that is down to their low wages. Indeed, wages have been frozen for many over the past 10 years. Even the Prime Minister's own Secretary of State admitted that universal credit has caused people to rely on food banks.

The number of older people now not getting the care they desperately need has risen to 1.4 million. Think about that—1.4 million people in need of social care. Things are getting worse. Does the Prime Minister agree with Labour's plan to fund social care properly or with her former deputy, who wants to tax the over-50s and take away their benefits?

The Prime Minister: As I have said on a number of occasions in this House, we agree that we need to ensure there is a sustainable, long-term future for social care,

and we will be bringing forward proposals in relation to that. We have given councils access to nearly £4 billion more for adult social care this year, which means a 9% increase, in real terms, in funding for adult social care between 2015-16 and 2019-20. But it is not just about the funding that goes into social care—[*Interruption.*] Lots of Labour Members are saying, yes it is. Actually, no, it is about ensuring that best practice is seen across local authorities and NHS trusts. That is why this is not just about funding for social care and local authorities. It is also about our long-term plan for the national health service—the biggest cash boost in the national health service's history—stability for the NHS, improving social care and providing for people in their old age.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister seems to have her head in the sand. The reality is that £7 billion has been cut from adult social care since 2010. The system is teetering on the brink of collapse as care companies go into administration, and the stress on the residents of those homes and their families is unbelievable. We need a serious strategy that ensures people get the social care they need when they need it.

Under this Government, things are getting worse on our streets, too. Violent crime is up by 19%, robberies are up by 18%, knife crime is at the highest level on record and 2.3 million criminal investigations have closed because the police were unable to identify a suspect—I believe because they have insufficient staff to do it.

Does the Prime Minister accept there is a violent crime epidemic that has arisen on her watch and is tearing our communities and our families apart? It has to be addressed by investment in our communities.

The Prime Minister: May I first say to the right hon. Gentleman—he made a reference to care companies at the beginning of his question, with a suggestion that this is a worrying time for all those who are in provision provided by those care companies—that, of course, it is a concerning time for them, for their families and for the employees of the company concerned? I think he was referring to Four Seasons. The Care Quality Commission is absolutely clear that there is no risk of service disruption at this time, and there should never be a gap in care for an individual. The Care Act 2014, introduced by the Conservatives in government, places a duty on local authorities to intervene to protect individuals where their provider is unable to carry on their care because of business failure.

The right hon. Gentleman went on to talk about the issue of crime. First, we see from the crime survey that, overall, crime is down by a third. He quotes the figures from police-recorded crime. He has previously been hauled up by, I think, the UK Statistics Authority for failing to quote the crime survey and for only quoting police-recorded crime. He talks about more money being available to the police and there is around £1 billion more money available to the police this year. Police and crime commissioners plan to recruit 3,000 more police officers. But, to tackle knife crime and serious violence—yes, we are concerned about it, which is why we brought forward the serious violence strategy—we also need to deal with drug crime, turn young people away from violence and ensure that the police and others have the powers to do their job.

I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that I will take no lectures on this from somebody who voted against more money for the police and voted against tougher laws on knife crime, because that is not helping the police or our citizens.

Jeremy Corbyn: If the Prime Minister does not believe me, perhaps she will believe her own Home Secretary. He said in March:

“Serious violence is on the rise. Communities are being torn apart and families are losing their children.”—[*Official Report*, 4 March 2019; Vol. 655, c. 667.]

Twenty-one thousand fewer police officers is a pretty obvious connection: there is likely to be a rise in crime and disorder as a result.

Under this Government, things in this country are getting worse. Their cuts and incompetence have left communities struggling and pushed public services into crisis. They have cut council budgets by 50%, poverty is up, waiting times are up and violent crime is up, all under a Government who seem to care more about pushing their very damaging austerity agenda than tackling the burning social injustices. Ahead of tomorrow's elections in England, can the Prime Minister explain why, from social care to crime and from life expectancy to poverty, things are getting worse under her Government?

The Prime Minister: We have seen the biggest cash boost to the NHS in its history under this Conservative Government, more people in work than ever before and more children in good and outstanding schools getting opportunities for their futures. And what do we see from Conservative councils up and down the country? Conservative councils give better services, they recycle more, they fix more potholes and they charge lower taxes. A vote for Labour is a vote for mismanagement, worse services and higher taxes. It is Conservative councils that give better services and charge you less.

Q3. [910627] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Would the Prime Minister confirm her support for Transport for the North's strategic transport plan, which will help to create an additional 850,000 jobs and £100 billion of economic growth by 2050 by connecting the key cities of the north through Northern Powerhouse Rail and improving key trunk roads, such as the A64, which runs through the beautiful and economically stifled constituency of Thirsk and Malton?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of Transport for the North. We are giving the great towns, cities and counties of the north more say over transport investment through Transport for the North, enabling the north to speak with one voice on its vision for transport over the next 30 years. It has made significant progress in finalising its strategic transport plan, and I welcome that. We are committed to reversing decades of underinvestment in northern transport, and we will have invested a record £13 billion in the region by 2020.

In regard to the A64, I understand that Highways England has undertaken considerable work on the performance on the A64. That will inform decisions that it will take on strategic road investments in the next period, between 2020 and 2025, as part of the second

road investment strategy. I am sure that Highways England will have heard my hon. Friend's passionate plea for his constituency.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Scotland's First Minister has pledged to match free EU student fees through to 2021. Will the Prime Minister follow that example, or is she determined to build a bigger hostile environment?

The Prime Minister: We have made clear the position for EU students in this year, and we will make the announcements in good time for students in future years. I think I am right in saying that the Scottish Government have actually said that EU students can have free tuition up to 2024, but English students will have to pay.

Ian Blackford: Quite remarkable, because it is the Tories who have introduced fees for English students. When it comes to leaving the EU, the Prime Minister's vision is blinded by ideology. In a no-deal scenario, her Government intend to curb EU student visas to three years. Scottish university courses are generally for four years. The Scottish Government and Scottish universities have asked repeatedly for this simple change to be made to reflect our circumstances. Will the Prime Minister confirm today that her Government will extend visas to four years to allow for Scottish university students, or will she once again completely ignore the wishes and interest of Scotland, as she has done right through this whole shambolic Brexit process?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the situation is not quite as problematic for those students as the right hon. Gentleman sets out, given the ability to convert visas. He started off his question by saying that the Government should not be driven by ideology. This is from the SNP! If the SNP is worried about students in Scottish universities, it needs to ensure that it spends more time improving the quality of education in Scotland and less time obsessing about independence.

Q4. [910628] **Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): A number of faith leaders and individuals across East Renfrewshire, particularly from the Catholic community, have raised concerns about recent changes to the immigration rules for preachers coming to the UK on short-term supply placements. The new tier 2 visa is double the cost, making it unaffordable for many parishes. Given the huge benefits that congregations and wider communities derive from these placements, can the Prime Minister look again to make sure that we are not putting up unnecessary barriers to continuing these long-standing and very positive opportunities?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend in his recognition of the valuable part that ministers of religion from all faiths play in their local communities. We want to continue to be able to welcome those who want to come to the UK in accordance with our immigration rules. I understand that, as part of its extensive programme of engagement around the future borders and immigration system, the Home Office will talk to representatives of a range of faiths and community groups, and those discussions will include the future visa arrangements for ministers of religion.

Q2. [910626] Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): Last week, in a public meeting in Stockton South, I heard a community that is fed up with rising levels of crime and antisocial behaviour. I heard about a lady in her 90s who is terrified in her own home. Residents in another part of my constituency have taken to carrying out their own street patrols. Cleveland police, my local force, have to contend with the fourth highest crime rate in the country, but have lost 500 officers because of cuts. My constituents have asked me to come here to ask the Prime Minister to look again at the funding needs of Cleveland police—will she do so?

The Prime Minister: First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman, who I understand was another of the London marathon runners on Sunday.

We are making more money available to local police forces, and around the country a number of police and crime commissioners are recruiting more police officers, but dealing with crime and antisocial behaviour is not just about policing. It is about how we ensure that we turn young people away from such behaviour and away from violence. That involves a wider range of activities, which is why, together with the Home Secretary and other Secretaries of State, I held the summit on serious violence and knife crime last month. That brought together people from all organisations—from community organisations and charities, as well as police forces and others—to ensure that we can tackle what is a whole-of-Government and whole-of-society issue.

Q8. [910633] Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): In 2017, my constituent Rebecca Kruza tragically took her own life. She had her whole life ahead of her but suffered from post-natal depression. Her son will now grow up never knowing his mother. Many mothers who return to work suffer mental health challenges while seeking to juggle the demands of work and parenting. Today is World Maternal Mental Health Day. Does the Prime Minister agree that we need to do more to support the mental health of parents and mothers when they return to work? Will she back Rebecca's family's campaign for more specialist mother and baby mental healthcare units in Kent and throughout the country as a whole?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising a very important issue. I send our condolences to his constituent's family, particularly that young son who will grow up without his mother. The issue of post-natal depression and people returning to work and balancing childcare and work responsibilities is important. We are looking into a new returners programme to help those who are returning to the workplace. My hon. Friend the Minister for Mental Health is doing some good work on the whole question of mental health provision, particularly for mothers with young babies. It is right for my hon. Friend to have raised this area of concern, which the Government are looking at in a number of ways. We will aim to ensure that nobody else suffers in the way that his constituent and her family did.

Q5. [910629] Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Prime Minister will not be surprised to learn that I would like her finally to spill the beans on Cambridge Analytica and AggregateIQ visiting Downing Street. For more than a year now, I have been asking

why these shadowy organisations were invited into the heart of her Government, and she has been refusing to answer. When I write to her, a junior Minister responds and says there is nothing to reveal—most recently they said that no meetings took place—but I now have a written answer from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office saying that Ministers and officials had a series of meetings with Cambridge Analytica. Will the Prime Minister finally come clean? Which of her Ministers, special advisers and officials have met AIQ or Cambridge Analytica; where and when did those meetings take place; and what was their purpose?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady has consistently stood up and asked me about meetings that took place in No. 10 and she has had answers about meetings that took place in No. 10. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Constitution has written to her about this matter. We routinely publish information about Ministers' and senior officials' meetings with external organisations, and the correct information has been published in the transparency returns for my meetings. She might like to know that the UK Government actually publish far more transparency data than the Scottish Government.

Q13. [910638] David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I have told the Financial Conduct Authority that one of the companies on its approved register owes millions of pounds, including money to the FCA itself. In the light of the collapse of another FCA-approved company a few weeks ago, leaving thousands without their life savings, will the Prime Minister find out what exactly the FCA actually does to regulate the companies on its approved register?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important issue and I am very happy to write to him with more detail in relation to the actions of the Financial Conduct Authority as it looks at those companies on its approved list. I think that it would be more helpful to him if I were able to give him a more detailed reply in writing.

Q6. [910630] Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): May I be lucky enough to be one of the 27% who get their question answered by this Prime Minister? Payday loans disproportionately affect the vulnerable and the Motherwell postcode has the largest payday loans per head in Scotland. As this Government's universal credit system is forcing people to turn to these high-interest lenders, will she halt the roll-out of universal credit and take action on the vultures in these companies who prey on the most desperate in our society?

The Prime Minister: On the issue of universal credit, this Government have changed the way it operates in rolling it out. We have ensured that somebody moving on to universal credit can get 100% advance payment where that is necessary for them. May I also remind the hon. Lady that the Scottish Government now have extra powers in relation to welfare, which, so far, they have been reluctant to use?

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): May I thank you, Mr Speaker, for asking Fitzwaryn School in my constituency to Parliament today? It is an excellent school with excellent pupils and outstanding teachers. Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the

Education Secretary on allocating £6 billion to high-needs schools, an increase of £142 million on the year before, and will she continue to focus relentlessly on the needs of schools such as these, particularly in rural areas, and the need for more sixth form places in high-needs schools?

The Prime Minister: I join my right hon. Friend in congratulating the Education Secretary on the action that he is taking, on the attention that he is giving in ensuring that that funding is available across the school sector and that those schools where there are particular needs are able to be supported properly, and on recognising, as we have done, the particular needs of schools in rural areas.

Q7. [910632] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): During the general election, the Prime Minister gave a manifesto commitment to retain free TV licences and bus passes. Does she still stand by that?

The Prime Minister: We do stand by the commitments that we made. Of course, we are changing the arrangements for the TV licences—that is going to the BBC—but there is no reason why the BBC, with the money available to it, is not able to continue that.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Will the Prime Minister welcome the first ever training session in the House of Commons on understanding autism, which is being held today and for which 59 colleagues have signed up? Each of us has around 1,000 people in our constituency who are on the autistic spectrum, so it is vital that Members of Parliament understand what life can be like for people with autism and that they can provide their constituents with even better services with that understanding.

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising that matter. She has raised the issue with me in the past, when I think I welcomed the suggestion to have these courses available to Members of Parliament. It is very important and I congratulate the 59 Members who have signed up for the course today. It is important that we are all able to provide that support and to understand rather better for those who come to our surgeries and whom we meet in our constituencies the challenges that they face.

Q9. [910634] **Mr Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister commit herself here and now to fly the flag and to build the three Royal Navy supply ships in British yards, including on the Tyne, by reversing the unpatriotic decision to put this out to international tender?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have taken shipbuilding in the United Kingdom incredibly seriously by publishing a shipbuilding strategy, which aims to ensure that we can enhance the capabilities of shipbuilding yards. Individual decisions are taken in relation to Royal Navy ships, but it is important that we have an overall strategy to encourage shipbuilding around the country.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): My terminally ill constituent Jacci Woodcock started the Dying to Work campaign to create security in the workplace for people who have been given a terminal diagnosis.

As of this week, over 1 million employees are covered by the voluntary charter. Is it not now time that the Government took this issue on and addressed the anomaly in the law?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue and championing the campaign; I know that she has met Ministers to discuss it. We all agree that terminally ill people should not have to worry about their job, which is why the Dying to Work charter is so important and such a good example of supporting terminally ill workers. I am pleased to hear that the number of employees covered by the charter has now reached the 1 million mark. Employers are making commitments to their employees by signing the charter—that they will not be dismissed and that their families' financial security will not be put at risk. I will ask a Minister to write to my hon. Friend about the related aspects of the disabilities Act and about looking at the issue in relation to legislation.

Q10. [910635] **Teresa Pearce** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): In March 2014, my constituent Jadwinder Singh Bhogal went on holiday to Dubai and never came home. He was arrested, made to sign a confession in Arabic and convicted of cocaine possession, despite no drugs or evidence of drugs being found on him. He is now serving 25 years in a Dubai jail. We applied, under the prisoner transfer agreement, for him to serve his sentence in the UK so that his elderly, frail mother could see her only son. This application was refused, as it appears all other applications have been since the PTA was signed by the United Arab Emirates in 2013. Is that PTA worth the paper it is written on?

The Prime Minister: I recognise the hon. Lady's concern about the case she has raised. I will ask Ministers in the Ministry of Justice and the Foreign Office to look at the issue and get back to her on it. When these PTAs are signed, we expect that they will do the job that they are intended to in enabling prisoner transfers, but I will ask that the relevant Minister write to the hon. Lady on her specific case.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Apart from an extraordinary leak, which I will not go into, the decision being discussed in many parts of the world is the possibility that we will be nesting a dragon in the critical national infrastructure of the UK by allowing Huawei to build the cyber-network that will power 5G. This decision is frankly extraordinary, given the advice of the National Security Agency in the United States and the Australian Signals Directorate. Could the Prime Minister explain why she feels that ignoring two of our closest intelligence allies and putting in danger a 70-year intelligence-sharing relationship that has underpinned the security of the UK is worth it for Chinese commercial gain?

The Prime Minister: We are committed to taking decisions, supported by a hard-headed, technically-informed assessment of the risk. We discuss security issues very closely with our allies. We have put in place a review of the 5G supply chain to ensure that we have a secure and resilient roll-out of 5G, and the decisions of that review will be announced in due course. Our priorities for the future of telecommunications are stronger cyber-security

practices, greater resilience in telecoms networks and diversity in the market, and those priorities drive our thinking.

Q11. [910636] **Sir Mark Hendrick** (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): Three weeks ago in this Chamber, I informed the Prime Minister that nearly 8,000 children in Preston are living in poverty—a significant amount of which is due to the roll-out of universal credit last year. In her response, the Prime Minister used the hackneyed phrase that families where both parents are in work are “five times less likely” to be in poverty. That is not an answer; it is a misleading statistic. Both parents working is not a guarantee that the family will not be living in poverty because of low pay. And what if only one parent is working, or it is a one-parent family? The Prime Minister knows that universal credit is not working for thousands of people in my constituency and millions of people up and down the country, and I believe the truth is that she does not care.

The Prime Minister: The reference I made to the impact of poverty on children living in a household where both parents are working is a correct one—that is a fact. What is also the case is that there are more people now receiving the full benefit to which they are entitled as a result of universal credit being introduced. We see disabled people in the household actually having access to more funding as a result of universal credit. Universal credit is ensuring that people not only get encouraged into the workplace, but when they are in the workplace they are able to keep more of the money that they earn. This is in direct contrast to a legacy system from Labour that meant that over a million people—1.4 million people—were left on benefits for nearly a decade.

Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): On the way up here this week, I received a telephone call from Dennis Hutchings. Dennis is 77 years old and he lives near Plymouth. He has just been charged with attempted murder from an incident in Northern Ireland 42 years ago. Dennis Hutchings is not alone; we have Soldier B and we have Soldier F. What is happening is in direct contradiction to what the Prime Minister herself personally promised on our conference stage two years ago. Could she inform people like Dennis of exactly what she has done, and what she is doing, to end this process, which is abhorrent to so many people in this country?

Mr Speaker: Order. I absolutely respect the sincerity and public-spiritedness of the hon. Gentleman, but in general terms it is not desirable to refer to sub judice cases, and therefore I know the Prime Minister will want to take into account that consideration in her response. But the hon. Gentleman has said what he has said and the Prime Minister will say what she wants to say.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I say to my hon. Friend that we have been clear that the current system for dealing with the legacy of Northern Ireland's past is not working well for anyone. As I have said before in this House, around 3,500 people were killed in the troubles. The vast majority were murdered by terrorists. Many of these cases require further investigation, including the deaths of hundreds of members of the security forces. The system to investigate the past

does need to change to provide better outcomes for victims and survivors of the troubles, but also to ensure that our armed forces and police officers are not unfairly treated. That is why, across Government, we are continuing to work on proposals on how best to move forward, but the Ministry of Defence is also looking at the wider issue of what more can be done to ensure that service personnel are not unfairly pursued through the courts in relation to service overseas, including considering legislation.

Q12. [910637] **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Frustratingly, this is now the third Prime Minister's questions in which I have raised the plight of fellow parents of premature and sick babies. Last time, the Prime Minister told the House that the Government were undertaking

“a short, focused internal review of provision for parents of premature, sick and multiple babies to obtain an understanding of the barriers to participating in the labour market.”—[*Official Report*, 20 February 2019; Vol. 654, c. 1467.]

So when will the Government publish the findings of that review and finally take action for us?

The Prime Minister: First, may I congratulate the hon. Gentleman, because I understand that he was another of the Members who ran the marathon on Sunday? I understand that he did it in support of Glasgow Girls football club and raised money for that very good cause.

Officials in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy are undertaking a short, focused internal review of provision for parents of premature, sick and multiple babies. They are looking at the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised—at the barriers to returning to work and staying in work that some parents can face. They have been working with organisations such as Bliss, The Smallest Things and Tamba to better understand the issues for parents. I am sure that a Minister will be happy to meet him in due course when these conclusions are reached.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe has now been in prison in Tehran for more than three years, deprived of the presence of her family. Will the Prime Minister join me in assuring her, and all those who are unjustly imprisoned overseas, as the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) mentioned earlier, that they are not forgotten in this House? Will my right hon. Friend update the House on what measures are being taken to ensure that Nazanin can come home as soon as possible, and, in the meantime, get the medical treatment she so desperately needs?

The Prime Minister: Let me first give the general reassurance that my hon. Friend asked for that these cases are not forgotten—that they continue to be worked on by Ministers and officials. Nazanin's case and others, in relation to Iran, I raise whenever I see President Rouhani. I raise these issues and the Foreign Secretary raises them with his opposite numbers. We are constantly raising these issues, but we are also ensuring that, in terms of our presence in Iran, people are working with the Iranian authorities as far as possible to ensure that the necessary medical assistance is provided to Nazanin, and indeed that others are supported in the way that they need to be. I can assure my hon. Friend that these cases are not forgotten. We continue to work on them and continue to raise them regularly with the Iranian authorities.

Q14. [910639] **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I know that the Prime Minister understands the importance of women attending their cervical smear tests, and I am sure she is aware that, because of a recent public health campaign, our cervical smear laboratories are overwhelmed. Would she care to comment on the recent tendering process for cytology services in England, which will see the number of laboratories reduced from 46 to nine?

The Prime Minister: The question is, what capability—what capacity—will there be for the cases to be properly dealt with? The Department of Health and Social Care and those who are undertaking this are well aware of the requirement in terms of numbers. Like the hon. Lady, I welcome the public health campaign on cervical smears. This is very important. I want to see more women going to have their smear, because it can save their lives.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): While Arsenal may be chasing a Champions League spot, Ilkeston Town are celebrating their promotion to the Evo-Stik League division one east. Will my right hon. Friend outline what the Government are doing to support grassroots football, which is so vital to our communities, and will she join me in congratulating the Robins and wish them every success next season?

The Prime Minister: First, I congratulate Ilkeston Town on their promotion, and I wish the Robins all the best for the next season. That is a good example of how grassroots football can benefit local communities, and it is important that we are putting more money in. Over four years, almost £100 million of public money is being used to help build and upgrade artificial and grass pitches, encourage greater participation and enhance coaching programmes. That includes creating new and improving existing community football facilities through the Football Foundation. We are committed to playing our part in improving and strengthening grassroots football in this country, and the Robins are playing their part in showing the benefit that has for local communities.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Does the Prime Minister accept that the growing warnings about a climate emergency require a fresh approach to highly polluting but rapidly growing sectors such as aviation? In particular, should not the control of carbon emissions and air quality take precedence over the expansion ambitions of the commercial owners of Heathrow?

The Prime Minister: Of course, we take issues around emissions, and climate change generally, incredibly seriously. We have consistently said that climate change is one of the greatest challenges that the world faces. That is why I am proud of this Government's record on dealing with

climate change. Since 2010, we have been decarbonising our economy faster than any other G20 economy. We are at the leading edge of industrialised nations in dealing with these issues, and we will continue to do so.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Music Man Project for people with learning difficulties on their triumphant performance at the Albert Hall, as well as the news that they will now go to Broadway? I am glad that a number of colleagues were present. Is that not yet another reason that Southend should become a city?

The Prime Minister: First, I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Music Man Project on their performance and wishing them all the best for their trip to Broadway. Opportunities like that are very important for musicians with disabilities, and they are paving the way and showing the excellent work that can be done, and the enjoyment and excitement that those musicians can get through those performances. I do not think that my hon. Friend has asked me a single question in the House that has not mentioned Southend becoming a city.

Sir David Amess: Let's do it!

The Prime Minister: I think we might need more than B&Q, if my hon. Friend gets the reference. He has been campaigning resolutely, and I am sure he will diligently continue to do so on behalf of his constituents.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Yesterday saw the first harrowing testimonies of those who were infected in the infected NHS blood scandal. Since the Prime Minister announced the public inquiry in July 2017, one victim has died every four days. Delay is not acceptable. In the Republic of Ireland, it was accepted that it was known that there were risks, and in the 1990s it paid full compensation. Why can we not do the same in the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: First, may I commend the hon. Lady for the work that she has done with others in this House to ensure that that inquiry is taking place? It is of course an independent inquiry. We are ensuring that the inquiry is provided with all the resources that it needs—that the chairman of the inquiry requires and identifies as being needed for that inquiry. She is absolutely right that this is something that should have taken place earlier and, as she said, there are those who have died since the start of the campaign to ensure that this inquiry could be held. It is important that we get to the bottom of this issue, and that is why we are ensuring that the inquiry is not only independent, but does have the resources it needs.

British Steel: EU Emissions Trading Compliance

12.51 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): I am grateful for the opportunity to make this statement to the House today. I wish to inform the House of a commercial agreement that the Government entered into with British Steel on 24 April. As you know, Mr Speaker, I wanted to update the House at the first available opportunity now that the market-sensitive elements of the resulting transaction have concluded.

The agreement with British Steel relates to its obligations under the EU emissions trading scheme. The ETS requires heavy industry and power producers to obtain and surrender allowances equal to their level of carbon emissions on an annual basis. Companies that are the most exposed to international competition are allocated a proportion of free ETS allowances annually. For years, many companies have used these free allowances to comply with their obligations for the previous year.

Just over four months ago, in December 2018, the European Commission suspended the UK's ability to auction ETS allowances until the withdrawal agreement is ratified. This was decided in order to maintain the integrity of the European carbon market in the event that the UK left the EU without a deal on 29 March this year. This position means that free allowances for 2019 have not yet been issued.

The withdrawal agreement negotiated with the European Union allows for full and continuing membership of the EU ETS until the end of December 2020. Therefore, once ratified, we will have the full legal basis immediately to issue free 2019 allowances. However, the decision of this House not to vote in favour of the withdrawal agreement means that it has not yet been possible to proceed on this basis. This has meant that UK businesses have unexpectedly, since December, been left without access to 2019 free allowances. All members of this House should reflect on the real-world impacts of decisions that we make in this place, or the lack of them, on the businesses on which many thousands of jobs and whole towns depend.

Despite the continued uncertainty, all UK installations have now met their 2018 obligations in full—before yesterday's compliance deadline of midnight last night. My Department reminded all participants that they still had a legal duty to meet their obligations for 2018 and that the UK is committed to upholding our environmental standards and continuing to comply fully with European law while we remain a member of the EU.

However, until this week, British Steel had not complied with its obligations. British Steel, as many Members know, employs 4,200 people directly in the UK—in Scunthorpe, Skinningrove and Redcar—and thousands more in its associated supply chains. As the second biggest steel maker in the UK and one of only two integrated steel-making sites in the UK, the assets at Scunthorpe and in the north-east are of significant importance to the UK. They are a major supplier to rail networks across Britain. As the only UK steel plant that produces the rails used on our tracks, they provide almost all those procured by Network Rail, as well as

supplying ScotRail, Transport for London and Translink in Northern Ireland, and they export a large volume of their product across Europe.

British Steel approached my Department earlier this year to explain that the absence of the expected 2019 free allowances left it unable to comply with its 2018 obligations. If it had failed to do so by last night's deadline, it would have attracted an immediate and unremovable fine of £500 million, on top of the continuing liability of about £120 million, putting the company under significant financial strain.

The Government were therefore left with a choice: either to see British Steel be unable to comply with its legally binding obligations, creating a liability of over £600 million; or to consider whether there was a path to allow it to comply within the strict bounds of what is possible under domestic and European law. After careful consideration, the Government took the decision to enter into a short-term bridge facility, valued at about £120 million, under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, at an interest rate of LIBOR plus 7%.

The effect of this agreement is that the Government have, in the last week, purchased the necessary emissions allowances on behalf of British Steel. In return, under a deed of forfeiture, ownership of the company's 2019 allowances will now be transferred to the Government once they are released. Through the subsequent sale of these 2019 allowances, we expect the taxpayer to be repaid in full. The 2019 allowances are more than are needed to fulfil the 2018 obligations, and all of them will come to the Government.

The terms of the deal ensure that if the price of allowances were to rise, the taxpayer would receive half of any financial upside once the allowances are sold back into the market. To ensure the taxpayer is protected in the event that allowances were to fall, under the terms of the deal, British Steel has been required to underwrite any shortfall and is covering the cost of arranging the facility. The price of carbon allowances has been rising over the past two years, and the Exchequer received £1.4 billion from auctioning allowances in 2018, up from £533 million in 2017.

In the unlikely event that we leave the EU without a deal, we are engaging with the Commission about the implications for our continued participation in the EU ETS. However, should an agreement not be reached, the Government are able to implement a domestic scheme that provides security against the loss of EU-derived allowances. I can confirm to the House that, following the purchase of the necessary allowances, British Steel has been able to comply with its 2018 EU ETS obligations in full.

I want to be clear with the House that the agreement reached with British Steel is a unique one in exceptional circumstances. My Department's assessment, which has been agreed with the Treasury, shows that the deed of forfeiture offers value for money to the taxpayer, with benefits exceeding the costs—meeting the accounting officer test. This is set against the alternative of British Steel failing to comply and causing a business with an annual turnover of £1.4 billion to have an instant £600 million financial pressure.

This position was supported by the independent Industrial Development Advisory Board, which assessed the proposal in its statutory role and agreed with the

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value-for-money assessment. I am placing in the Libraries of both Houses a copy of my accounting officer's letter to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and the Comptroller and Auditor General, and I have written to the Chairs of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee and of the Treasury Committee. I have been advised that the arrangement is fully compliant with the state aid rules that apply to the steel sector, which require its terms to be commercially comparable.

While this was an unenviable situation to face, the Government believe that the agreement reached with British Steel to ensure that it could comply with its legal obligations represents a responsible course of action. I hope this is a view that Members across this House will also support, and I commend this statement to the House.

12.58 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): A number of industry voices have welcomed this announcement. As Unite the union has commented today, British Steel workers and those in the supply chain will be breathing a sigh of relief at this loan. However, it is regrettable that the Government's handling of the Brexit negotiations has brought us to this point. The Government have been warned about the uncertainty over the EU ETS for over two years, and the Prime Minister's threats of a no-deal Brexit for over two years have caused significant uncertainty for the steel sector. UK Steel, the body representing the sector, warned in January that a no-deal Brexit was nothing short of a disaster for the sector, but despite the warnings, the Prime Minister ploughed on and the risks to the viability of our manufacturing sector have been plain to see.

This has had an impact on British industry, as it continues to fight off uncertainty. That is why it is imperative that we continue in this House to work across parties for a solution that will reach a consensus; I know that the Secretary of State is committed to that. But he must also note that this is part of a long track record of this Government standing by as our manufacturing faces increasing pressures, both domestically and internationally.

When Donald Trump imposed a 25% tariff on our steel, the Government's response was lukewarm at best, and the Prime Minister's refusal to fight for the sector was telling. The Government's Trade Bill is set to make the sector even more vulnerable to steel dumping. The Government have been woefully silent on the steel sector deal proposals from industry and unions about the issues that are stifling competition, such as electricity prices: UK industries pay up to 50% more than their European counterparts. Furthermore, the Trade Remedies Authority has been described by the Manufacturing Trade Remedies Alliance as possibly the weakest in the world.

Will the Secretary of State provide some clarity for the steel sector today by describing the measures that his Government will take to ensure that the UK's low carbon infrastructure, such as offshore wind turbines, and other projects, such as the Royal Navy's new fleet solid support ships, are built using UK steel? Will he confirm what action he is taking on publishing a steel sector deal and incentivising both public and private

investment in the sector? Will he also confirm what action he is taking on business rates and energy costs right across the sector?

This is welcome news, but as I have said it is not enough on its own to provide the certainty and assurances that workers and businesses right across the steel sector need. I know that the Secretary of State shares my belief that steel is one of the jewels in the crown of British manufacturing, and I hope he can assure the House today that this is just the first step in a long list of policies dedicated to supporting the sector going forward.

Greg Clark: I thank the hon. Lady for her welcome for the steps that we have taken. She is absolutely right that if a Brexit deal had been agreed, this would not have been necessary: the deal that has been proposed and voted on three times in this House would have made this statement unnecessary. I gently point out to her that the company itself, British Steel, wrote to constituency Members in December last year, when the agreement had been reached in the European Council, saying in terms:

"We believe the deal that has been tabled and agreed with the EU is within the best interest of UK business"

—British Steel—

"and we urge you to think about voting in favour of the deal."

Unfortunately, there was not a majority in the House for the deal, and part of the problem was that Opposition Members did not vote for it. I welcome the constructive discussions that the hon. Lady and I have been having to now come to an agreement, but had Opposition Members voted according to the advice of the company, this would not have been necessary.

I also take issue with what the hon. Lady said about standing by. I do not think anyone could describe this initiative as "standing by"—quite the reverse: it is an agile response to an unwelcome situation, and I would have thought that she would commend it. She was not in the House at the time, but I remember well when the steel making on Teesside was substantially closed down, mothballed, during the last Labour Government, without such a response to do what we could to keep it in operation.

On energy prices and suchlike, I should say that under the last Labour Government steel production and employment in steelmaking in this country fell by 50%.

Rebecca Long Bailey: We don't need a history lesson!

Greg Clark: Well, history is important in this because one of the reasons why our electricity prices have been high compared with others is that in the last five years of the previous Labour Government, industrial electricity prices rose by 64%. What we have done since then is provide £291 million in compensation for energy-intensive sectors, to correct some of the inflation that took place during that time.

As the hon. Lady knows and has acknowledged, my firm view is that in a world where manufacturing in this country and its opportunities around the world are undergoing a revival, there is absolutely no reason whatever why British Steel should not make a major contribution to that, right across the country. I am keen that we should conclude a sector deal with the steel sector.

There have been important discussions. All sector deals require co-investment from the Government and the companies. No one is keener than I am to conclude one: as I hope is evident from my statement today, I am prepared to act in support of a sector that is important—not just for the economy, but for the towns across the country in whose lives it plays such a prominent role.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): If the Government had kept their word and taken us out on 29 March without the withdrawal agreement but tabled a comprehensive free trade agreement, we would not be in this mess. What are the Government going to do to have a proper industrial strategy, which can work only if there are more adequate supplies of much cheaper power?

Greg Clark: What my right hon. Friend has said is not the case. Our legal obligations for 2018 would be there, and the company would have to comply. Had we left without a deal, the company would be in the position that it is in.

When it comes to the competitiveness of the UK steel sector, it is clear that the markets are international and, especially in the case of British Steel, very substantially across the continent of Europe. It has been very clear that we need to make sure that we continue to trade on terms at least as favourable as we do at the moment with the European Union, which is why both British Steel as a company and the steel sector have been absolutely clear, in terms, that we need to ratify an agreement such as has been proposed, and we need to do it very quickly.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for early sight of his statement. I also put on the record my welcome for the action taken by the Government to protect 4,200 jobs; it is really important that we protect the remaining heavy industry and manufacturing facilities in the UK. That said, questions still need to be answered. The Secretary of State confirms that this is a loan, on commercial terms, to avoid the risk of a fine of half a billion pounds to British Steel. To mitigate that risk of a fine, what was to prevent British Steel from just borrowing from the market, given that it is borrowing from the Government on commercial terms? Why did this go to the eleventh hour? It seems that what is almost a gamble has been taken with British Steel in the discussions with the Government. Will the right hon. Gentleman explain that? Were the risks identified when the Government were negotiating the extension to article 50?

In his statement, the Secretary of State talked about the need for Members to reflect on the impact of decisions or non-decisions in this place. That seems like another classic attempt to blame other Members for the Brexit mess we are in. It is not our fault—there has been a lack of leadership from the Government. For two years, the Prime Minister was telling us that no deal was much better than a bad deal, then all of sudden, near the end, it was “my deal or no way at all.” That withdrawal agreement suffered the biggest parliamentary defeat in history. Surely, the Government should have reflected on that, instead of coming back here time and again and blaming this House for the Brexit mess.

The situation is further amplified by the fact that the statement says that in the case of no deal the Government are working with the Commission about future participation in the EU ETS scheme. Surely, if the Government had

made preparations for a no-deal Brexit those discussions would have already been concluded and a way forward identified.

How do we get transparency and discussions with Government and industry for companies such as British Steel and Nissan, for which back-door deals were done previously? Who misses out? How are these companies identified? Why, for example, was it left to the SNP Scottish Government, rather than the UK Government, to protect Scottish steel?

Finally, this situation proves the need for proper investment in carbon capture and storage. Peterhead has sufficient storage, and it will be ready to be utilised and operational by 2023–24. That would tie in with the Teesside cluster and help the steel industry. If the Government can find £100 million overnight for a loan, why do they not find further money for direct strategic investment, which will help heavy industry and the low carbon position?

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman started out welcoming the action we have taken and ended up, it seems, withdrawing that support. I will take the first half of his statement at face value and recognise that we have taken action to deal with an unusual and urgent problem, and have done so in a way that I think has displayed some agility. Advice has been taken, which will be fully disclosed to the Committees of the House, on the terms of the agreement and how it can be commercially benchmarked. Clearly, borrowing against allowances with a short period of time before the deadline—it is in the company’s gift and the company’s obligation to comply—requires moving quickly. The judgment we took was that we wanted to make sure we could secure against the possibility of the fine, and do so in a way that was commercially benchmarked. We have done that and it can be scrutinised. The deadline was last night. The fact that I have come immediately to this House to make a statement and publish the accounting officer’s advice I hope illustrates the transparency with which we have proceeded.

On the contingency that this arrangement has had and whether a deal has been approved, I put it as a matter of fact that the reason we had to make this transaction was that we have not, as a House of Commons, agreed a Brexit deal. We have not ratified a Brexit agreement. I said to my opposite number that I welcome the constructive discussions that are taking place. I hope that in the days and weeks ahead, the hon. Gentleman’s party might approach them in the same spirit and try to come to an agreement so that not just the steel industry but every industry in the country can have confidence in the terms of our relationship with Europe in the years to come.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State. My experience in government was that the most important things that Secretaries of State do are those least noticed. They are the crises that do not happen. He has, with supreme competence, dealt with what could have been an extraordinarily tricky situation, as all those involved in maintaining British Steel in this country know.

Is the Department taking steps to ensure that when we leave, as I hope, in an orderly way in the relatively near future with an agreement with the EU, there is a proper substitute for the ETS on a domestic basis that

[Sir Oliver Letwin]

will complement the measures that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is taking in a whole realm of cognate spheres?

Greg Clark: I am grateful for the endorsement of my right hon. Friend, not least because in the previous Government he played the role he has ascribed to me with some deftness and success on many different occasions. He is absolutely right that agreeing to a withdrawal agreement would allow our continued participation until at least December 2020, giving us the time to put in place different arrangements, which would be in our gift. One reason we felt that it was important that British Steel should comply is that the institutions that drive compliance with emissions reductions targets should be respected. We want to send a clear signal that we expect the targets to be respected and implemented. That will take place while we are a member of the European Union and, as my right hon. Friend indicates, afterwards too.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's decision. Without it, there would be huge job losses in the industry. This crisis at British Steel has been caused by the uncertainty over our future membership of the EU's emissions trading scheme. Given that half of steel manufacturing in this country is exported to the EU, our relationship with the EU matters hugely for the future. Why did the Government allow us to get into the position where British Steel had to pay upfront for its allowances, even though we remain a member of the EU today? Will the Government confirm what the liability to the ETS will be of British Steel and other UK steel producers should we leave the EU without a deal?

Greg Clark: The position we find ourselves in is through no choice of the UK Government. It was the Commission that took the decision to suspend the availability of allowances. We are having constructive discussions with the Commission about the release of the allowances and that is why this arrangement is described accurately as a bridging arrangement. We want and expect to be able to have access to those allowances. Participation in the ETS is not a matter of entitlement. It is not available to countries outside the European Union without special designation, but the discussions we are having are constructive.

On liabilities and the nature of the transaction, I have written to the hon. Lady in her capacity as Chair of the Select Committee. I am very happy to follow that up and to give whatever evidence she needs to scrutinise the transaction.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I welcome the announcement of the support for British Steel, but with the greatest respect, what is the Secretary of State doing to support other UK-based steel companies that have already paid to meet their commitments and could now find themselves at a commercial disadvantage as a result of the action he has taken? Has he taken account of that and will he be able to offer support to other UK-based steel companies?

Greg Clark: We of course make an assessment of the consequences. I think my hon. Friend will see, when he looks at the advice, that it seemed to be the right and

responsible decision to ensure that this huge liability of over half a billion pounds did not suddenly crystallise in British Steel. We have a strong relationship with the steel sector. I might mention the industrial energy efficiency fund, worth £315 million. The steel sector is a prime example of how working to improve the efficiency of the technology deployed can help with our emissions reduction targets and reduce the costs of the sector. We are working with all companies in the sector to make that a reality. I know that, in his constituency capacity in south Wales, he takes a big interest in that.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): No doubt carbon credits are a useful way of managing carbon emissions, but Brexit or not we need to become carbon-zero in a very short period of time. I wonder whether the Government are actually taking that urgency seriously. What are the Government doing continuing to support the fracking industry, which is a fossil fuel industry? Surely all we do needs to go into renewable energy?

Greg Clark: The hon. Lady should know that we have one of the strongest records in the whole world in implementation and delivery of emissions reductions. It is important to acknowledge that mechanisms such as carbon pricing are one of the foundations of that, so it is important that the rules are respected. We are about to have a substantial debate on our next steps. I hope she will contribute to that, as am I. Perhaps we might have some further exchanges later this afternoon.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): As important as the continuation of the ETS post Brexit surely is, does my right hon. Friend share the view that the really long-term solution for both heavy industry and a zero-carbon economy is the advent of carbon capture and storage, and hydrogen? What measures are the Government taking to advance those causes?

Greg Clark: I agree with that. My hon. Friend gives me an opportunity to respond to what the SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) referred to and I neglected to comment on. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is the opportunity for energy-intensive industries that are significant emitters to capture that carbon. We have a competition, which is being run at the moment, and sites such as Teesside have put in very impressive and attractive bids. I and my colleagues in Government want Britain not just to be one of the leading developers of the technology of CCUS, but to implement it to the advantage of our energy-intensive industries.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The term "cliff edge" is probably overused, but there is no doubt that British Steel was taken to the cliff edge on this one, with incredibly last-minute deals and negotiations. What steps will be taken to ensure that lessons are learned from this experience? Could the political declaration on the future relationship be amended to secure a commitment to the ETS? If not, we will end up at another cliff edge at the end of the transition period.

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman talks about taking us to the cliff edge. It is a legal responsibility on the part of each emitter to comply with its requirements to surrender allowances. Notice was given, and as some of my hon. Friends pointed out, every other company

acted on that. We were presented late in the day with a choice I described as unenviable. We responded to that pragmatically, and I detect in the hon. Gentleman's tone a recognition that this is the right step. To avoid repetition of this situation, the advice from the company and the industry is clear: the House needs to come together, long before 31 October, and agree a withdrawal agreement that would result automatically in the ability to release allowances, not only for this year but for the following year too.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I very much agree with the steps taken by my right hon. Friend. However, is he essentially saying that this whole situation has arisen because the United Kingdom, and specifically our steel industry, is being punished by the European Union, despite our still remaining a member?

Greg Clark: I would not put it that way myself. The suspension was put in place because we were liable to leave on 29 March. Given that the year to which the allowances refer is the calendar year from January to December, it was the observation that, as things stood, we were unlikely not to be a member of the scheme for the great majority of that year; now that we have agreed an extension of up to 31 October, that is clearly a different matter. The discussions we have had so far with the Commission have been constructive in recognising our ability to issue new allowances.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): To what degree does the Secretary of State agree with the assessment in the *Financial Times* on 16 April that this situation could have been avoided had the company not sold surplus allowances from previous years, and therefore that this situation is a result of management failure by the private equity firm that owns British Steel for which the public are now expected to pay?

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman reflects an accurate point: if the allowances had not been sold, they would be available to discharge the liability. This is by no means a unique practice; across industries and firms, it is a fairly common way to proceed. However, it might well command the attention of the House as to whether it is the best way to proceed.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. It will be particularly welcomed by my many constituents who work at the Scunthorpe works, which, as he highlighted, supplies most of the rail network with track, which of course would have to be imported were the Scunthorpe works to close. Does he agree that this highlights that there is a cost to tackling climate change? It is far better that we approach that in a realistic, well-balanced way, such as the Government propose, rather than giving way to unrealistic demands from other groups.

Greg Clark: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's welcome. I know that his constituents would have faced a worrying time had this liability crystallised on the company. In fact, British Steel has free allowances to cover its emissions. It is not a question of this being, as it were, a punitive tax; because British Steel operates in an internationally competitive sector, it has allowances to cover the costs

that it incurs. It is a question of matching up the timing of the new allowances with its obligations. In this case, we found a way to square that circle.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Today's statement is about specific support for British Steel, and I completely understand the position we are in. However, as the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) said, other companies out there that have incurred significant costs will ask what support the Government might offer to them. What will the Minister say to them?

Greg Clark: The hon. Lady will know that, through the industrial strategy and our work with particular sectors, we have a strong record of investing in the future potential of industries. Steel is part of that, but as she will know, we have increasingly deep working relationships—whether with the automotive, life sciences or the creative industries, or other sectors such as construction—to make sure that we capitalise on our strengths in this country, which are innovation and discovery, putting ourselves at the cutting edge. That is available and is being well exploited across the economy. I hope and expect that the steel industry will be part of that investment in the capability and capacity to prosper in the future.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and his support for British Steel. The steel industry, by its very nature, has very high energy costs. What action is my right hon. Friend or his Department taking to reduce those costs and, in parallel, to reduce pollution from the steel industry, which is very important for the future of the United Kingdom?

Greg Clark: I mentioned—it was announced in the spring financial statement—a new industrial energy efficiency fund worth a third of a billion pounds to partner with energy-intensive businesses in changing and upgrading their technology, so that they both consume less energy, and therefore have lower costs, and also produce lower emissions. As I said to the shadow Secretary of State, since 2013 we have provided nearly £300 million to energy-intensive industries in compensation for some of the effects of high costs. However, the way forward is energy efficiency, and that is the commitment that we made and backed in the financial statement.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome this measure but, again, it is a reaction to potential failure, rather than a proper, coherent plan for the industry. That needs to be gripped robustly. Does the Minister accept that there is insufficient capacity within the European emissions trading scheme to provide free credits to companies subject to anti-competitive measures, dumping and distortions caused by firms trading outside the ETS? We need to increase the level playing field available to British Steel operating in that sphere, in which it is subject to distortions caused by firms outside the ETS.

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman is right that we need to be vigorous in our trade defence mechanisms. Steel is a sector that all Members know is subject, and has been over the years, to dumping by global competitors. Through the G20 forum in particular, at which I have represented our country, we have been vigorous in

[*Greg Clark*]

pressing for the strongest measures against anti-competitive practices such as that, and we will continue to do so in the future.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): I apologise for not bobbing, Mr Speaker; my back is showing my age and its abuse on the rugby field over the years, so I waited until the very last moment.

I think the Secretary of State has handled this brilliantly well. There was a danger that we stepped in really early on, as suggested by Opposition Members. The market needs to sort this—companies have obligations—and only as a last resort should taxpayers' money be brought into the equation.

Greg Clark: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He is absolutely right, and I do not want to say from the Dispatch Box that I have engaged again in this type of transaction. The obligations are with the company, and it would obviously have been much better had it been able to discharge them itself. However, sometimes we have to take decisions in office based on the evidence of the consequences. I felt, and was supported by advice that I received, that the responsible action in this case was to make this facility available, with the security that we have obtained, and to do so in time to allow the company to meet its obligations by the deadline.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): British Steel workers will be glad that the Government have stepped in here, but in Wales 9,000 jobs rely on this whole sector, and many workers and their families in south Wales will be troubled by the wider situation. Can the Secretary of State please confirm whether the new fleet solid support ships will be built with UK steel?

Greg Clark: The question of procurement is a very important one. We have changed the rules so that local economic, social and environmental impact can be taken into account in those procurement decisions, and we have also published for full disclosure for every Department and arm's length body the details of what steel they procure.

Nick Smith: Yes or no?

Greg Clark: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we cannot specify under the procurement regulations that the work should go to a particular firm, but we can make it possible to take in local effects and be transparent as to the decisions taken. Within the legal constraints, which the industry and the unions well understand, we are acting to make sure that the process is much more public than it has ever been before.

Points of Order

1.31 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Four Seasons Health Care provides residential care for 17,000 old and vulnerable people in 322 homes across the country and employs 22,000 staff. Some 80% of Four Seasons residents are in nursing or high-dependency beds, with only 20% of its places in residential care. Yesterday, it was announced that the Four Seasons Health Care group was going into administration. The care homes it runs are now up for sale, which leaves residents and their families facing considerable uncertainty, with no guarantees of what the future may hold.

Despite this collapse and the fragility of the care market, there is still no sign of the Government's long-overdue Green Paper on adult social care funding, which the Secretary of State pledged to bring forward by April—not May, but April. In the last hour we have seen a written statement, but given the numbers of extremely vulnerable people affected by this situation, hon. Members should have the chance to question Ministers. Mr Speaker, have you been notified of an intention by the Government to make an oral statement to reassure hon. Members about the future care of their constituents who are resident in those Four Seasons care homes and nursing homes?

Mr Speaker: The short answer is that I have not been so notified. However, this is an extremely serious matter, which I myself of course have seen covered in the media in the last 24 hours. My advice to the hon. Lady is that she pursue the issue with her usual indefatigability. The fact that no ministerial oral statement has been proffered does not mean that the possibility of an oral exchange on the matter in the near future does not exist. There is a possibility of such an exchange, and she might wish to reflect on how she might achieve her objective.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will be aware that tomorrow in the local elections voters in Watford, Mid Sussex and North West Leicestershire will be required to take their poll cards to the polling station to cast their vote under the Government's voter ID trial. You may also be aware that European poll cards have also dropped—before the local elections—in these three authorities. I have had an indication that the European poll cards will not be accepted tomorrow for voters who turn up in these three districts. Have you had any indication that a Minister will attend the House to clarify the situation for voters who perhaps mistakenly take the wrong poll card to the polling station tomorrow and are turned away and denied their right to vote?

Mr Speaker: I have received no indication that a Minister intends to come to the House to speak about the matter today, but it is very important that there be clarity about the voting arrangements, so I hope that the words uttered by the hon. Lady will have been heard on the Treasury Bench and that they will without delay be conveyed to Cabinet Office Ministers.

BILL PRESENTED

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

WILD ANIMALS IN CIRCUSES (No. 2) BILL

Secretary Michael Gove, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mrs Andrea Leadsom and David Rutley, presented a Bill to make provision to prohibit the use of wild animals in travelling circuses.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Tuesday 7 May; and to be printed (Bill 385) with explanatory notes (Bill 385-EN).

**Police Officer Training
(Autism Awareness)**

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

1.35 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require police forces to train police officers in autism awareness; and for connected purposes.

There are at least 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK. The vast majority are law-abiding citizens, but, from time to time, they may come into contact with police officers—either as witnesses, victims, or alleged offenders—and neither the interests of justice nor those of autistic people themselves are served when there is no real understanding by officers of their difficulties.

Daniel Smith is a 25-year-old autistic man who ran to a police station for refuge after being beaten up in what was essentially a hate crime that occurred while he was chatting to some strangers in a park. He expected to find safety, but instead he found himself handcuffed, locked up for many hours and given two assault charges, despite telling the police officers he was autistic. It was a terrifying and distressing ordeal, during which he was refused contact with either his family, an appropriate adult or a medic, which he should have been allowed. It took a further and anxious six months before his case came to court. Thankfully, he was acquitted of all charges, but he was badly let down and is now, not surprisingly, frightened of the police.

The National Autistic Society told me that a recent survey showed that just 37% of police officers said they had had any autism training, but that 92% said they would find it useful. While there are training duties for health and social care professionals and the Government have just consulted on a new mandatory training programme, the same is not true for our police forces.

An untrained police officer is unlikely to understand the problems that many autistic people face and will probably be unable to imagine what it might be like for someone such as Daniel Smith to be questioned, accused or arrested. They will probably be unable to grasp the autistic person's difficulties with social communication, such as problems with interpreting words, gestures and tone of voice. Often autistic people will not understand facial expressions, gestures or tone of voice, and they may interpret words quite literally. They often might just agree with what is said to them and so wrongly admit guilt. Police officers will probably be unable to grasp their difficulties with social interaction. Autistic people find it difficult to read other people or recognise or understand their feelings and intentions. As they may also often find it difficult to express their own emotions, they find engagement with society seriously challenging. They may appear insensitive, behave in socially inappropriate ways and generally appear odd in the way they react; they might look guilty.

Police officers will probably be unable to understand difficulties that autistic people have with changes to daily rules and routines. Autistic people may find comfort in daily routines and rules that can be safely followed in a world they perceive as confusing and unpredictable. They may struggle with changes to their routines. Police officers might not understand other things, such as their

[Ann Clwyd]

intensity or even obsessive interest in a particular subject or topic, which can become all-important to them and might sometimes put them in conflict with the law.

There are also all-important difficulties relating to sensory sensitivity. Autistic people are often over or under-sensitive to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light, colours, temperatures or pain. A busy, crowded room may become unbearable, for example, and unexpected noises can cause extreme anxiety or even physical pain. That can result in challenging behaviour or meltdown—an intense response when autistic people are overwhelmed, resulting in a temporary loss of control, which is very relevant to the conditions in a police station.

All those common characteristics of autistic people can combine to make them victims of crime, unwitting or unknowing offenders, or unreliable witnesses. Contact with the police will often come at a time of heightened anxiety, which is stressful for all of us but amounts to a crisis for someone on the autism spectrum.

It is now 10 years since the passing of the Autism Act 2009, which requires the autism strategy to exist. Although some progress has been made, many of our services still do not understand autism well enough, and that includes the police service. Some police forces have acknowledged this need, and some training takes place in some forces, but much more needs to be done. We believe that mandatory training would have many benefits for autistic people, for their families, and for police officers themselves.

If that happens, autistic people who are victims of crime, or witnesses, will be better understood and helped to explain what has happened to them and assist police with their inquiries. If they are suspected of committing a crime, they can be questioned in a way that enables them to understand what is happening and will not cause them more anxiety. If they are being arrested, a police officer may be able to better prepare them, and avoid dangerous and traumatic physical restraint. Reasonable adjustments such as the provision of a single cell, perhaps in a quieter part of the custody suite, could be arranged at the police station to help to prevent an autistic person from becoming overwhelmed by the sensory environment.

The police will feel more confident in their abilities to support autistic people in their communities. After all, there is one autistic person among every 100 people.

Autistic people will be more confident that they and their needs will be understood, and that may make them more willing to come forward to assist police or report crimes.

Perhaps most important of all, inappropriate prosecutions leading to incarceration might be avoided if autism were better understood and recognised in the custody suite. Being arrested can be a sign of an autistic person in crisis—an autistic person whose needs are not being met. We already have far too many autistic people in prison. Some of them have not yet been diagnosed, and they will be diagnosed in very few of our prisons. How much better it would be if more such cases were dealt with through police referral to the liaison and diversion schemes that are now being developed to help offenders to understand their offences and not to repeat the offending behaviour. That would be far better than a prison sentence in some, if not all, cases.

The Bill will oblige the Government to create an autism understanding standard for police officers, outlining what good autism training looks like and what is expected of officers. On that basis, it will require the national policing curriculum in England and Wales, which currently requires training to protect vulnerable people—including people with mental health problems—to include autism, which will ensure that new police officers have the training that they need. It will require each police force to create an autism understanding continuing professional development programme, based on that standard. Establishing that will have a cost, and there will also be the cost of releasing officers to attend training, so the Government should establish a funding scheme.

As the Autism Act approaches its 10-year review, it is high time that the police service was required to make autism awareness training mandatory.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Ann Clwyd, Tonia Antoniazzi, Kevin Brennan, Dr David Drew, Dame Cheryl Gillan, Susan Elan Jones, Jeremy Lefroy, Ian Murray, Sir Mike Penning, Jim Shannon, Nick Smith and Tom Tugendhat. present the Bill.

Ann Clwyd accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed (Bill 386).

Opposition Day

[19TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Environment and Climate Change

Mr Speaker: I must inform the House that I have not selected either of the amendments.

1.47 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House declares an environment and climate emergency following the finding of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change that to avoid a more than 1.5°C rise in global warming, global emissions would need to fall by around 45 per cent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero by around 2050; recognises the devastating impact that volatile and extreme weather will have on UK food production, water availability, public health and through flooding and wildfire damage; notes that the UK is currently missing almost all of its biodiversity targets, with an alarming trend in species decline, and that cuts of 50 per cent to the funding of Natural England are counterproductive to tackling those problems; calls on the Government to increase the ambition of the UK's climate change targets under the Climate Change Act 2008 to achieve net zero emissions before 2050, to increase support for and set ambitious, short-term targets for the roll-out of renewable and low carbon energy and transport, and to move swiftly to capture economic opportunities and green jobs in the low carbon economy while managing risks for workers and communities currently reliant on carbon intensive sectors; and further calls on the Government to lay before the House within the next six months urgent proposals to restore the UK's natural environment and to deliver a circular, zero waste economy.

Today the House must declare an environment and climate emergency. We have no time to waste. We are living in a climate crisis that will spiral dangerously out of control unless we take rapid and dramatic action now. This is no longer about a distant future; we are talking about nothing less than the irreversible destruction of the environment within the lifetimes of Members.

Young people know this. They have the most to lose. A few weeks ago, like many other Members on both sides of the House, I was deeply moved to see the streets outside Parliament filled with colour and the noise of children chanting "Our planet, our future". For someone of my generation, it was inspiring but also humbling that children felt that they had to leave school to teach us adults a lesson. The truth is that they are ahead of the politicians on this, the most important issue of our time. We are witnessing an unprecedented upsurge of climate activism, with groups such as Extinction Rebellion forcing the politicians in this building to listen. For all the dismissive and offensive column inches that the protesters have provoked, they are a massive and, I believe, very necessary wake-up call. Today we have the opportunity to say, "We hear you."

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend's constituency neighbour, I congratulate him on, many years ago, giving up his vehicle and on using mainly his bicycle for years as an MP. *[Interruption.]*

Jeremy Corbyn: I fear that my hon. Friend has unwittingly provoked lots of strange thought processes among Conservative Members.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): At the opposite extreme to my right hon. Friend's bicycle, the largest source of carbon emissions in the country is of course Heathrow airport. Given that, is it not folly to be going ahead with a third runway at Heathrow? Would not it be a clear indication from the Secretary of State today if he said the Government were not pursuing that course?

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Obviously, aircraft emissions are one of the major problems we face in this country and all around the world. Like him and other colleagues, I was opposed to the expansion of Heathrow because I want to promote more surface transport in a more sustainable way, which is mainly on railways.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Change UK): I thank the right hon. Gentleman and fellow cyclist for giving way. Does he agree with the young people who are outside this building that it would be easier and better to tackle climate change if we remained full members of the European Union?

Jeremy Corbyn: I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), who represents an absolutely wonderful town where environment is at the core of the lives of many people. We are not here to debate the EU or Brexit, about which everyone will be very pleased, but I would say that, under any proposal from my party, we would import into the UK all the environmental regulations the EU has adopted, most of which are very good and progressive, although often they do not go far enough, and there would be a dynamic—

Mr Speaker: Order. I gently ask the right hon. Gentleman to face the House so we can all hear him.

Jeremy Corbyn: Mr Speaker, you are absolutely the last person I would want to be offensive to, so I apologise. We would ensure that there is a dynamic relationship with those regulations, so I am trying to please both sides at the present time—*[Interruption.]* Such is the joy of politics when we want to protect our environment.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): How the right hon. Gentleman is proceeding with his Brexit policy is interesting and will be noted outside this place. Does he agree that to beat climate change in this country and around the world we have to green our pension funds, banks and stock exchanges, decarbonise capitalism and drive trillions of dollars into the green clean energy investments that we need?

Jeremy Corbyn: The right hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. In a former life, I was a trade union organiser and negotiator. Even then we were discussing with the pension fund trustees how they would have environmentally sustainable investments and we would use that as a way of promoting green energy and such issues. I urge people, many millions of whom have shares in pension funds, to do exactly that.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I welcome that Labour is now following the Green party lead in calling for a climate emergency, but does the right hon. Gentleman agree that fossil fuel subsidies make a mockery of a climate emergency? We are one of the worst countries in Europe for giving subsidies to fossil fuel

[Caroline Lucas]

industry. Does he agree that it is not compatible with a climate-constrained economy to go on with these subsidies to fossil fuel companies?

Jeremy Corbyn: Indeed, what we need is a sustainable energy policy and I will come on to that. I obviously pay tribute to the hon. Lady for the work she has done on this. Often, she and I have been on exactly the same side on these issues of environmental sustainability.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn: I will give way a couple more times but then I ought to get on with my speech, or else the Speaker will tell me off because others want to speak.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): On that point about fossil fuels, does the right hon. Gentleman recognise what natural gas has done to decarbonise this country, reducing our levels to levels not seen since 1888? Does he also recognise that 280,000 jobs are supported by the oil and gas industry? Is he concerned about those 280,000 jobs?

Jeremy Corbyn: We want a sustainable energy policy in this country. I did not hear all of the hon. Gentleman's intervention as others were talking, but if he is talking about issues of fracking he knows perfectly well that this party is opposed to it because we want to see a more sustainable world and a sustainable environment.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the lack of urgency in the Government's own targets, which they acknowledge they need to meet? For example, by the time we meet the reducing plastic waste target, I will be 66. Why should it take a quarter of a century to achieve that change?

Jeremy Corbyn: The whole point of today's debate is to declare an emergency to focus the attention of all of us on the sheer urgency of the issue because it is not going to go away; it is going to get considerably worse unless we act and set an example to other nations to also act.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab) *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn: I give way to the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee.

Mary Creagh: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on declaring an environment and climate emergency. Did he see the report the Committee produced last week stating that, if we leave the EU, the watchdog the Government are currently proposing is toothless because it does not have the power to fine Government for breaches of air pollution, water quality and waste standards? Does he agree that that is a very big barrier for the Government to overcome?

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, the work her Committee does and the report it produced. The watchdog has to have all the teeth necessary to make sure the actions are taken. As I

pointed out in response to an earlier intervention, there has to be a dynamic relationship with European regulations in order to achieve that. I thank her for her work.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn: I am going to make some progress before giving way to some more colleagues.

I have been a Member of this House for 36 years. In that time I have observed something about this place that is glaringly obvious but seldom acknowledged: Parliament rarely leads change; it usually drags its feet—it is normally the last place to pick up on the major reforms that society is demanding. Think about the huge transformations in our society—workers' rights, women's rights and gay rights. The impetus has always come from outside—from social movements and communities—while Westminster is often the last place to understand that.

Let us not repeat that pattern. Let us respond to what a young generation is saying to us in raising the alarm. By becoming the first Parliament in the world to declare a climate emergency, we could, and I hope we do, set off a wave of actions from Parliaments and Governments all around the world. Surely if we lead by example and others follow, that would be the best possible answer to the all too common excuse we all hear on doorsteps: "Why should we act when others won't?"

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): This side of the Chamber was absolutely packed when my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) introduced the Bill to hardwire net zero into our economy. Where were the Opposition then?

Jeremy Corbyn: I am not entirely sure what point the hon. Lady is trying to make, but I am pleased she is here today and I look forward to hearing her contribution.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Public sentiment and Labour's position is clear: we must declare a climate emergency and legislate for net zero emissions. But the Government are procrastinating. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the political will to tackle climate change is there in the public and on these Opposition Benches but it is absolutely lacking on the Government Benches?

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Let us show today that the political will is here, in this Parliament, to declare the climate emergency, which we believe is necessary.

Let us work more closely with countries that are serious about ending the climate catastrophe, especially those at the sharp end of it, such as the small country of the Maldives, so vulnerable to rising sea levels. It told the UN climate talks last year:

"We are not prepared to die"

and implored countries to unite. Bangladesh's Foreign Minister recently warned of the "existential threat" posed by climate breakdown to the 160 million people of his country and urged others to adhere to their commitments under the Paris climate change agreement.

I attended the Paris conference in 2015 with my good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner). I thank him for his passion at that

conference, for his commitment to environmental sustainability and for the great work he did on forestry during the last Labour Government. It is a pleasure to work with him. He and the whole of the Labour party strongly support the UK's bid to host the UN climate change conference in 2020, and I really hope that that will happen. When it does, Members from across the House will have a chance to interact with those attending the conference.

Let us also make it clear to President Trump that he must re-engage with international climate agreements. We must also be absolutely clear-eyed about the Paris agreement: it is a huge and significant breakthrough, but it is not enough. If every country in the whole world meets its current pledges as per the Paris agreement, temperatures will still rise by 3° in this century. At that point, southern Europe, the horn of Africa, central America and the Caribbean will be in permanent drought. Major cities such as Miami and Rio de Janeiro would be lost to rising sea levels. At 4°, which is where we are all heading with the current rate of emissions, agricultural systems would be collapsing.

This is not just a climate change issue; it is a climate emergency. We are already experiencing the effects all around us. Here at home, our weather is becoming more extreme. The chief executive of the Environment Agency recently warned that we were looking into what he called the "jaws of death" and that we could run short of water within 25 years. At the same time, flash flooding is becoming more frequent. Anyone who has visited the scene of a flooded town or village knows the devastation that it brings to families. That was vividly brought home to me when I visited Cocker mouth after the 2015 floods, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman), who is doing such a brilliant job as shadow Environment Secretary. She first challenged the Government to declare a climate emergency a month ago.

Around the world, we are seeing ice caps melting, coral reefs dissolving, droughts in Africa, hurricanes in the Americas and wildfires in Australia. Cyclone Idai killed more than 900 people in south-east Africa, mainly in Mozambique, and affected 3 million more, only to be immediately followed by the current horrors of Cyclone Kenneth. The heating up of our climate is contributing to a terrifying loss of animal and plant species, but sadly, that is something that we are only just recognising. I remember joining and working with the World Wide Fund for Nature when I was at school. According to the WWF, humanity has wiped out 60% of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles since 1970—a year that many of us in this House can remember.

Earlier this year, the first global scientific review of its kind found that insects could become extinct within a century unless action was taken. Insects pollinate plants and keep the soil healthy. Without pollination and healthy soil there is no food, and without food there is no life. Meanwhile, there is far too much intensive farming. We are pumping far too many fertilisers into the earth, which is taking its toll on our soil. Soil degradation is a major issue, as anyone who reads the farming journals will be picking up on all the time. We are seeing the weakening of soil structures, and there is a need to strengthen them. More sustainable farming systems will lead in the longer run to better yields and less cost for pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers. The

Environment Secretary himself has warned that we have only 30 to 40 years left before our fertile soil is eradicated, so I hope he will support the motion today.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I agree with what the Leader of the Opposition said about President Trump. It is time that he re-engaged with the Paris agenda, and dare I say that that would be a good subject for after-dinner conversation? The right hon. Gentleman mentioned leading by example, and he is right that this country must do that even though we play only a small part in the overall global emissions. Should he become Prime Minister, where does he think coal should sit in the balanced energy policy of the future?

Jeremy Corbyn: We need to see a growth in renewable sources and green energy, and I am coming on to that in my speech. We also need to see a reduction in the use of fossil fuels.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way; I recognise that he has allowed a lot of interventions. We can all agree that there is an environmental and climate change emergency, and he is setting out some of the reasons that many of us—most of us, all of us—would agree with the motion, but is it not time for the House to stop scoring cheap political points and to start trying to find consensus? I ask him in all genuineness: if he is willing to sit down with others to try to find consensus on Brexit, is he willing to sit down with others to try to find consensus on something that is arguably far more profound—climate change?

Jeremy Corbyn: Last week, the leaders of the parties in Parliament, with the exception of the Prime Minister, attended a roundtable with a group of young people led by Greta Thunberg to discuss that very issue. Yes, I am very happy to sit down with anybody to discuss the issues of our environment and sustainability, and I invite the right hon. Lady to do exactly the same.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): On the subject of coal, does the right hon. Gentleman now regret the comments he made while he was seeking to become leader of his party in 2015, when he stated that he was in favour of reopening coalmines, and does he therefore deplore the recent decision to open a new coalmine in Cumbria?

Jeremy Corbyn: I do not regret any of the statements I made in the 2015 leadership campaign. I was talking then about the way in which the coalmining communities in south Wales had been so disgracefully treated by the Government that the right hon. Gentleman supports. On the question of the Cumbrian mine, yes there is an issue there, and there is also an issue about the supply of coal that will always be necessary for fuelling the blast furnaces in the steel industry. This is why I am talking about taking a balanced approach to energy that recognises the need for sustainable industry and for reducing emissions. None of this is easy, but we have to move in the right direction by reducing carbon dioxide emissions and creating a cleaner, more sustainable environment.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): I agree with my right hon. Friend on the ecological crisis that we are facing. I am hosting Chris Packham here in Parliament today, where he will meet parliamentarians. Will my

[Anna McMorris]

right hon. Friend join him and members of the Environmental Audit Committee in calling for a conservation audit to look at what is really going on out there with species biodiversity?

Jeremy Corbyn: I compliment my hon. Friend on her work. An audit like that would be an appropriate response to the debate we are having today. She is right to suggest that unless we examine biodiversity loss, particularly in areas of monocultural agriculture around the country, as well as in urban areas, we will not know just how serious the situation is, so I do support her proposal.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most disturbing aspects of this climate emergency is that some of the poorest people in the world live on the land that is closest to the rising sea levels? Anyone who is concerned about mass migration today should be truly worried about this crisis, because millions of those people are going to be travelling many miles to try to find a safe place with clean drinking water where they can make a home for themselves.

Jeremy Corbyn: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, and I shall come on to it in a moment. At the heart of the environment and climate emergency is the issue of justice, and it is those here and around the world who are least to blame for it who bear the burden and pay the highest cost. A 2015 study found that children living in our British inner-city areas can have their lung capacity reduced by up to 10% by air pollution on major roads. Of course, the situation is even more extreme for children growing up in densely populated urban areas in China and India. The pollution levels in many cities around the world are damaging children before they reach the age of five. Children should not have to pay with their health for our failure to clean up our toxic air.

Working-class communities suffer the worst effects of air pollution. Those who are least able to rebuild their lives after flooding will be hit hardest by rising food prices, while the better off, who are sometimes more responsible for emissions, can pay their way out of the trouble. Internationally, in a cruel twist of fate, it is the global south that faces the greatest devastation at the hands of drought and extreme weather, which fuel poverty and war and create refugees as people are forced to flee their homes. Some of the 65 million refugees in this world—not all, but some—are in reality climate refugees. They are paying the price of emissions that come not from the global south, but overwhelmingly from the global north and rapidly industrialising societies.

Sir David Attenborough recently said on his brilliant television programme:

“We now stand at a unique point in our planet’s history. One where we must all share responsibility both for our present wellbeing and for the future of life on Earth.”

That is the magnitude of what we are talking about. It is too late for tokenistic policies or gimmicks. We have to do more. Banning plastic is good and important, but individual action is not enough. We need a collective response that empowers people, instead of shaming them if they do not buy expensive recycled toilet paper

or drive the newest Toyota Prius. If we are to declare an emergency, it follows that radical and urgent action must be taken. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to avert the disastrous effects of warming greater than 1.5° C, global emissions must fall by about 45% by 2030 to reach net zero by 2050 at the absolute latest. It is a massive demand and it is a massive ask, and it will not happen by itself.

We are going to have to free ourselves from some of the harmful beliefs that have characterised our thinking for too long. The hidden hand of the market will not save us, and technological solutions will not magically appear out of nowhere. An emergency of this magnitude requires large-scale Government intervention to kick-start industries, to direct investment and to boost research and development in the green technologies of the future, and that is not a burden.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on leading on this debate. Does he agree that the last Labour Government created a consensus on this issue under the Climate Change Act 2008, which was so ably led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), and that that consensus included the need to work together not just in this country, but with our international partners? Will he join me in congratulating the Welsh Labour Government on declaring a climate emergency earlier this week?

Jeremy Corbyn: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I will come on to the work done by the previous Labour Government, which did so much to try and bring about awareness of the climate emergency. We have the chance to bring new manufacturing and engineering jobs to places that have never recovered from the destruction of our industries in the early 1980s. We need a green industrial revolution with huge investments in new technologies and green industries.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is correct to declare a climate emergency and a broader environment emergency. He talks about radical action, and one action that we need to take is to protect the world’s forests. After transport, deforestation is the second biggest source of emissions. We are destroying around 20 million acres—a mind-boggling amount—every single year, and billions of people depend directly on forests for their livelihoods. So, from the point of view of biodiversity, humanitarianism and climate change, protecting the forests must surely be a No. 1 priority for any Government.

Jeremy Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman is right that that must be a high priority. I will be coming on to it towards the end of my speech, but he is correct that forests not only sustain a high level of biodiversity, but are a huge source of carbon capture, locking it up within the trees themselves.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful speech about the need to address climate change. Does he agree that if the Government were really committed to tackling climate change, they would not be investing in fracking? Instead, they would be investing in renewable energy sources, such as tidal energy and solar, that would help areas such as mine in the north-east.

Jeremy Corbyn: Indeed. My hon. Friend knows my views on that. I attended a public meeting in a village in Derbyshire to discuss fracking, and I was impressed by the fact that all the people there were determined to improve their environment and wanted a form of energy generation that is more sustainable than fracking. They were worried about the dangers of pollution levels in groundwater and other issues, so I thank her for that intervention.

Historically, the industry that changed Britain was coal. Coal powered the first industrial revolution in Britain, but that was done on the backs of the working class at the expense of our environment. The green industrial revolution will unwind those injustices, harness manufacturing to avert climate breakdown, and provide well-paid, good-skilled and secure jobs. Imagine former coalfield areas becoming the new centres of development of battery and energy storage. Towns such as Swindon, which proudly made locomotives, could become hubs for building a next generation of high-speed trains. Shipbuilding areas that were once the heart of an industry that is now diversified around the world could gain a new impetus in developing offshore wind turbines and all the technology that goes with them.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) for her great work on the green industrial revolution and Labour's plan, which will create hundreds of thousands of jobs in renewable energy. The solution to the crisis is to reprogram our economy so it that works in the interests of people and the planet. That means publicly owned energy and water companies with a mandate to protect the environment instead of just seeking profit. It means redesigning public agricultural funding to benefit local business and sustainable farming that supports biodiversity, plant life and wildlife. It also means not unnecessarily flying basic products across the globe when they could be transported in a more sustainable way.

The solution means funding home insulation schemes, particularly where there are poor-quality homes—especially in the private rented sector—and I pay tribute to the work done on retrofitting homes. When I visited the University of Salford with my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South, I saw the work being done on the efficient conversion of back-to-back terraced houses into sustainable homes with energy efficiency. That means investing in bus routes, cycle routes and infrastructure, and reopening railway lines and improving railways in public ownership, so that people can travel quickly and cheaply, and not necessarily by car.

The solution also means big investments, such as the Swansea bay tidal lagoon, and not prioritising fracking, which rides roughshod over local communities and damages our climate. It means planting trees to improve air quality and prevent flooding. It means expanding our beautiful forests, which absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and provide habitats for wildlife. Sadly, the United Kingdom has some of the lowest levels of forest cover in Europe. It has expanded somewhat, but it needs to grow a lot faster. We must support tree planting initiatives, such as those in Leicester and Milton Keynes, and the brilliant initiative of the national forest in Leicestershire. It is exciting to think about all the opportunities we will have, if we take them. However, if Natural England's funding is slashed in half, we will see how austerity and cutting of funds reduce our ability to act.

Internationally, we must ensure that our defence and diplomatic capacity are capable of responding quickly and effectively to climate disasters around the world. We must take serious steps on debt relief and cancellation to deal with the injustice of countries trying to recover from climate crises they did not create while, at the same time, struggling to pay massive international debts. The debt burden makes it even harder for them to deal with the crisis they are facing. In our aid policy, we need to end support for fossil fuel projects in the global south.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful point about the importance of justice. On Monday, I went to meet year 4 at the Milford Academy in my constituency because they had written on their concerns about deforestation in the Amazon rain forest. Is it not vital that we listen to the views of young people? They are the ones who will be hardest hit if we fail to act, and are they not right to call on us here today to commit to action to protect their future?

Jeremy Corbyn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The message is that we need to do far more in this country, but we also need to carry that message elsewhere. I cannot be the only person in this House who is very disappointed by the statements made by President Bolsonaro of Brazil concerning the future of the Amazon rain forest. It is a precious asset for the people of Brazil, as well as something necessary for the whole world. We will be in danger of forcing into extinction species that we have never even discovered, and that is exactly what is happening at the present time. It means that a creative thought process is needed in our international relations.

The last Labour Government brought in some of the most ambitious legislation in the world with the Climate Change Act 2008, and I pay a special thank you and tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and others who brought it in. They did incredible work to ensure it happened, and I remember my right hon. Friend's work at the Copenhagen conference in 2009 when the UK was given a prime seat in the negotiations because we had genuine respect on this issue due to the Climate Change Act he had piloted through Parliament.

Since then, I am sorry to say, we have fallen behind. Conservative Members will boast that the UK is reducing carbon emissions, but I have to tell them it is too slow. At the current rate, we will not reach zero emissions until the end of the century, more than 50 years too late. By that time, our grandchildren will be fighting for survival on a dying planet.

The point that Greta Thunberg made to me and others when we met her last week is that we should listen to the science, which is an impressive thing for her to say on behalf of all the young people she works with and speaks for. The IPCC has said:

"Limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society".

The IPCC has also said that such action is urgent.

The science says this is an emergency, but an emergency does not have to be a catastrophe. We could use it as an opportunity to rebuild our economy so that it works for the many, not the few. This is not a time to allow despair to take over, but a time for action. We can do this.

[Jeremy Corbyn]

The Government can improve the lives of our people while defending our natural world. What we do in this country can have an impact around the globe.

Let us embrace hope. The children in schools get it. They get it right away. They grasp the threat to their own future and, in fact, they want to be taught more about it as part of the curriculum and their normal school day. Are we to be content to hand down a broken planet to our children? That is the question we must ask ourselves today. We have a chance to act before it is too late, and it is a chance that will not be available to succeeding generations. It is our historic duty to take it.

I urge Members to support the motion before the House today.

2.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): I begin by thanking the Leader of the Opposition for choosing today's motion, which provides us all with an opportunity to affirm our commitment to do more to deal with the challenge of climate change and to enhance our degraded environment.

I also begin by sending a message to the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), who, because of unfortunate family circumstances and a close family member's illness, cannot be here today. I am sure we all want to send her and her family our very best wishes. The Prime Minister cannot be here for this debate, as she very much wanted to be, because she is appearing before the Liaison Committee.

It is important to acknowledge that, across this House and outside it, there are many political figures and political leaders who have played a part in raising awareness of the challenge of climate change and in making it clear that we must do more. I am very happy to associate myself with the Leader of the Opposition's remarks in thanking the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) who, as Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, was influential at Copenhagen in helping to raise ambitions worldwide. His Climate Change Act 2008, which was supported by both sides of the House, ensured that we as a country had, at the time, the most ambitious approach towards climate change ever.

I also thank the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey). We served together in the coalition Government, in which he was Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. Although we did not always agree on everything, I put on record my admiration for the way in which he approached all these issues in a balanced, mature and reformist fashion.

Although it is rare that I have good words to say in this House about the Scottish Government overall, I have to say that Roseanna Cunningham, the Scottish Environment Minister, has shown leadership on this issue. Although we may have our differences, it is only fair to record that Roseanna's voice has been a strong and powerful one for the environment, as indeed has that of Lesley Griffiths in the Welsh Assembly.

The environment belongs to us all, and the cause of climate change is a fight that unites us. All of us in this House have a common humanity that we need to defend.

Sir Edward Davey: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his words. From my experience in government of two and a half years of negotiating on climate change with the European Union, Britain managed to ensure that 27 other countries raised their ambitions to our level. We managed to have leadership at the EU; we influenced America and China; and we influenced the Paris climate change treaty to make it far more ambitious than anyone expected at the time because we were at the European Union table and were able to lead on climate change. Does he realise that, by leaving that table, our influence on this critical issue for our world is being dramatically reduced?

Michael Gove: I repeat my gratitude to the right hon. Gentleman for all the work he did. There are a number of multilateral institutions through which we work, and this Government are committed—I am grateful for the Opposition's support—to bringing the conference of parties on climate change to London in 2020, to ensure that this country can build on the achievements that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd) helped to secure at Paris and so we ensure that Britain can show global leadership on the environment and climate change.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that he and I were on different sides in the referendum, but does he agree that it was deeply frustrating, as Environment Ministers, to have to sit in EU co-ordination meetings lowering the standards and ambitions of the United Kingdom Government to reach a single point of agreement? It is not a binary issue. Britain has a very ambitious international commitment, and I found myself constantly having to lower those ambitions to maintain one point of agreement.

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend knows how important it is to negotiate hard in every international forum, but he also knows, as a former Minister who is committed to the environment and who supported remaining in the European Union, that there are committed environmentalists who are strongly in favour of our membership of the European Union and committed environmentalists who welcome our departure. Nobody could say that my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) or Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb are, in any way, anything other than sincere campaigners for environmental enhancement, and they both feel—I think this is completely open to debate—that we can achieve those goals as effectively, if not better, outside the European Union.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: I want to make a little progress. I will take more interventions.

I welcome the opportunity of this debate, and I welcome the support provided by Members on both sides of the House. I make it clear that the Government recognise the situation we face is an emergency. It is a crisis, and it is a threat that we must all unite to meet. The first British politician—in fact, the first world politician—to make it clear that climate change was an emergency was Margaret Thatcher. She was a Conservative and a Christian who believed in the principle of stewardship, but above all she was a scientist who followed the evidence. From Margaret Thatcher at the United Nations

to Michael Howard at Rio and the achievements of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye at Paris, there has been a green thread of ambition running through Conservative Governments. That is why in assessing what needs to be done, it is important that we take proper account of what has been done. We must acknowledge our mistakes, but we must also recognise achievements across parties.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: With that, I am happy to give way to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas).

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. His words are honeyed, as ever, but we need action, not just words. Last week, Greta Thunberg talked about the emergency and said that we needed action. Will the Secretary of State demonstrate his new-found conversion to this emergency by agreeing that the expansion of Heathrow airport is quite simply incompatible with our climate change commitments? If that goes ahead, aviation could, if it is given a blank cheque, be using up two fifths of our total carbon budget by 2050.

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady makes an important point. She talks about honeyed words, and of course one thing that the Government have done is to take action under our pollinator strategy to ensure that honey is produced in a more sustainable fashion. I am very happy to see more bees and other pollinators taking flight.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: I want to make a little bit more progress. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) for the speech that he gave yesterday, as was mentioned earlier in the debate.

Caroline Lucas: Answer the question, Mr Gove.

Michael Gove: I am. My hon. Friend laid out what the consequences will be if we do not collectively take action. To be fair to the Leader of the Opposition, so did he.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: I will not give way at this stage; I will do so shortly. *[Interruption.]* No. I mean no disrespect, but I must make progress. I cannot answer the previous question—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. The Secretary of State is trying to make progress.

Michael Gove: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will give way to colleagues from all parts of the House in a moment, but I must develop my argument. It is important that everything that the Government have done and need to do is properly analysed in this House.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham pointed out, five of the warmest years that this planet has ever endured have happened since 2010. The consequences for us all are visible, and they have been recorded by

Members from across the House. We have wildfires in the Arctic, the Ross ice shelf is reducing in size at a greater rate than anyone anticipated and glaciers are in retreat across Europe and in the Tibetan plateau. Those things are all evidence of the impact of climate change. Although statistics are sometimes abstract and the impact may seem distant, as individual citizens and as parents we all know that the next generation will face the consequences if we do not take action now to deal with climate change.

A warming world will result in the desertification of large parts of our Earth; our Foreign Secretary is speaking today in the Sahel about the action that we are taking to deal with that. As has been mentioned, the transformation of previously fertile lands into lands that are incapable of generating food will result in population movement, which will create challenges—as the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out, not just a security challenge for the global north, but a moral and ethical challenge for us all.

We in the United Kingdom must bear that moral and ethical challenge particularly heavily. We were the first country to industrialise, and the industrial revolution that was forged here and generated prosperity here was responsible for the carbon emissions that have driven global warming. The burden of that is borne, even now, by those in the global south, so we have a responsibility to show leadership. It is vital that we reduce our emissions, for the defence and protection of those in small island developing states who face the prospect of coastal erosion and damage to their economies. That is why the Government are committed to spending £5 billion every year on helping developing nations to deal with the prospect of climate change.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: I am now happy to give way, and I will do so first to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker).

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and his ministerial team for their leadership on chalk streams. This country has 85% of the world's chalk streams, many of which are in my constituency and are degraded. The Secretary of State recognises that, so may I urge him to bring forward the Abingdon reservoir plan as soon as possible?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Biodiversity is declining precipitately not just in chalk streams, but in Scotland's salmon rivers, and we need to take action. We need to work with water companies, landowners and farmers to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to restore our rivers to health, for the sake not only of recreational anglers but of all who believe in biodiversity.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: In fairness, I must give way to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), who has been seeking to intervene from the start.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): I am grateful to the Secretary of State. Ten years ago, I helped to form Cool Earth, which is brilliantly run by Matthew Owen. We are a tiny non-governmental organisation that protects

[Frank Field]

more rainforests than any other NGO, whatever its size. When we go to the Department for International Development, we are told that we cannot have any money because we ask for too little. Will the Secretary of State put a rocket up DFID?

Michael Gove: A rocket might require too much fossil fuel to have the desired effect. The right hon. Gentleman makes a serious point, however. We work collectively across the Government. On the morning of 7 May, I will be meeting the Secretaries of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and for International Development and the Foreign Secretary to raise that issue.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: I want to be fair to Scottish National party colleagues, so I am happy to give way to the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil).

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. He is slowly signing up to the talk of a climate emergency. In my constituency, the UK's carbon footprint could be given major help by the inclusion of a 600 MW interconnector to the mainland from the best wind resource in Europe. At the moment, Ofgem is talking about a 450 MW interconnector, but for 4p more for the average bill payer, we could do a lot for the UK's carbon footprint. Will he stamp on Ofgem and make sure that, when it talks about consumer concerns, it is talking about consumers' environment rather than a tawdry 4p on bills?

Michael Gove: That is a fair point, effectively made. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is ultimately a decision for National Grid—[*Interruption*—]and Ofgem; forgive me. We should all take account of the fact that Scotland has contributed to the significant growth in renewables across the United Kingdom. Offshore wind and solar have grown over the past seven years. Yes, that has been led by a Conservative Government—or a coalition Government, for some of the time—in London, but the Scottish Government have played their part.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: In that spirit, I am very happy to give way to the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald).

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for allowing me to intervene. I want to take him back to security. There are many teeth in the dangerous maw that is climate change, and security does not get enough attention. Between DFID, the Ministry of Defence and perhaps the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, will the Government at some point publish an analysis of how the global security effects of climate change affect the UK, and what part the UK sees itself playing?

Michael Gove: That is a fair point, and I will take it forward. In advance of our preparations for COP 26 at the end of 2020, I will ensure that we include in our deliberations the dimension of security, which I know is close to the hon. Gentleman's heart.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: I must allow my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park to intervene, after which I will take an intervention from the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) and then make some progress.

Zac Goldsmith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that part of any new deal for nature—it has been much discussed, and I hope it will be discussed again today—should be a significant shift in DFID's spending such that a much greater proportion of its money is spent on protecting and restoring the natural world, as a means of preventing base poverty and alleviating poverty?

Michael Gove: I could not agree more, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development believes that as well. One of the best ways to safeguard the environment is to support people towards sustainable growth. Projects such as the Darwin initiative have shown the way in making sure that we can provide people with dignity and the chance to flourish economically, while at the same time safeguarding and enhancing valuable habitats.

Anna McMorrin: The Secretary of State speaks with his characteristically warm words, but words are not followed by action across the Government. Subsidies are being cut from onshore wind and solar, while VAT on solar has been increased. We need to see real action across every single Department and a responsibility on every single Minister to cut carbon.

Michael Gove: I absolutely agree that we need action. I thank the hon. Lady for her work, because before she joined us in the House, she played a distinguished role in Welsh politics, making sure that the environment was at the heart of the agenda for the Welsh Assembly Government.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: I have taken some interventions and I will take some more, but first I want to make some points, particularly in response to the hon. Lady's question. She asked about action, and that is legitimate. Let me be clear: in the UK, since 2010, we have decarbonised our economy faster than any other G20 nation; between 2010 and 2018, we reduced greenhouse gas emissions in this country by 25%; UK CO₂ emissions have fallen for six years in a row, which is the longest period on record; and the UK's renewable energy capacity has quadrupled since 2010. The proportion of UK electricity that comes from low-carbon sources increased from 19% in 2010 to almost 53% in 2018, which meant that 2018 was a record year for renewable energy; over the past year, we have generated record levels of solar and offshore wind energy; and annual support from the Government for renewables will be more than £10 billion by 2021. All that has come as a direct result of a shared ambition, with a Government who set stretching targets and are prepared to intervene where necessary, but who recognise that we need the ingenuity and enterprise of the private sector working in partnership with the Government to deliver change.

I stress that safeguarding our environment must not come at the cost of ending economic growth, because economic growth is vital to spur the innovation and

secure the investment to make sure that we have the technological breakthroughs that can safeguard our environment. Since 1990, under Governments of different parties, we have seen a 40% overall reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, and we have also seen a two-thirds increase in growth. If we think in particular about the significant growth in renewables, of course solar energy initially needed subsidy to kick-start it, but as solar energy costs have diminished, so the need for subsidy is, as any economist would tell the House, lesser. This is no criticism of any previous Government, but when we came into power, only 38.3 MW of power in this country was generated by solar; now, the amount is 13,000 MW, which is 13 GW. That is a 99% increase in solar power generation under Conservative Ministers.

Now, is there more to do? I do not deny that there is more to do. Should we be more ambitious? We have to be more ambitious. The story is sometimes told of the past nine years as nine years in which we allowed the grass to grow under our feet; no, we allowed a thousand flowers to flourish to ensure that our environment was safeguarded.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I am sorry to make a Thatcherite point—I know Thatcherism does not go down very well nowadays—but will my right hon. Friend confirm that the best way to reduce emissions is to have a vigorous, free-enterprise, low-tax, deregulated economy, and that the countries with the worst records are socialist command economies, particularly in eastern Europe?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend makes a good point. It is no coincidence that it was Margaret Thatcher, a scientist and a free-marketeer, who was the first to raise the alarm on climate change, and it is no coincidence that the record of environmental devastation in the eastern bloc when we had command-and-control economies shamed the world.

This is not a party political point; it is merely an observation that the command-and-control economy in Venezuela has not only beggared its own people and made profligate use of hydrocarbons in a way that has led to environmental degradation, but socialism has trumped the environment as a cause, so their contribution to animal welfare has been having to open a zoo to allow people to eat the wild animals. The truth is that the fundamentalist socialism that we have seen in Venezuela and the heedless selfishness exhibited by some other political leaders in other parts of the world are twin dangers. We need to face them down. Whether it is Bolsonaro in Brazil or Maduro in Venezuela, we need to say to those who do not put their people and their environment first, “We’re on your case. Free markets, free individuals and an Earth free of pollution are what people deserve.”

Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): Earlier, my right hon. Friend referred to the wonderful work that the UK is doing on the environment, and he has just mentioned other countries. Will he tell the House a bit about what pressure we are putting on other countries to play their part, because this really has to be a global effort?

Michael Gove: I hope I might have the opportunity to make it clear to the President of the United States when he comes here, perhaps over dinner—I will probably opt

for a meat-free option on that evening—that as the world’s biggest polluter, he has to take responsibility. When it comes to the environment, I am ideologically colour blind: whether people come from blue states or red states, or from blue parties or red parties, the key question is, “Are you acting?” If they are acting, I will applaud.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way to a Member from the yellow party. He has spoken at length about his environmental credentials and what the Government are doing on the environment, but will he tell me why the Government are not supporting my Nappies (Environmental Standards) Bill?

Michael Gove: I have had the opportunity to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss his Bill, and we are looking into whether we can use the extended producer responsibility scheme to cover the initiative that he asks about. I am grateful to him for raising that point, because his proposed legislation draws attention to a defect, but I am not sure that it is absolutely quite right. I am happy to work with him to bring about change.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): The Secretary of State has talked about flowers and about honey; does he agree that although we talk a good game in Parliament, the parliamentary estate is an appalling environment for our pollinators? Through him, may I invite every MP present to join me in two weeks at the all-party group on bees and pollinators, where we are going to see a mock-up of what it would be like if we turned Cromwell Green into a wild-flower meadow and hosted a beehive that MPs could manage, thereby doing more than just talking?

Michael Gove: I absolutely agree. Of course, at DEFRA we have a beehive on our roof. Everyone can play their part.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): My right hon. Friend has been making points about national and international leadership, but we can all do more, including local councils. He will be aware that Conservative councils recycle or reduce waste by more than twice as much as Labour councils. Will he congratulate in particular North Kesteven District Council in my constituency, which has reduced its carbon footprint by almost 70% in the past 10 years?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a good point—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: I will not give way for another few minutes.

I am happy to congratulate North Kesteven District Council on its exemplary leadership. Of course, at local government level throughout the country there are leaders from all parties—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Although he is speaking quite audibly, I cannot hear the Secretary of State because there is so much noise. I thought people wanted to hear his answers to their questions.

Michael Gove: I am grateful for your help, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will give way again, but not for a few moments.

I wish to place on record my thanks to everyone in local government who contributes to improving recycling. We still need to do much more, which is why in the forthcoming environment Bill we will put into effect some of the changes that our waste and resources strategy talks about, to ensure that we have uniform levels of recycling throughout the country and that we extend the extended producer responsibility scheme. It is a fact that overall, pound for pound, kilo for kilo, Conservative councils have a better recycling record than Labour councils, but I am more than happy to acknowledge—

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Michael Gove: No.

I am more than happy to acknowledge that there are individual Labour councils that do well and from which we can learn.

I said that we need to do more as a nation, which is why I am looking forward to the publication tomorrow of the report by the Committee on Climate Change, which was originally established by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). The programme of carbon budgets that the committee has set has enabled us to make significant progress so far in the meeting of our obligations to the earth, but we all know that we need to do more.

Last October, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change made it clear that the Paris target of a 2°C temperature rise was, as the science showed, not ambitious enough and that we need to ensure that we slow the rate of greenhouse gas emissions and hopefully achieve net zero in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. After that IPCC report, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Business, immediately commissioned the Climate Change Committee to tell us what we as a Government and as a society should do to meet that target. That level of ambition was endorsed by a range of different organisations, from the NFU, which says that we should try to have net zero in agriculture by 2040, to companies such as Tesco, our biggest single retailer, which have also committed to the net zero target. That is why I am delighted that, today, the Leader of the Opposition has also joined this Government, the NFU and Tesco in committing to net zero by 2050. As they say, every little helps.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: I will not give way for a second.

One thing I want to emphasise is that actions and a higher level of ambitions count, but when people across this House say that this situation is an emergency, we need to look at the record. I am very happy for our record to be looked at and for criticisms to be made. Since I became Environment Secretary nearly two years ago, the Leader of the Opposition has not used a single Opposition Day to debate climate change or the environment until today. He has not asked a single question—not one—of the Prime Minister about climate change or the environment, despite more than 400 opportunities to do so. When climate change protesters

went to his own home in order, literally, to bring home the scale of the challenge that we face, he was not able to stop and talk to them on that occasion. The point that I make is not that we should doubt the sincerity of the right hon. Gentleman, but rather that if we believe that this is an emergency, as one of my colleagues pointed out earlier, we should not try to say that any one party in this House has a monopoly of virtue. Let us try to ensure that we have a civilised debate that combines a sense of urgency about the challenge in front of us and a determination to take action in the future. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order! This is like a primary school class—I am sorry I mean no insult to primary school children. Is the Secretary of State taking an intervention?

Michael Gove *indicated assent.*

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): As we are talking about cross-party consensus, let me say that things are moving very fast in this debate. Whatever has been said about fracking in the past, it is not a transition fuel, but a fossil fuel. We should stop any new investment in any new technology that is based on fossil fuel. We must stop it. Will his Government finally commit to stop their support of fracking?

Michael Gove: I completely understand where the hon. Lady is coming from, but one thing that we all must acknowledge is that, as we strive to meet more ambitious targets for emissions, hydrocarbons will be part of that mix. To be fair to the Leader of the Opposition, he has acknowledged that coal—high-quality coal—can be part of the mix when it comes to, for example, steel production. There is a legitimate argument across this House about the pace at which we should reduce our reliance on coal, and no Government have gone faster to reduce our reliance on coal, the single most polluting hydrocarbon than this Government. When it comes to other hydrocarbons, in the mix, we know—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but we have been told that we should listen to the science. We know that gas is a less polluting hydrocarbon. If we can move from coal to gas, then, overall, we reduce the level of pollution. Ultimately, we want to move as fast as possible to incentivising and generating more of our energy from renewables, which is what we have done.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: I will not give way.

The key thing that everyone across this House has to recognise—and to be fair to the Leader of the Opposition, he has recognised it—is that if we want to make progress and we want to have a higher level of ambition, we need to be realistic about what those trade-offs are, and we need to ensure that, where appropriate, gas can be part of the energy mix. It is a diminishing part, but it will be a part for the foreseeable future.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: I am not giving way at the moment.

It is also important, as the right hon. Gentleman pointed out, that we not only take action on energy, decarbonise our economy and recognise the global challenge

that climate change presents, but do everything we can in our own country to adapt and to mitigate the effects of climate change. That is why this Government are committed to the planting of 11 million new trees. That is why the Countryside Stewardship and Woodland Carbon Fund has been created—to ensure that we reforest this country, which, as the right hon. Gentleman fairly pointed out, is one of the least forested in Europe.

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Michael Gove: I will not give way at this stage.

We are lucky in this country to have a concentration of blanket bog and peatland, one of the most effective carbon stores in the world, and this Government are committed to restoring more than 6,000 hectares of peatland to a state where they can play their role in acting as a carbon sink. All of these steps are part of the 25-year environment plan, which is intended to ensure that, for the first time, we hand on to the next generation a restored environment. I am talking about more trees planted, more habitats restored to good or better status, more investment in clean air and water and, above all, more investment in making sure that the organic content of our soil is improved—a critical measure not just in improving fertility for future food production, but for dealing with carbon.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): The Secretary of State could not avoid giving way on the subject of soil. It saddens me—and I agree with what was said earlier—that this issue is being made into some kind of political football. It has been about not only the words, but, as he has demonstrated, the policies. Getting the policies right is the game changer. One of our game-changing policies is our clean growth strategy. Does he agree that that is the direction in which we have to go to really change minds and industry?

Michael Gove: There are few people who are more passionate about the environment than my hon. Friend, and she is absolutely right. The clean growth strategy shows, as we discussed earlier, how we can combine the decarbonisation of our economy with the creation of new jobs. There are hundreds of thousands of jobs in our country that are part of clean energy generation and carbon capture, and that is the way to go.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Michael Gove: With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do want to take a number of interventions to ensure that Members across the House can make their points, but then I shall not take any more, because this debate is heavily oversubscribed and I want everyone to have the chance to speak. On that basis—and I will seek to be quick—I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston).

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): My right hon. Friend has mentioned several times the importance of handing on to future generations. To that end, is he as impressed as I am, when we go round schools in our constituencies, at the level of concern and awareness about environmental issues and climate change? Can we praise all those who have helped to educate our young children to be aware of these issues, including some TV programme makers, who play a part in educating our young people?

Michael Gove: I absolutely agree. The role of many broadcasters, not least the BBC, has been inspirational. On Friday, I enjoyed the opportunity to visit Tytherington School in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley), where an incredibly impressive group of year 8 and year 9 children showed how they are combining enterprise by operating their own new company and making sure that recycling and renewables are at the heart of economic growth.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman spoke earlier about leadership. Will he celebrate with me the Labour council of Kirklees, which, in January, had already declared a climate change emergency? Does he agree that, as we have so much consensus, we could declare an emergency today and all go back to our constituencies and start campaigning? We cannot be on the wrong side of history in this regard.

Michael Gove: I agree with the hon. Lady that a high level of ambition on the part of local government is absolutely right, but the key question is not whether we declare an emergency—that is only one part of it—but whether we act. It is actions, not words, that count. Throughout this debate—I applaud the Leader of the Opposition for calling it—we have heard again and again about the series of actions being undertaken by this Government and about the series of actions that we intend to undertake, which show how seriously we are taking this. That is the real test.

Andrew Griffiths: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. I know that he, like me, will be celebrating Staffordshire Day today and praising the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust for the work it does to protect our environment. May I draw his attention to the fact that we have just gone through the longest period of coal-free electricity production since the industrial revolution? That is action by this Government.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That happened on Easter weekend. Let me also say that the beautiful Staffordshire moorlands contain some of the peatland and heathland that is such a valuable resource in so many ways.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Michael Gove: I will not give way to everyone—just a few more. Then I will make some progress.

Mary Creagh: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way, and I welcome the change in his party's policy on the forests, which—let us not forget—the Government planned to sell back in 2011. Does he share my concern that the country is currently set to miss its fourth and fifth carbon budgets? Does he also agree that the next spending review conducted by the Treasury has to set out how not just the economy but the entire Government purchasing processes and policies have to achieve net zero—that it should be a net zero spending review?

Michael Gove: Makes sense to me.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): As we produce a new agriculture and environment policy, we can plant a lot of trees along banks to mitigate flooding

[*Neil Parish*]

while improving our environment and having great food at the same time. I very much welcome the policies that the Secretary of State is bringing forward.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have to recognise the vital role that farmers and growers play—not just in providing us with food, but in ensuring that our countryside is beautiful and that we are fighting climate change. I particularly thank the leader of the National Farmers Union, Minette Batters, who has committed the NFU to having net zero agriculture by 2040. She is a fantastic champion not only for British food, but for our environment.

Chris Bryant: Home energy conservation is going to be vital if we are to achieve these goals. Many of the poorest households in the land unfortunately live in homes that are very difficult to insulate through traditional means. Is it not time that we introduced a new scheme that makes it possible for people like my constituents to do their bit?

Michael Gove: I absolutely take the hon. Gentleman's point. We must ensure that new construction meets high standards not just in carbon emissions but in the provision of domestic heat. He is right that we need to look at retrofitting existing housing, particularly in some of the poorer areas of the country and in areas such as the hon. Gentleman's constituency, where the case is most pressing.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in praising the Woodland Trust for the work that it is doing on the proposed 50 million tree northern forest, and the Forestry Commission, which grows all the trees in my constituency?

Michael Gove: I am hugely grateful for the national forest, which has taken former industrial areas in Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Leicestershire and rendered them even more beautiful. The Woodland Trust has been inspirational in Cheshire and areas of the northern forest, which we are planning to develop from Liverpool to Hull. Although the Forestry Commission does not always get everything right, I am more than happy to endorse and celebrate its work in Northumberland and Cumbria.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: I can only really give way a couple more times.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I am most grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. He mentioned peatlands, but 80% of our peatlands are damaged, and this accounts for 10% of our carbon dioxide emissions. Will he therefore explain why the Government are only putting £6 million a year into peatland restoration?

Michael Gove: It is actually £10 million.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. As he spoke about the regional aspects of the issue, may I ask him to work more closely with his colleague who is currently in the Sahel? There are areas of land, such as Vietnam, with paddy fields that are only about 1 metre above sea level. We are talking about the possible salination of

agricultural area, and the consequent massive population movements caused by climate change. I very much welcome the efforts that the Secretary of State is making domestically, but how much is he doing with the embassy network around the world?

Michael Gove: All posts recognise the vital role that the UK has to play in ensuring that we deal with environmental and climate change challenges. Whether that means ensuring that we halt deforestation in Indonesia or that we deal effectively with the challenges of climate change in Vietnam or Bangladesh, we deploy our international development money and our overseas development assistance with exactly that goal. Is there more that we can do in the future? Absolutely, but as my hon. Friend pointed out—and as the Foreign Secretary is making clear today in the Sahel—this is an area where our moral responsibility for the world's poorest, our own interest in global security and our debt to the next generation coincide.

I want to conclude simply by saying that there will be an opportunity in the environment Bill that we intend to bring before the House shortly—the first environment Bill for many years, a flagship measure—for Members across the House to work together to ensure that we have the highest standards of environmental protection. I have been grateful for the work undertaken by the Chair of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee to ensure that the Bill is improved. I have never seen a Bill come to this House that has not benefited from scrutiny, improvement and enhancement along the way.

The way in which the Bill will mark a step change in how this country tackles the twin challenges of climate change and our broader ecological degradation is a test for us all. Will we approach it in a spirit of constructive but determined energy? Will we use that legislation to say that we will all work together, as we worked together across parties in 2008 when the Climate Change Act was introduced, to demonstrate that Britain—the country that was responsible for the first industrial revolution—is powering a new green revolution?

The responsibility rests on us all to be honest and gracious about the achievements of other parties, as I was earlier about the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Environment Minister. But it is also incumbent on us all to recognise that, if we really believe that we face an emergency and a crisis, we should do as our forefathers did when this country faced emergencies and crises in 1914 and in 1940. We put aside partisanship, we recognised the sincerity on the other side and we acknowledged that both sides had made mistakes, but we had a shared ambition to prove that Britain could lead. We have led in the past in defence of freedom. Let us lead now in defence of our planet.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I think it only fair to warn hon. Members that I have indications that some 84 people wish to speak this afternoon. There will therefore be a time limit of five minutes initially, although that is likely to become three minutes later. Hon. Members might wish to reconsider their long speeches in the light of that information.

3.7 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): May I just say that it is about bloody time? Grave warnings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have been ignored by too many Governments and parliamentarians for far too long. Greenwashing and tinkering have been the order of the day. We have had Prime Ministers stating that they would run the greenest Government in history and saying, "Vote blue, get green." We have had Ministers jetting around the globe to attend summits on how to address climate change. We have had sombre words and much head-shaking as hands were wrung and crocodiles asked for their tears back. Then, last week, a 16-year-old girl came here—an extremely impressive 16-year-old girl—and she was fawned over by some people who were anxious for some reflected glory. Suddenly, people are running around trying to look worried about this issue.

I should clarify that there have always been some voices that have been raised and that have carried warnings in this place and in others for some time. There are people who warmed these Benches warning about global warming when it was less than fashionable to do so. Some were labelled cranks and crackpots, but they picked up those names and carried on, because the issue was so important. Those people have sat on Government Benches and Opposition Benches. Most will not now be remembered, and that will be okay by them. I am glad that the Secretary of State paid tribute to Roseanna Cunningham, who is now the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform in the Scottish Government. She was one such toiler. She suffered her time here as a Member in the 1990s, and she still rants about how hard she found it to get anyone to really listen to what needed to be done—not just to appear to be listening, nor to engage in a listening and engagement exercise, but actually to listen. Not that she bears a grudge.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree that one of the concrete actions that the Government could take to respond to this emergency is to ban fracking throughout the UK?

Deidre Brock: As the hon. Gentleman is probably aware, the Scottish Government have taken significant action on that issue, and I would very much like to see it taken across the UK as well. There is no place for fracking anywhere, in my opinion.

Roseanna Cunningham is now at the forefront of delivering on a programme to actually deliver on addressing climate change—an environmental policy that takes into account the needs of people and the need to hand on a working planet to future generations. She will tell us that she wants to do more, to deliver more and to solve all the problems and solve them now, but she knows, as do many who sit in this Chamber, that Government policy does not pivot so easily, and public attitude changes take time and effort to effect. That means that this needs the extra effort and extra attention that great changes usually need. We have to change the way we live—the way we conduct society. We have to be aware now that these changes will make life less comfortable. That is just how it is, though, and we should get on with it.

This is the one issue that might require us to put away the tools of political point-scoring and decide to work together for the survival of the species. We may not agree on the way forward, and we do not have to, but we can do that without losing sight of what we are driving at. The DEFRA Secretary—or Old Swampy, as I like to call him—and I can find ways to work together. I can offer him the benefit of vision that those of us who live in Scotland have of a Government working towards some serious and stretching targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions. We can chat about how the Scottish Government have put money into ensuring that there are enough charging points for electric vehicles to allow a target for phasing out petrol and diesel vehicles by 2032, and about funding electric buses and ultra low emission vehicles in the public fleet.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): On working together, I am not sure if my hon. Friend is aware that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is apparently looking at allowing onshore wind in Scotland where the Scottish Government have embraced onshore wind, yet the Scottish Secretary has put in writing to BEIS his objection to Scotland getting access to onshore wind, and now the Departments are refusing to release that correspondence. Is that not disgraceful and the very opposite of working together?

Deidre Brock: I am indeed aware of that issue, and I do think it is disgraceful. I cannot see how the Secretary of State has a leg to stand on in this regard.

This needs ambition—not personal ambition, but political ambition and the desire to see future generations able to breathe on this planet. We need to challenge an old measure of Government success—the measure that says that the greatest good a Government can do is grow GDP—and start to measure success by how much the Government can do to ensure that there is a future where the sustainability of communities and the environment is a touchstone.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Does my hon. Friend agree that for all the glossy words of the Environment Secretary, what is needed is for Departments to work together? As she knows, Dalgety Bay beach in Scotland is still covered in radioactive particles, and the Ministry of Defence has dithered and delayed on this. Does she agree that that needs to be addressed urgently; that it cannot wait until next year, as seems to be getting suggested; and that the message has to go to the Government that Scotland is not Westminster's nuclear dumping ground?

Deidre Brock: I could not agree with my hon. Friend more. It has been three decades since radioactive particles were found on Dalgety Bay beach, and only now is the MOD finally committing itself to a clean-up of those particles. That is an utter disgrace. I would like, personally, to see an environmental audit of all MOD activities on Scottish land and water to see what that uncovers, and then, of course, the MOD paying for the clean-up operations.

We must have regard to the warning issued by the Governor of the Bank of England when he said that climate uncertainty was an economic risk and that climate challenges could become challenges in the financial markets. We have to see that, swallow it and move on. Action on climate change can be a threat to jobs, but inaction is a death knell, and not just to jobs. Mark Carney

[Deidre Brock]

also said that there was opportunity in the changes to come, and that we should embrace that and welcome the possibility of new industries and new jobs arising from new technology.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that the pressure for the real, far-reaching change that we need is being brought to bear by the future generations that we are failing by not going far enough? Will she join me in congratulating the pupils of Whitehirst Park Primary School in Kilwinning, who have been working very hard to learn more about climate change?

Deidre Brock: I certainly will. My own two daughters' knowledge of these important issues is so much greater than mine was at that age. The amount of work that is being put in on this issue by students right across the UK is phenomenal; it is very impressive indeed. I really appreciate my hon. Friend bringing that up.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Like me, the hon. Lady spent many weeks in the Committee on the Agriculture Bill, which, if introduced properly, could take us forward, notwithstanding the implications of our membership of the EU. Is she rather surprised that that Bill is yet to come back to the House, months after it left Committee?

Deidre Brock: Yes, I have to agree with the hon. Gentleman—it has surprised me how long the Bill has taken to reach the Floor of this House again. It was an interesting time in Committee. A number of the issues did not really concern Scotland, of course, as he will be aware, but there were some big issues that were not properly addressed by the Minister at the time. It might be that the Government are grappling with the issues around food production, for example, which, as he will know, was not even in the Bill.

To return to welcoming new industries and new jobs arising from new technology, that is why the Government should be reversing decisions they made to pull funding from renewables and to cut subsidies, denying researchers the tools they need to progress these new technologies. Nova Innovation, headquartered a few hundred metres from my constituency office in Edinburgh North and Leith, has recently installed tidal arrays off Shetland, gathering power from the sea and demonstrating that the technology can be scaled up and adapted to provide a constant and consistent source of renewable energy. That was possible only because EU funding was available to drive the development of the technology. Post Brexit, none of that funding will be available, so how will the Government be stepping up to the plate? Will they be filling this hole left by our departure from the EU? Indeed, since this is a Labour motion, may I ask Opposition Front Benchers to give some concrete assurances that if they ever got into power, research into renewables would see increased support and funding—and, crucially, as referenced by my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), connections to the grid would be cheaper for renewable power generated?

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making a valuable contribution. On European funding for research and development, the Government

will not guarantee replacing that money beyond 2020. That is a very important point. If the Government were really serious about doing something about climate change, they would step up and tell us exactly what is going to happen after 2020.

Deidre Brock: The hon. Gentleman is correct. This is just another example of the uncertainty that the whole situation around Brexit has caused, and the Government refuse to clarify it for the many people who are waiting to see what the grants might be.

What offers are likely to be made by any potential UK Government in the next couple of years to address the causes of climate change and climate chaos? A change of Prime Minister might offer an opportunity to change direction, but I see few signs that anyone leading on policy development in either of the two largest parties has really heard any of the warnings. Changing our society will require some discomfort, some pain and some realignment of how we live, and that is unlikely to happen immediately. For example, we still depend on fossil fuel-powered vehicles to get our food to the shops, and often even to get it to our front doors—from truck, to ship, to truck, to home delivery van. We still depend on hydrocarbons to make fertilisers. We still have an addiction to plastic that defies all understanding, and a hankering for personal transport.

People changing their cotton buds and refusing straws in pubs is not enough. The average inhabitant of these islands will join in with efforts to change the way we live, happily or otherwise, but it needs leadership from Government, proper investment in reliable renewable energy production, investment in and subsidies for low-emission public transport, a real push against plastics, and an uptick in building standards on insulation and energy-efficient heating and lighting—and not just for houses.

Sir Edward Davey: I agree with everything the hon. Lady is saying, but will she share her thoughts on how we manage the oil and gas industry in the UK over the next two or three decades?

Deidre Brock: Absolutely. I would suggest something along the lines of the Scottish Government's £12 million transition training fund, which was launched in 2016. The fund enables people who are in the oil and gas industry—about 240,000 jobs across the UK depend on it—to train and perhaps progress into the renewables industry. That is certainly something I would like to see.

Alan Brown: Further to that point, does my hon. Friend agree that the oil and gas industry could also be supported by implementing carbon capture and storage, which allows a low-carbon transition? That is where the UK Government are sadly lacking, having pulled the £1 billion funding. That is where we need to go, and it could make use of the decommissioned oilfields.

Deidre Brock: Absolutely. That is a crucial element. Unfortunately, as the National Audit Office told us, the two competitions on CCS were cancelled at a cost of some £140 million, and that needs to be looked at properly again. At the moment, there is a £20 million prize fund on CCS, but it is simply not sufficient.

This requires a change of Government—not a change of personnel; there is no point changing the hand on the rudder if the course is still towards the rocks—and a change in attitude, ambition and direction of travel. It requires change across every Department and every ministerial portfolio. It needs Government to engage with the people and civic society, and to drive this agenda forward. In spite of the couthie words often chuntered here about saving the planet, there has not been much evidence of action. This is one small corner of the world, and it cannot change global politics on its own, no matter what strange dreams Brexiters have. We have a duty and a moral obligation to do our bit to keep this world fit to hand on to the next generation, and it is about time we bucked up our ideas.

3.22 pm

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): This debate really matters. It matters to the hundreds of thousands of people across our great nation and the world. This is the mother of all Parliaments. This is the country that had the first industrial revolution. It is our moral responsibility to come together as a Parliament and show the leadership that people across the world rightly expect of us. We today should be building on the radical political consensus that was achieved back in 2008, which brought all parties in the House together and gave any Minister standing at the Dispatch Box legally binding targets on reducing emissions.

I am confident, given the actions taken, that this Secretary of State and this Government will respond positively, enthusiastically and responsibly to the guidance they will receive tomorrow, which will set out why we need to move to net zero carbon by 2050 or sooner. We need today to put petty political point scoring to one side, recognise what this country has achieved and share that ambition to do more and faster.

Like every other Member, I know from going around my constituency that all parts of society we represent—whether schoolchildren, members of the women's institute or the business community—are asking us to do more. They are also asking us what more they can do. This is about what not only we in this place do, but what our whole country will do—what businesses, public services and people will do. I know that people want to do the right thing, but sometimes they do not know what to do.

I want to make one simple point today, by sharing the great work of Luci Isaacson and Climate Vision in my constituency. Back in 2009, she set up a simple 10-pledge challenge. She got 10 local ambassadors in Truro to recruit a whole team of us to make simple changes in our lives over four months, and between us, we saved more than 3,000 tonnes of CO₂. It was not virtue signalling or running out and buying the most expensive new electric vehicle. It was simple things that we can all do, like switching energy provider, which saves money as well as CO₂, or eating local, in-season produce and walking more often—all sorts of practical things that save us money, make us feel better and contribute to our local economy.

I set a challenge to every Member of the House today. I know they care very much about this issue and that many of them are riding bicycles and taking all sorts of action in their communities. I ask them to go to my website, look up the work of Climate Vision and make one of those pledges or all 10 of them, so that

today we can all commit to reducing our own emissions. We are all leaders in our communities, and we can support and encourage everyone who wants to play their part and make a difference. They can use #10PledgeChallenge, so that together we can send out a strong message that as individual leaders, policy makers and Members of this mother of all Parliaments, we get it, and we are stepping up to the greatest challenge that we will face in our lifetimes.

3.26 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton). Her eloquent words on climate change show that the Front Bench's loss is the Back Benches' gain and this House's gain.

The tone of this debate has been largely good-natured and about shared objectives, and that is important. This debate matters, and the emergency matters, because, contrary to what the Secretary of State implied, we are not doing nearly enough as a country. It is true that we have made a lot of progress in relation to the power sector, but 75% of the gains we have made overall since 2012 have been in that sector alone. The latest report of the Committee on Climate Change in 2018 says that emissions in the building sector, the agriculture sector, the waste sector and the fluorinated gases sector have been flat for a decade.

The emergency matters because it says to not only the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs or other Departments—the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is also on the Front Bench—but the whole Government that this matters to everyone and that this is not just another issue we have to deal with, alongside all the other issues we face. Every issue has to go through climate change and what we do about it. It is the whole basis of our politics for generations to come. I hope that the Secretary of State will support the emergency, because it will focus minds in the Government.

I do not want to speak for long, but I do want to talk about political persuasion and in particular about how we carry the public with us on this journey. Nice words were said about me, and I am grateful to both Front Benchers for that, but the truth is that I feel a sense of guilt. I feel a sense of guilt that I have not done more on this issue and that I did not do more when I was leader of my party. I talked about the issue, but I did not do more.

It is bad thing that in the 2015 TV debate, which I do not like to recall too much, not one question was asked about climate change, and that tells us something about the fact that Brexit—it is bad enough, given how it sucks the political oxygen out of all the other issues—is not the only reason why this issue has not been more salient, or rather that it goes through peaks and troughs. I think that the reason is that this is the ultimate challenge for politics, because the decisions we make now will have impacts in generations' time, but less so today. The electoral cycle, if we are honest about it—and we respond to our voters—is five years, or perhaps less, not 20, 30 or 40 years.

Catherine West: I make a very quick intervention just to say that my right hon. Friend does not need to apologise, because he did write the emissions trading scheme when he was very much part of a Labour Government beforehand.

Edward Miliband: It is nice of my hon. Friend to say so.

I want to talk about how we persuade people, and I think there are four things we need to do. First, I enjoyed the speech by the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), who speaks from the Front Bench for the SNP, but I slightly disagreed with one thing. She said a couple of times that we need to tell people their lives are going to be less comfortable. I slightly feel that that is saying, “I’m here from Planet Politics to say you’re going to have a less comfortable life.” I do not mean this in a trite way—I think it true that sacrifices must be made—but we should promise people something else, which is that they will have better lives if we act on climate change. I do not think that is a false promise; I think that is a genuine promise.

If we think about this idea of the green new deal, what is that about? It is about retrofitting every building in this country—house by house, street by street—in the way we did in the 1960s and 1970s when we moved from town gas to natural gas. That is tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of jobs, including for my constituents and the constituents of every Member, and it is about lower bills for people. If we think about our towns and cities, we see that it is about making them much better for walking and cycling—and, indeed, electric vehicles—cutting thousands of deaths from air pollution. My first and in a way most important point is: let us tell people not just the gloomy part of this—it is important to talk about the gloomy part—but that they can have better lives as a result. That is what we are in politics to do.

Secondly, I want to say something about the role of individuals, because I have come to believe that there is something slightly dangerous in this. Every individual has to do their bit, including we politicians, but I think there is something that makes people feel incredibly powerless if we put all the weight of responsibility on them. We are saying to people, “We’ve got this massive problem; your kids are never going to forgive you; and you’ve got to act.”

Let me give the House one statistic. In Norway last month, 60% of sales of new vehicles were electric; in Britain, it is something like 1.8%. I am sure we in this House all love the Norwegians. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] Indeed. But that is not because the Norwegians are intrinsically more green than we are, but because there is a shedload of incentives to go green and buy an electric vehicle in Norway. The point is that this is about system change, not just individual change. Some of this is about decisions not necessarily that individuals are making, but what airports we commission, how we produce our power and all that. Individuals must make their contribution, but incentives matter, and we cannot place all the burden on individuals.

Thirdly, there is sacrifice—the point made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith. We cannot deny that there will be sacrifice, and there will be things we cannot necessarily do that we do at the moment but have to do less. Why have we failed to make some progress on this, and I am thinking back to my time as leader as well? Because I do not think that we or the green movement as a whole have thought enough about how we distribute the costs among those who bear the burden.

The reality about energy bills is that the poor pay a significantly higher proportion of their income on energy bills than the rich. As we think about the £10 billion that goes to support energy companies, which the Secretary of State talked about, we have to think about how those costs are borne through taxation as opposed to energy bills. Unless we do that, people will say, “Well, hang on. The costs are all falling on me, and I can least afford it.” We only need to look at what has happened to President Macron and the protests he has faced to realise that we cannot just say, “It’s green and therefore it’s fair.” We have to make sure that the costs are fairly distributed.

My fourth and final point is about the international angle. The right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who is not in his place, wrote recently that Extinction Rebellion should go and protest in China, while he seemed modestly to approve of some of its aims. That misses the point: as Secretaries of State and the House know, the reality is that our moral authority comes from our being able to act. There is no way we could persuade China and India to act themselves if we were not leaders on this issue.

My experience at the not-very-successful Copenhagen summit was that China and India would listen to us because, unlike the US, we were actually acting. I cannot emphasise enough to the House the authority that our ability to act gives us. By the way, the Chinese recognise the opportunity. They are installing so much solar and wind power because they know that there is an economic advantage. The issue is particularly crucial in the next 15 to 18 months because of our hope to host COP—the conference of the parties—in 2020. That is the moment when we have to update the Paris targets. We are overshooting, even on the basis of the Paris targets. Unless that conference of the parties takes decisive action, it may well be too late.

Sir Edward Davey: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right on China; it is vital that people understand this. The Chinese are moving ahead very fast. He and his colleagues, and the former Foreign Secretary Lord Hague, were crucial in making sure that the Foreign Office was engaged in climate change diplomacy, persuading the Chinese that the fall in the cost of renewables, particularly solar, made them affordable and that the health benefits of reducing air pollution made them really attractive to their population. The change in the mood in China could be the change in the mood across the world. We need to learn from China, support it and make those points.

Edward Miliband: I agree absolutely with the former Secretary of State.

I want to finish by saying this. I reflect on our cross-party consensus in this country, which is incredibly important. It was created in part thanks to David Cameron’s advocacy of the issue in the 2000s, and it is important that we maintain it. However, we should allow this: there will be different visions of how we get to the same goal. There will be a more socialist vision and a more Conservative one. Part of the grammar of politics that we have to learn is to argue while sharing the same objectives—maintain the cross-party consensus, but have discussions and arguments about how we can meet our goals.

Finally, I should say that there is a downside scenario, which is that future generations will say that we were the last generation who did not get it and we failed to act. But there is an upside, too: if we act, we can create better lives for those future generations.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. There is now a formal time limit of five minutes.

3.37 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), with whom I share a role in my membership of the all-party parliamentary climate change group. That is very much cross-party.

I share some of the right hon. Gentleman's frustration. I have been an environmental campaigner all my life—Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace. I used to be anti-nuclear, actually, although I am not anymore because it is low carbon. I vowed that if I ever came to Westminster, I would get involved in this agenda. Guess what? I have, and we are doing things. I am deeply frustrated about some of the misinformation peddled about the supposed lack of things we are doing.

There have been many good achievements, as the Secretary of State said, although that is not to say that there is not more to do. We have cut gas emissions by 25% and are phasing out coal-fired power stations. We have a renewables agenda and all the jobs. That is good work, but without a shadow of a doubt the degradation of the planet and the situation with climate change is very severe. We need to do more and quicker—I am not going to argue about that.

As I have said in this Chamber before, this issue is definitely bigger than Brexit. I reiterate the calls being made today for net zero emissions. I raised that in a question to the Prime Minister last week. I mean it, and I believe that our Government will absolutely mean business when we hear the advice of the Committee on Climate Change tomorrow.

All the Taunton Deane people I have met—Taunton Green Parents, the Extinction Rebellion people whom I met up here and all sorts of religious people of every shape and form—have asked me to put the environment at the top of the agenda. People care.

However, to really radically cut emissions and realistically hit the 2030 target, there has to be some really big thinking. As other Members have said, we are capable of sorting this out. It will require more of the right policies; we have good policies, but we need more of them. It will require driving societal change and investment into the right infrastructure and science, with vision, targets, market mechanisms and regulation that we check regularly to make sure it is all working. The overarching umbrella has to be sustainability. If we put sustainability over every single thing we do so that every Department comes under it, we cannot go wrong. Without sustainable soil, water, air and biodiversity, we simply cannot live. We can live for a short while, for one election period, but we cannot keep going. It is absolutely essential.

We need to line up our policies perhaps more cleverly than we are doing right now. One small example is the clean growth strategy, which I applaud. It needs to align

itself much better with the prosperity fund. There is a bit of a conflict between the drive for ever more growth and productivity. We need to get sustainability in such initiatives as the prosperity fund.

I honestly think that every single person out there can share this with us. I genuinely think it is really exciting that we need to change society to solve this crisis. As the right hon. Member for Doncaster North said, it might be a bit uncomfortable but I think there will be great benefits. We will be healthier, because we will be cycling and walking, providing we put in the right framework for cycle lanes and walkways. We could have vehicle-free streets. How lovely would Taunton look if we did that? We could have prettier towns and not be breathing in fumes.

Steve Brine: Although today's debate was opened by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and will be closed by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, does my hon. Friend agree that this issue is cross-governmental? The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has a huge role to play. At the weekend, Cycle Winchester saw hundreds of us cycling through Winchester as part of a mass cycle ride. The city of Winchester has about as much designated safe cycle way as the length of this Chamber. Local government has a huge role to play to make the change she talks about in respect of cycling.

Rebecca Pow: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. Only yesterday, I went to a superb event on cycling here, hosted by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), where that exact point was made. We need to take up many of that event's recommendations. I agree that communities and local government are key, because they drive our developments and our homes. We need more eco-friendly, energy-efficient homes releasing less carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, with much more energy-efficient heating systems. I had a 10-minute rule Bill not very long ago which called for better consultation in this area and to embrace technologies. We have to ask ourselves how we are going to do all this. We have the clean growth strategy. As I said earlier, science and technology will play a really important role, but we need to put more capital in and we need a plan for raising capital to invest in the future technologies that we need to introduce at pace.

On the wider environment, we have such an opportunity to change our land use: the way we use our land and the demands we make on it; the natural capital impact approach; paying for public services and goods, so we plant more trees and have better soil management that holds and captures carbon, and helps to control flooding. All of those issues are important and we have the opportunity, if we can get it right, with the 25-year plan, the Agriculture Bill and the forthcoming environment Bill. This is a very exciting opportunity, but we have to get it right.

On transport, I am the chairman of the all-party group on electric and automated vehicles. This will be a big, growing and important agenda. I think the Committee on Climate Change will set us even stricter targets on getting rid of diesel and petrol cars, so we have to get the infrastructure in place right now. We have to get the

[Rebecca Pow]

issue of storage sorted out, because it will be so important going forward. I have not mentioned carbon capture, but it could be a really big part of this agenda if we invest in it correctly.

I honestly believe that this could be the new green revolution and I am pleased to be a part of it. We should all be a part of it. I know we will and I look forward to the announcement from the Committee on Climate Change.

3.43 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Last year's IPCC report could not have been any clearer: we have just 12 years to take real action. That is not 12 years to debate whether we need to take action, but 12 years to implement policies that dramatically cut down on our carbon emissions and change how we, as individuals, live our lives. That needs to start today. It may not be fashionable these days, but we need to heed the advice of experts. Dr Dmitry Yumashev of Lancaster University recently published research showing the potential \$70 trillion cost if we fail to take action and meet our targets. We simply cannot afford—financially or otherwise—to continue down the same route we have been on.

I will talk briefly about young people. I am proud that the Labour-led Lancaster City Council has already declared a climate emergency; it was one of the first councils to do so. That was led by our young activists across the Lancaster district, and I pay tribute to Councillor Amara Betts-Patel, Councillor Oliver Robinson, Peter Curphey, Haddi Malik and Dan Chester, to name but a few of the young people calling on their council to do more and to put forward bold policies to tackle this crisis. The onus is now on us in the House to listen to the words of young activists up and down the country and globally and to put climate change at the forefront of everything that we do.

It is clear that we need to do more on how we travel about our communities. We need to make the switch to public transport, but in Fleetwood it could not be more evident how far away we are from having a sustainable transport policy. Every morning, hundreds of my constituents get into their cars and drive down the A585 to access jobs and education. If they were given a reliable, low-carbon alternative, I know that many would ditch their cars and jump on public transport, so the Government really need to get serious about investing in sustainable transport for communities such as Fleetwood, so that people can make that switch. That means urgently rebalancing our transport spending towards communities such as Fleetwood and to the north-west of England, bringing back into use disused rail lines that were cut by Beeching and making sure that people have the chance to use greener alternatives to cars.

Harnessing the power of wind and water has huge potential to transform Lancashire into a true energy coast. Hydro, wind, and solar energy industries have the potential to provide thousands of skilled, highly paid jobs, which will transform employment prospects for our young people while providing for our energy needs. The beginnings of this green economy are already visible in Fleetwood: I recently visited 4Navitas, which builds vertical-axis wind turbines and which was set up and is run by Fleetwood entrepreneurs Paul Cook and

Marcus Stefani. Other Fleetwood entrepreneurs have been pursuing plans to construct a hydro barrage across the River Wyre, which again has huge potential to transform the town.

Sadly, the Government continue to ignore the potential of this new green economy and persevere with damaging and unwanted policies, such as fracking. The people of Lancashire said no to fracking. It is not compatible with meeting our climate change objectives, and it is time that the Government woke up and banned fracking in this country, as the Labour party has proposed.

The Government need to lead the charge for a sustainable future, but that does not mean that individuals and communities cannot take a stand. I was pleased to support the Extinction Rebellion activists in Lancaster last week, who were demonstrating about the need to change the way we live our lives and standing up for a green future. Part of that future needs to involve making sustainable choices about how we live and what we eat. Most scientists now agree that we need to eat significantly less meat to tackle climate change, and we need to recognise the real damage that intensively farmed meat has on the ecosystems of developing nations.

I believe that only a Labour Government who place the environment at the front and centre of Government policy and usher in this green industrial revolution will succeed in halting the slide to environmental chaos. Future generations will not forgive us if we do not take this opportunity for positive action. We owe it to our children to seize this opportunity and to vote today to declare a climate emergency.

3.48 pm

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I am grateful for your calling me early, Madam Deputy Speaker, and for being able to contribute—albeit briefly—to the debate. I start by agreeing with the Leader of the Opposition; he was right to call for consensus on tackling climate change. I also thought it entirely appropriate that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs clearly showed the cross-party support for delivering on the UK's ambition and global leadership in this area, as well as pointing out how far the UK is delivering on this agenda. We need to introduce some balance into this debate, and I am pleased that both did so. I join others—on both sides of the House—in suggesting that we should proceed with efforts for London to host next year's climate change conference. I very much hope that it does.

I am a member of the Environmental Audit Committee, and as such have the opportunity to review the Committee on Climate Change's and activists' claims and challenges, as well as to hold the Government to account on the delivery of the sustainable development goals and their climate change priorities. I was pleased therefore to support my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) when he yesterday introduced his 10-minute rule Bill, which was very well supported by Conservative Members. It is absolutely right that the House seek to commit to net zero emissions by 2050, and this in itself will require facing up to many significant challenges—some have already been mentioned, I am sure others will be—on land use, transport, energy sources, energy efficiency, joining up Government policy and showing international leadership to share the burden across the globe.

Taking that further and faster, however, as some have called for, would increase the challenge. As a farmer, I join the Secretary of State in applauding the NFU for accepting a net zero emissions challenge for agriculture by 2040. This will require very significant changes to land use, as has been graphically highlighted by the “Zero Carbon Britain” report from the Centre for Alternative Technology, which shows that diversifying land use is required across most of what we currently do today. We would need to double the land used for food for human beings in this country; to dramatically reduce the grassland for livestock; to double the forested area to a quarter of the entire UK; and substantially to increase the areas for biomass and renewable energy.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. On reforestation, did he share my enthusiasm for the Secretary of State’s remarks today about planting 11 million trees across the country? Could this not fire up schools’ imagination? We could get them to do much more of this and maybe have an award for the best primary schools locally to follow through on this agenda of reforestation.

Mr Dunne: That is well worth doing—we should encourage younger generations to recognise the power that trees have in capturing carbon—but 11 million trees goes nowhere near what would be required to get to net zero. It is a step in the right direction but only a single step.

Brexit and leaving the common agricultural policy provide the UK with a unique opportunity to take a lead, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is doing through the Agriculture Bill, in developing a new system of support to encourage such change in land use. While it will not be easy, it is absolutely right that we take full advantage of this opportunity.

We have heard much about the problems and challenges of meeting these targets but very few solutions offered yet in this debate, so I would like to highlight two. Innovation and maturing technology will create opportunities and solutions and drive down costs—as we have seen, solar costs have declined by 35% in the last three years alone—but a balance of technologies will be required; there will be no simple single solution.

There has been considerable focus—my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) mentioned it earlier—on the switch to electric vehicles, but this will pose very significant generation challenges. One example provided to me recently suggests that one motorway service station replacing 20 petrol and diesel pumps with 120 electric superchargers—the number needed to fuel the same number of vehicles in an hour—would require a 14.5 MW substation, which is equivalent to the electricity required for 32,000 homes. This is, then, unlikely to be the simple solution that some of us hope for, so I would like to make a quick plug for hydrogen fuel cell generation, which can become cheaper than batteries and is being pioneered by a small company, Riversimple, which was started in my constituency. It has the added benefit of reducing reliance on cobalt, which is required for batteries and is itself a finite resource.

The second solution is for changing attitudes and behaviour in an area of UK global strength—it is something I have taken a particular interest in on the EAC:

the UK’s leadership role on emerging green finance initiatives. This was set out in our Committee report last year, “Greening Finance: embedding sustainability in financial decision making”. Climate risk reporting by companies and pension funds will make clear the financial implications of ignoring climate change and provides an opportunity for the UK to show global leadership.

3.54 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne). I agree with him that we should consider the possibility of using hydrogen in our fuel networks, which could be an interesting development.

I last had the opportunity to speak about this issue in February, when we had our first debate on climate change in the main Chamber for two years. It was only a short Back-Bench debate on net zero emissions, and it remains disappointing that Back Benchers and the Labour party rather than the Government are instigating debates on this crucial issue. I spoke then about the devastating changes that I had seen in the Great Barrier Reef between my visits, the first 25 years ago and the second just a couple of years ago. I congratulated the organisers of the Glastonbury festival on their decision to ban plastic bottles—in passing, I encourage other festival organisers to do the same—and I talked about giving up my car and trying to rely on public transport and cycling.

Given the limited time available, I will not repeat those remarks, but I am pleased to support Labour’s challenge to the Government to declare an environment and climate emergency. Such a declaration would convey the gravity of where we are with climate change. It would constitute a recognition that we are now left with a limited window of time in which to mitigate the worst of the damage that we have done—the Leader of the Opposition described the scale of the crisis comprehensively in his opening speech—and an invitation to other Governments to do the same. No other Government have declared a climate emergency, and doing so would make the UK a world leader, just as the last Labour Government led the world in passing the first binding climate change Act. It would also send a signal to the Extinction Rebellion protesters, the striking schoolchildren and the young people I speak to in schools in my constituency that we are listening and will act with urgency—for it is urgent action that we need.

Acting in the context of a climate emergency means setting ambitious goals and achieving them with commitment and motivation. What is happening now in Manchester is a good example of the action that can be taken at local level by those who are serious about their green ambitions. Last year Manchester held its first green summit and launched the first city region-wide plan to eliminate single-use plastics. Just over a month ago it held a second summit, focusing on the five-year environment plan.

Greater Manchester generates roughly 3.6% of our total UK carbon dioxide emissions, and we have acknowledged our responsibility to make our contribution to meeting targets. Ours is a cross-cutting approach that recognises and demonstrates the range of actions that we need to take. Manchester has looked into how to reduce CO₂ emissions and improve air quality as part of its transport plan. There are plans for new building developments to be zero carbon by 2028 and for existing

[Jeff Smith]

housing to be retrofitted to increase efficiency, which is a big economic opportunity, and extensive plans to create clean air zones and tackle nitrogen dioxide exceedances. That is all part of our aim to make Manchester a carbon-neutral city by 2038, which is a suitably ambitious goal for the city that started the first industrial revolution and needs to be a leader in the next—the green industrial revolution.

I do not have enough time, but I would love to be able to say more about the importance of climate change as a social justice issue. It disproportionately affects the most marginalised members of society—it is often the poorest families who live in urban areas with high levels of pollution—but the biggest injustice of all is the fact that poorer countries that have contributed less to global warming are being disproportionately hit by its effects. The lives of people living in the global south are already being torn apart because of the actions that we have taken in the past. The United Kingdom has a moral obligation to set and reach ambitious carbon emissions targets, not just for the sake of our people's health and environment, but to offset our global contribution. As a wealthy nation, we must also offer financial support for climate mitigation and adaptation efforts by countries in the global south that are affected by extreme weather events.

I regularly visit local schools, and, overwhelmingly, young people want to raise two issues: climate change and plastic pollution. When I speak to those young people, I say that we must all accept our responsibility to play our part, whether by eating less meat, reducing the number of car and plane journeys or avoiding single-use plastics. However, we must also match that individual ambition with legislation. We must tackle this issue as a nation. We urgently need legislation to update the Climate Change Act.

There are many other actions that we need to take, which have been outlined by other Members. As we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), we have a massive opportunity. Let us declare an environment and climate emergency today, and let that declaration be a spur for those actions.

3.59 pm

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I welcome this debate, and it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) and all who have spoken today in the spirit of cross-party urgency.

I welcome, too, the chance to highlight the importance of this issue at the heart of this Government and the urgency of us all working together—across party, across generations and across these Houses—in the interests of the next generation, who in much of our politics feel pretty dispossessed at present. Secondly, I want to highlight the importance of innovation, science and good business and insist that we do not pursue this in an anti-business spirit but instead harness the power of the market to help us solve these problems. Thirdly, I want to insist—not in any spirit of partisanship but merely to contribute to the debate going on on this side of the House for the heart and soul of conservatism, a debate similar to that on the Opposition side of the House—that good environmental stewardship and policy is central to good one-nation conservatism.

Before coming to this House I was lucky enough to have a career in the field of science and innovation, founding and financing companies with incredibly exciting solutions to some of the great, grand challenges we face, mainly in the field of medical, clean tech and agri-tech, and as an MP I have been lucky enough to work in the Department of Energy and Climate Change and as Life Sciences Minister. It is important that we all agree that there is an environmental emergency in the world, and that we send the message that we get it. It is also important that we admit that this is very complex and that, as the great David Attenborough himself put it to me, we should be every bit as worried about biodiversity and the damage to habitats around the world as about the impact of climate change and the importance of mitigating it. The truth is this problem is being driven across the world by massive industrialisation, deforestation and urbanisation, and those seeing their life chances transformed by the agricultural and industrial revolutions driving those changes do not want us in the west to hold back their prosperity; instead they want us to reach out and help them deliver a model of clean green growth.

I absolutely agree with those who suggested this should also be at the heart of our DFID strategy. I would like a much more muscular alignment of our aid, trade and security, including our biosecurity, because economic resilience is key to prosperity around the world.

Secondly, on science and innovation, I want to pay tribute to some of those who have not just jumped on the bandwagon but have spent their careers in science trying to develop the science behind this important debate. I am thinking of those at the British Antarctic Survey, the scientists I have been lucky enough to meet and work with at Cambridge and the University of East Anglia, and those who have been working on battery technology, which holds the key to unlocking the power of electricity and electric sustainable power. I am thinking, too, of those in agri-tech; I was lucky enough to launch the agri-tech strategy, and incredible work is going on to reduce plastics, water and soil impact in modern farming. I am thinking of those in the automotive and aerospace industries; I recently visited Lotus in Norfolk, which has developed a Formula 1 car powered by biofuel, made by genetically modified bugs breaking down agricultural waste. This is great science holding great potential for our green economy. Indeed, the aerospace industry is currently embarked on taking 400 million tonnes of carbon dioxide out of its footprint. Let us not criticise those on the cutting edge of trying to develop the technologies, and let us neither be complacent.

Thirdly, on the Conservative party's track record and legacy, may I support the Secretary of State in his work and remind him and my colleagues on this side of the House that it was this party that led the first Clean Air Acts, it was this party's leader Lady Thatcher who first put this challenge on the agenda of global leaders, and it was this party that, through its values of stewardship, conservation, incentives and responsibility and its belief in prosperity—in giving and taking responsibility and in the principle of mutuality and harnessing rewards and incentives—has used the market to drive an economics of shared values as much as of share value?

This party understands how we achieve green growth and, at the risk of going all Monty Python on you, Mr Speaker, and asking "What have the Conservatives

ever done for the environment?" let me say that this year we have reached a high in renewable energy, we are reducing emissions faster than any other G20 nation, and we have put £92 billion into clean energy and created 400,000 jobs. I do not mean to be complacent for a moment but let us inspire the next generation by resisting tribal politics, being led by science and being inspired by what innovation can achieve.

4.4 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is a great honour to be able to make my maiden speech during this debate on climate change. This topic is very close to my heart, and I am so pleased to see the importance that is being attached to it here in this House. I stand here today as the newest Member of Parliament, representing my home constituency of Newport West. I feel very proud and privileged to be able to do this, but of course, as colleagues across the House know, I am only here because of the sad passing of my honourable predecessor, Paul Flynn.

Paul was so well known and admired here in this House, but also in Newport West. During the by-election campaign, there would be someone in virtually every street in which we knocked who told us of how Paul had helped them or a member of their family. He was so well known, so respected and so loved by everyone in Newport West. Here in Westminster, fellow Members have taken the time to tell me stories of Paul and what a great man he was. We all know how intelligent and quick-witted he was, but he was also very kind and considerate. I only knew him for the last 15 years or so—hon. Members in this House have known him much longer—but he always took the time to talk to me and others in Newport and, just as importantly, he listened to what people said to him. His sense of humour was legendary and his ability to use a one-line response to close a debate was something to witness.

Paul is one of the main reasons I am here. He inspired people to go further than they thought possible. I will always be indebted to him for his advice and guidance, and yes, of course I have a copy of his book "How to be an MP", and I am proud that Paul signed it for me. Paul was one of a kind. He had such a great intellect and an ability to speak on a vast range of subjects. I may not have his parliamentary experience, but I will strive to match his qualities. I will maintain an independence of thought and I will be a socialist to my dying day. I want to champion the people of Newport West and make sure their voices are heard clearly here in this House.

Newport West is a relatively new constituency, having been formed only in 1983. Paul was the second Member and he was here for 32 years. I am not sure I can promise the House that I will be here for that long, but I am proud to be the first woman Member for Newport West. I am also only the second woman Member in Gwent and the 20th female MP in Wales ever. Sisters, we are getting there—but slowly!

Newport West is a great constituency, built on the back of the industrial revolution. Initially developed as a port, it quickly developed into a town that welcomed people from all areas and countries who settled and developed their own communities within the town. It has always been a place that welcomed the stranger. Work was mainly based in heavy industrial areas such

as steel manufacturing, but in recent years it has developed in high-tech areas such as Proton Partners International, the first proton beam cancer therapy treatment centre in the UK. We also have high profile facilities such as the Celtic Manor resort, which hosted the successful Ryder cup in 2010 and the NATO summit in 2014.

Newport became a city in 2002. It has continued to grow and develop, but it has maintained its sense of community and the people are friendly and welcoming. I am proud to be a Newportonian. It is a city with its own character and quirks. We hold our own with the likes of Cardiff and Bristol—[*Interruption.*] We do! We have our own identity and we relish our role as the underdog. That was well evidenced during the recent FA cup run of our very own Newport County football club, whose wins over Leicester and Middlesbrough in the third and fourth rounds were watched by thousands of us. We celebrate our successes well!

Newport is also the place where the Chartists marched in 1839 to demand democratic rights and were mown down at the bottom of Stow Hill. The bodies of those killed that day were taken and buried in secret in the grounds of St Woolos Cathedral. Members would all be most welcome to come along on 4 November when we commemorate this important event in our fight for democracy and rights for all. Newport was there, and I am proud to be a citizen of that city.

But the people of Newport West are hurting after years of austerity. The numbers of homeless people are rising, families are suffering and older people are being forced to choose between heating their homes and eating. Yes, we have record employment, but much of it involves low-paid or minimum-wage work or zero-hours contracts. Some people have to take on two jobs just to keep a roof over their head. That is not right, and I am here to speak out on behalf of those people in my constituency. They are not asking for outlandish wage increases or unrealistic improvements in their terms and conditions. They just want a fair crack of the whip. They want job security, a safe place to live, freedom from crime and the fear of crime and to know that their family members can have a good quality of life. That is not unreasonable, and I am here to help them achieve it.

I was born and brought up on the Gaer, an area of Newport West. I went to Duffryn High School, the local comprehensive, and trained as a physiotherapist in Cardiff. I spent 32 happy years in a job that was rewarding and enjoyable. I worked with people with long-term conditions, such as stroke, MS, Parkinson's and cerebral palsy. It was a real privilege to be able to work with patients and their families to empower and enable them to reach their maximum potential, but I also had to speak out to ensure that people who were unable to speak for themselves got the care and treatment they needed. Physiotherapists are good at understanding what people need and speaking out to ensure that they get it. I plan to continue to speak out in that way in this House.

I am here today to thank my predecessor Paul Flynn for his diligent, untiring work for Newport West over 32 years. I want to pick up his mantle and carry on his good work, speaking up for the people of Newport West and the issues and difficulties they face. With God's grace and the help of colleagues, family and friends, I will do that. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr Speaker: Many congratulations to the hon. Lady. We look forward to hearing from her a great deal more in the future.

4.11 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): May I be the second to congratulate most warmly the hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) on an accomplished maiden speech? Her love of and passion for her constituency shone out in everything she said.

We have done well on climate change, because PwC reports a 42% cut in emissions since 1990, but we are all here today because we know that we must do more and that the need is urgent. Whether from younger people or from Back Benchers across the House, a challenge generally leads to better government and better results. I want to be positive and to point to five areas that are part of the solution. To be fair, the Government are involved in part in all of them, but they need to go further in some.

We have already had mention of electric vehicles and hydrogen vehicles, and I welcome the investment in battery technology and the Government's efforts so far. However, we have heard today that Norway is far ahead of us, and 1.03 million new energy vehicles, as they are called, were sold in China in the first 11 months of last year, which is an increase of 68%, so we cannot rest on our laurels. I look forward to when ultra low emissions vehicles become more affordable so that more people can buy them.

There is one easy win in the area of transport—this would also deal with air pollution—and that is to take greater action on engine idling, something which New York has done recently with proper enforcement powers. Westminster City Council has its #DontBeIdle campaign, and we could and should do something across the UK about idling. Cycling and walking will also be part of the solution, and I am proud to be the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary cycling group. Roughly 2% of journeys in the UK are made by bike, but the numbers for Germany and the Netherlands are around 10% and 25% respectively. We can go further, but we must mainstream cycling funding, and new roads in particular need to be cycle-friendly. We are not quite there yet.

On aviation, unbelievably, electric planes have a future. I must admit that when I first read about them I had to check that it was not 1 April, but easyJet is looking to bring out a nine-seater prototype this year. By 2027, easyJet and Ryanair are hoping to fly some commercial routes up to distances of 500 km, so aviation can have an electric future, certainly in short-haul flights, and we should welcome that.

We have heard a lot about retrofitting, but why are not all new homes being built as zero-energy-bill homes? I was privileged to welcome the British architect Bill Dunster OBE to my constituency, and he is building such homes now. Not only do they address the climate issue, but not having to pay gas and electricity bills can be critical in helping our low-income constituents to look after their families. We need to accelerate that. The Building Research Establishment in Watford has proved that the technology is there, and we should be doing much more on that front.

We have heard about the forests we are planting, with 50 million trees to be planted in the northern forests and another 11 million trees being planted by the

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I am one of probably many MPs who were privileged to send 10 trees to their constituency from the “Commonwealth canopy” scheme organised by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), and that is something we can do, too.

The subject of this debate includes the environment, about which we have not spoken much today, particularly our wildlife. I am privileged to live in a constituency in which, when I go home in the evening, I see deer, muntjacs, foxes, rabbits, pheasants, partridges, woodpeckers, goldfinches, nuthatches and many other wonderful forms of wildlife. We need to make sure they can exist, too.

My constituency also hosts Duke of Burgundy and chalk hill butterflies, and butterflies are one of the creatures most in danger from climate change. Only a very small increase in temperature can cause them difficulties.

In summary, I want a future that is green and profitable, and for which we help our poorer constituents to adapt.

4.16 pm

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): On behalf of Labour Members, I pay tribute to our new colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones). I have the unenviable task of following what was a truly beautiful maiden speech. I look forward to working alongside her in the months and years to come.

Like my hon. Friend, I want to speak about my constituency today. I represent one of the two constituencies that make up Calderdale, and nowhere feels extreme weather more acutely than Calderdale. The Calder Valley and Halifax constituencies experienced catastrophic flooding in the 2015 Boxing day floods, which affected 2,720 residential properties and 1,650 businesses, and we were lucky not to sustain more damage in March 2019 following a period of exceptionally heavy rainfall that pushed flood defences to the limit.

One of the most serious and immediate consequences of climate change is more frequent extreme weather events, which are a very real and terrifying prospect. One element of the response to such dangers locally that is worthy of mention has been the work of Calderdale's “slow the flow” volunteers, whose natural flood management work across the Calder valley took the force out of the rainwater as it made its way down our steep slopes. Their work made a significant difference during the periods of greatest intensity during the March near-miss rains. Natural flood management not only contributes to a degree of protection from excess water, but does so through greater and more responsible stewardship of our natural environment.

I am pleased to say that the Labour-run Calderdale Council is already ahead of the game on climate change, having declared a climate emergency in January in response to the warning from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that there are just 12 years left to limit global warming.

Calderdale Council has succeeded in cutting its own CO₂ emissions by 35% and the borough's by 26%. Although Calderdale is on track to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 40% by 2020, we know this is not enough. Further action will be needed if we are to deliver the reductions necessary to keep global temperature rises below 1.5° C.

There are another two particular pressures across Calderdale that bring this global challenge to our doorstep. The first, like in so many other parts of the country, is air quality. We have seven designated air quality management areas in Calderdale, where monitoring indicates the annual mean objective for nitrogen dioxide being exceeded. The most recent figures from Public Health England show that the number of deaths from respiratory conditions is significantly higher in Calderdale compared with the national average. Although there are a number of reasons for that, poor air quality is a significant factor.

I am pleased to say that Calderdale has responded with a comprehensive air action plan, with a view to declaring Sowerby Bridge, one of our worst affected areas, a low-emissions neighbourhood. The plan prioritises the promotion of ultra low emissions vehicles and public transport, alongside walking and cycling, as well as promoting the clean-up of public transport fleets. Calderdale Council is also defending at a public inquiry its decision to reject an application to build an incinerator in the area. In the interests of air quality, I have made my views on the issue very clear.

Another initiative is the launch of the “Electric Valley” petition, building on the work of the Halifax and district rail action group electric charter, which sets out the benefits of electrification of the Calder Valley line. If we are to take vehicles off the road and ask more people to use public transport, electrification is a win-win. Not only has the Calder Valley line, which connects Manchester and Leeds through Halifax, been plagued with problems in recent months, but it is a dirty route. With electrification, we can improve the journey and clean it up at the same time. That was the top recommendation of the northern electrification taskforce “Northern Sparks” report four years ago, so I hope that the Department for Transport is watching the debate and will revisit that report.

The final threat that I want to raise is wildfire. Heatwaves have resulted in an increased frequency of wildfires on Pennine moorland. The Pennine moors, covering Kirklees, Calderdale and parts of Bradford, include sites of special scientific interest and special areas of conservation. Moorland areas are instrumental in storing CO₂—it is estimated that Britain’s peat bogs store the equivalent of 10 times the country’s CO₂ emissions—but when peat bogs are damaged by pollution or wildfire, they start to leak CO₂ instead of storing it. That has happened more and more often, with two blazes on Saddleworth moor in the last 18 months and a fire on Ilkley moor just two weeks ago.

It is far too easy to think that this is a problem for someone else, somewhere else, or for the next generation to solve. Calderdale Council has taken its responsibilities incredibly seriously, but it needs holistic Government support to deliver a carbon-neutral future. I hope that sharing those examples of how climate change is on our doorstep in Calderdale every single day will motivate us all to take action.

4.21 pm

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): I want to make three very brief points, which I hope will not repeat anything that has been said so far. The first relates to the tone and nature of the debate. It is enormously to be welcomed that there is once again consensus across the House of Commons in favour of taking this issue very seriously.

I recall the time I first went to see, in his then role as Environment Secretary, the brother of the former leader of the Labour party. I put it to the then Environment Secretary that the Conservative party, whose policy review I was running, was prepared to move forward on a climate change Bill, and he said to me, rather memorably, that he could not see any way to prevent consensus from breaking out. It did so, and that climate change Act has protected the whole political class from a great tendency for one party to score points off the other in relation to potentially unpopular measures. As long as we can maintain that consensus, I agree with the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband)—the former Leader of the Labour party and former Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change—that we may disagree from time to time about the means by which we achieve things, but we can still move forward satisfactorily.

The second point I want to make relates to the comments made by the right hon. Gentleman and by the other former Energy Secretary who has spoken, the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey). System change in the UK is required, and only through system change can mass effects be achieved. We should not expect people to take this on themselves individually as a moral crusade. Some noble souls will, but the aggregate effect will be slight compared with that of system change.

System change must work with the grain of human nature. That means, for example, that in electrifying the car fleet, which is by far the greatest current shift that we can achieve, we need to solve range anxiety. The reason that people—even those who can afford to do so, and for whom such cars represent a net saving—do not buy electric cars is that they are worried about the duration for which they will be able to travel. If we ask ourselves the crucial question, “Are you willing to have a car that might not get you home from the constituency?” the answer will always be no.

There is a ready solution; Next Green Car is already setting out plans for recharging stations every 50 miles on our trunk roads, so that no one will ever be more than 50 miles from a recharging station. We are putting a huge amount of effort, as are the car manufacturers, into improving battery storage. We can solve the problem. Sustained governmental effort is required over the succeeding 18 months or so to put us in a position where we can rival Norway, and then we will start to create a virtuous circle.

As soon as those who can already afford to do so start buying electric cars in sufficient quantities, the price will fall naturally. People who are currently less able to afford such cars will then be able to do so, after which prices will fall yet further. We will thus create exactly the sort of extraordinary revolution that we have seen in information technology with the smartphone, of which there were almost none in the world 25 years ago but of which there are now literally billions, including in many impoverished countries.

That brings me to my last point, which is about the item that has not been discussed terribly much this afternoon but will obviously need an awful lot of discussion over the next few years. There are roughly 2.6 billion people living in India and China, and they are living in circumstances that make climate change particularly significant for them. This is about not just the air pollution issues that dominate in Chinese cities, but the

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extreme tensions relating to the use of water, for example, in the border lands between China and India. The regimes in both countries are very conscious of affairs. They are also conscious of the need to lift up those 2.6 billion people—in the case of China, to lift people out of middle-income status and into being rich, or what they call moderately prosperous, and in the case of India, to lift literally hundreds of millions of people who are still in abject poverty up to the condition of middle income, along with advancing the interests of those who already enjoy middle incomes. That will require a huge amount of additional activity and energy.

There is no way that anybody preaching from this House or anywhere else in the world is going to tell those countries that they do not have a right to lift their populations into that kind of prosperity. We in the west therefore have a solemn duty to spend our time trying to work out how we can make it easier and cheaper for those countries to achieve that goal, and to work with them to do it. That will require a substantial realignment of not only climate change policy, but our entire western foreign policy, which is of course too large a subject for me to dilate on now. Nevertheless, I hope that if we are to take this issue forward, we can do so with the seriousness that is required in our Foreign Office, and across the western world's diplomatic establishments, and not just in Departments that are concerned with our domestic affairs.

4.26 pm

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): Climate change is damaging the lives of people in the UK and abroad. We see the impact through the two recent cyclones that have struck Mozambique. A country that usually expects only one major storm every 10 years has had two in two months, with the latest, Cyclone Kenneth, the strongest cyclone ever to hit Africa.

In the UK, climate change is seen as directly responsible for the projected rise in heat-related deaths and flooding, with the poorest and most vulnerable people most likely to bear the brunt. It is a tragedy that those least responsible for climate change suffer the most. We need to act to prevent a global climate disaster, yet the Government are not doing enough.

On emissions, the Government like to talk smugly about what a good job they have done, but the Committee on Climate Change warned last year that the UK will not meet the emission reduction targets laid out in the UK's clean growth strategy for the fourth and fifth five-year carbon budgets. On biodiversity, too, the Government are falling short, with only five of the 19 targets in the strategic plan for biodiversity set to be achieved.

The Government's commitment to fighting climate change is enshrined in the sustainable development goals, yet according to UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development we are underperforming on 72% of the targets that are relevant to the UK, and many of those are also relevant to climate change. Take target 11.6, on reducing the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including air pollution: UK100 found that 17.9 million NHS patients in England are registered at a GP practice in an area that exceeds the World Health Organisation annual limit for PM2.5 air pollution.

The national Government clearly do not care enough about climate change, but thankfully some of our local elected officials do: Bristol and Liverpool have pledged support for the sustainable development goals; Birmingham approved a motion on the sustainable development goals in November last year; and 59 councils, more than a third of them Labour-run, have declared a climate emergency. Although those are great initiatives, local government needs more support from central Government. Local authorities need resources to invest in better, greener infrastructure, to encourage and support more people to cycle and walk safely and to promote renewables.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. She has referred to what cities and authorities throughout the UK are doing; will she join me in congratulating the Welsh Government on declaring a climate emergency, and cities such as mine, Cardiff, which is doing so much work on sustainable transport, led by Councillor Huw Thomas?

Preet Kaur Gill: I am delighted to congratulate the Welsh Government on that.

The Government have blocked onshore wind, Britain's cheapest form of energy. According to SERA, the reintroduction of onshore wind would cut another £1.6 billion off the collective electricity bill, but rather than act, the Government have chosen to block onshore wind. Sir David Attenborough has said that climate change is humanity's

"greatest threat in thousands of years",

yet the Government keep signing up to things that they fail to deliver. I call on Members on all Benches to back Labour's motion and take the necessary action to address this threat nationally and internationally, to protect the planet and the climate for all future generations.

4.29 pm

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): Earlier this week, I read that climate change is firmly back on the political agenda, but it has been on the agenda for decades now under different Governments. Tributes have already been paid to the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), who is no longer in his place, and to the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey), who must have left the Chamber a few seconds ago. A sense of urgency has been felt across all the parties—I will come back to the word "urgency" a little bit later in my contribution.

The task of decarbonising our economy is necessary. If we go about it in the right way, which this Government are doing, we will build a better and more secure future for generations to come. As I mentioned, I have a slight problem with the wording of this motion. I do recognise the need for urgency on this matter. I prefer the word urgency to emergency, coming to this matter as I do with 25 years' experience in the oil and gas industry. In all my time in that industry, climate change and CO₂ emissions were front and centre of how we operated. As people can imagine, the word emergency in that industry has a whole different meaning. It means to drop everything and to do something now, and it is the dropping everything part of that expression that I have a problem with.

The future of our environment is, as many have said, too important for party political point scoring. It is time for deeds, not words, and this UK Government are

delivering on deeds. Those who say that the Government are doing nothing could not be more wrong, because we are leading the world in decarbonisation. I will not list the very many ways in which we are doing that, owing in part to time constraints, but also owing to the fact that many other Conservative Members have already done so.

Between 2010 and 2018, greenhouse gas emissions fell by 25%. CO₂ emissions have fallen six years in a row, the longest run of reductions on record, and last year they fell to the level they were at 130 years ago. We are achieving that without compromising on economic growth, defying the naysayers who argue that we must choose between prosperity and the planet.

The debate on decarbonising our economy as effectively as possible is a serious one, and it merits serious discussion, not grandstanding gestures such as suddenly declaring an emergency. We should be working constructively with the UK Government to build on their achievements. I therefore hope that they will take into consideration three landmark publications. One of those, as others have mentioned, is the report of the Committee on Climate Change, which is due out tomorrow and which I very much look forward to reading. The second is a recent report from the Scottish Affairs Committee, of which I am a member, on the future of the Scottish oil and gas industry, and the third is last week's report from the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee on carbon capture, usage and storage.

CCUS technology will be a necessary part of any serious plan to decarbonise our economy. The St Fergus gas plant in my constituency of Banff and Buchan, which is connected by an existing pipeline to the industrial complex at Grangemouth, is also known as the Scottish cluster. It is one of five clusters currently being considered for Government investment, which should be operational by the mid-2020s. In north-east Scotland, we have the expertise and we have the infrastructure in old North sea oil and gas wells and pipelines that we can take advantage of. I know that the UK Government are committed to CCUS and to the development of at least two cluster sites. I agree with what Members from all parts of the House have said: there is space for more ambition. Today, I am calling on the UK Government to commit to developing—or to consider developing—at least three CCUS clusters, to be operational by the mid-2020s, including, of course, the one in north-east Scotland.

The necessary investment will be outweighed many times over by the economic benefits of being a world leader in CCUS technology exports, by allowing heavy industry to continue in a low-carbon economy, by fighting climate change and by being able to export that expertise around the world, as that expertise will be much sought after in the years to come.

This is how we deal with climate change. This is how we decarbonise our economy. It is not by shouting about an emergency, but by building on real action, on CCUS and on other projects that this UK Government are already implementing.

4.34 pm

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): In the short time I have, I want to make three simple points in support of the motion. The first is that it is essential that this House formally declares an environment and climate emergency. I listened to the Environment

Secretary, and I do not believe that he formally committed the Government to doing so, but he did recognise that the situation that we face is an emergency—by contrast to what the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth said last week. I will quote what she said, because it struck me at the time:

“I do not see the point of saying anything unless we take action”.—[*Official Report*, 23 April 2019; Vol. 658, c. 612.]

I do not think that she could have been more wrong, because language matters. Of course deeds must follow words, but the manner in which we define problems in turn shapes our conceptions not only of the range of possible solutions, but also of what is necessary.

We have to stop talking about climate change as though it were some benign force and start talking about what we are really confronting: an ongoing and accelerating crisis from which no one will escape and which will have profound and potentially existential consequences for everything that every one of us holds dear. That is arguably a reason that the Extinction Rebellion movement has struck a chord and it is why—at least to my mind—a degree of alarmism is entirely justified, as long as that fear acts as a clarion call to act, rather than merely provoking a sense of hopelessness. Complacency remains the greatest barrier to the response that is required. We must therefore do everything we possibly can to bring home to the public the nature of the threat we face and to build consensus for the kind of disruptive change that will inevitably have to take place as we respond to it.

My second point is that the unique situation in which we find ourselves demands a far more vigorous response than the Government have provided to date, and it demands that that response begins now. There is no doubting that there is cause for pride in the UK's record when it comes to climate action, but it is also undeniably the case that the reductions achieved over recent years are largely the result of having picked the low-hanging fruit, that our annual rate of emissions reduction is slowing and that we are not on track to meet our binding emissions targets.

Where, then, is the commitment from the Government to bold policies of the kind that would drive deep decarbonisation across the whole economy and get us back on track? Given all that we know—the fact that the Paris pledges will still amount to 2.7 °C of warming and that we are not on track to meet those pledges—our collective response cannot simply be business as usual. Legislating for net zero emissions by 2050 should be the absolute minimum that we are aiming for, and it should spur a far more ambitious policy agenda.

My third and final point is that the institutions of government as they are currently organised are simply not set up for the scale and pace of the transition required to avert catastrophic climate breakdown. The abolition of the Department of Energy and Climate Change three years ago was a serious mistake, but it was also emblematic of a more deep-seated failure on the part of the Government to accord emissions reduction the status it requires. When I was a member of the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change, I remember repeatedly pressing the then Secretary of State on the inadequacies of the clean growth inter-ministerial group, but at least a body of that kind existed at that time; it does not now. If the Government were really serious about this crisis, their response would

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be driven relentlessly from the centre, with the institutional architecture put in place to co-ordinate and drive progress across all Departments, with emissions reduction woven throughout Government policy; it is not.

In all likelihood, we have probably already squandered the opportunity to avert an unprecedented degree of warming, but what we do in the coming 10 to 15 years will determine whether we avert even more drastic change and the suffering that will surely define a world where emissions continue to rise unabated. We must declare an environment and climate emergency, act in a way that is commensurate with such an emergency and reform the machinery of government so that we are able to drive forward this agenda. That is why I will wholeheartedly support the motion this evening.

4.38 pm

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook). I agree with him that the architecture of government needs to change to reflect the dire urgency of the issue. I want to ensure that any changes that this or any future Government make are not just about moving the deckchairs on the Titanic, but that they are actually part of a coherent strategy that goes through every single Department and every agency, and that that urgency is reflected in them.

I commend the Opposition for what is, I think, a perfectly reasonable motion. I would have improved on it—it could have been a little more congratulatory—but essentially it is a quite a mature bit of opposition. However, I want to reflect for a moment on what the key point about creating a climate and environment and emergency is really saying. As far as I am concerned, of course we have an emergency. Seven years ago, I attended the Pacific Islands Forum, representing Her Majesty's Government, and there I met the leaders of island states who are buying leaseholds on other islands because theirs are practically uninhabitable. The land where they have grown the food on which they depend is salinated because of rising seawater, and there are whole hosts of other reasons why they look one in the face and say, "We have, now, a climate emergency."

The IPCC has given us 12 years. In climate science, that is a heartbeat. We have to get this right. The ice shelves are melting at 10 times the predicted rate, last year 39 million acres of tropical and rain forest were lost, and it is predicted that one third of the species we have on this planet now will be lost by 2050 unless we do something. The crucial question is whether the UK is doing its bit. It sterilises the debate if Opposition Members just attack us. I am looking forward to some generous comments from the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who, no doubt, in the balanced nature of this debate, will applaud the Government for what they have done to be a world leader.

But let us talk about more important things: about where we are going in future. I want to reflect on the very good speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) and the really inspirational words from the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). Can Parliament reflect the nation's concerns? Can it raise its game to talk about this in a way that does not make people out

there turn a tin ear to our deliberations? It can, of course, by welcoming the fact that there is a fair degree of cross-party consensus. I entirely recognise the point made by the right hon. Gentleman that there will be socialist tinge to this, and there will be a free-market tinge on the Conservative Benches, but essentially we all want the same outcome and we all accept the science. Unfortunately, that is not the case in the United States, where it is an entirely polarising issue. Let us be glad that it is not that way here.

We have to be honest with our constituents. Young people come to my door and say that we need to be at net zero by 2025. Well, we would all like that, but let us explain to them, using the data, what it would actually require. I hope that tomorrow we will have a very clear steer from the Committee on Climate Change about what is going to be required to get there by 2050, and by 2045 in the largest amount. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman in saying, "For goodness' sake, let us be positive with our constituents." It is one thing to scare the pants off them, and there is a perfectly legitimate reason for doing that, but let us also be positive and explain to them that mankind has an extraordinary ability to overcome the most appalling problems, and we have the ability to do that now. We can use the power of market forces. This is where I would slightly differ from the Leader of the Opposition. Properly regulated, properly incentivised market forces can achieve enormous amounts, as my right hon. Friend said—particularly in the area of electric vehicles, for example.

While most people support what we are doing, they are also taking their children to school, trying to keep their mortgage paid and trying to keep the roof over their head. They want to know that we are on it, that we have a real sense of purpose and that, across the political class represented in this Chamber, we are going to get this sorted.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I have to reduce the time limit to three minutes. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) should not be surprised, because he can count as well as I can how many of his colleagues want to speak and how little time is left.

4.44 pm

Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab): In February, I asked the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth whether she really believed the Government were doing enough on climate change. Her answer was:

"I am very pleased to assure the hon. Lady that we are not only doing enough, but leading the developed world."—[*Official Report*, 12 February 2019; Vol. 654, c. 726.]

Clearly, after pressure from young people striking and the protests that have taken place, the Government have been forced to change their language. They now admit that much more needs to be done, which is welcome, and the Secretary of State recognised that in his opening remarks.

In spite of that rhetoric, the Government have failed to take the necessary action on climate change. I could mention many things, and we are short on time, but I cannot support anything that puts green jobs at risk. Urgent action is needed, and it must be bold, transformative and jobs-centred. We need change driven

by the Government, including to transform our economy. Our current economic system threatens the foundations on which human wellbeing depends. Building a sustainable economy needs a fundamental rethink of the way we run and measure its success, so that GDP, which takes no account of environmental impact or human wellbeing, is no longer the only benchmark. We need to adapt how we produce goods and services to reflect natural constraints.

As the party of workers, Labour is unequivocal that the required shift to a net zero-emissions economy must be fair for communities and workers. What we need is nothing short of a green industrial revolution, which will allow us to develop jobs and investment opportunities across the UK, such as the 50,000 well-paid, unionised jobs that Labour would create in Scotland.

It is clear that the demand for change from our young people and campaigners is not about business as usual, with bold words but bland action tinkering around the edges. They are explicit that this is about ensuring that actions are transformational, addressing the systemic drivers of environmental degradation and climate change. Labour is committed to doing that. My constituents in Midlothian are extremely concerned about not only climate change but the environmental crisis. Scotland's rivers, including my local River Esk, are being frequently polluted, and it is awful to see.

I will sum up with the words of my constituent, who wrote to me recently to say:

"Current legislation appears to be serving companies; it is serving 'convenience', which translates into suffering, poisoning and harm for wildlife and ecosystems, and it is serving profits and the economy."

We must create a system that is for the people, for the planet and for the many.

4.47 pm

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): It has been a pleasure to sit in the Chamber for this debate, and I am really pleased about the consensus across the House today. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) must have had a heart attack when I signed her early-day motion on 13 March, which called for a UK-wide climate emergency. I did so because I passionately believe in the need for that. My daughter was home from Australia. She is a marine biologist, and she told me in no uncertain terms what daddy should do. She is 30 years of age, and I often listen to her. I have been involved in this campaign since I joined the World Wide Fund for Nature and adopted a dolphin for my daughter when she was nine years of age. She is now working in the environment, which is not the highest-paid job.

It is the young people who have driven this campaign, and not just today but for many years. There was movement in this House before the demonstrations took place around the country. This is part of the movement. Before the young lady came over here—an unbelievably clever, intelligent and fluidly speaking young lady—the movement was going on in this country, and perhaps we needed that extra nudge.

This might sound strange, but I am disappointed that we are not going to vote this evening. I understand why the motion will be agreed and why those on the Government Benches will support it, but we should have put a marker out there. Perhaps on another day, when not so

many Members on both sides of the House are away preparing for the elections tomorrow, we can come back and do this again and again.

There are two parts of most of what I have heard today that need to be touched on again. One is people's trust in us that what we are telling them to do is good for them. We told the British public to go and buy diesel cars. That is what the experts and the scientists told us, and we did that and that was driven forward across Europe and across the western world. We are now telling them to scrap them, and that they are nasty, horrible, dirty things. People do not just switch. For people on a low income who have invested in a car, that is their freedom: it is what they need on a daily basis. For me, this issue is rightly important, and we have to make sure that we get right what we tell them to do.

The other issue is plastics. Why are we selling plastic in this country that is not recyclable? The Government could do something about this tomorrow. I am sure there would be consensus to do so, and we could make sure that we recycle all plastic sold in this country.

4.50 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): We need our environment, and the environment needs us to care for it. In the last week, we have had powerful reminders from Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion that the time to take decisive action on climate change is now. Scientists project that in 12 years it could be too late to prevent levels of pollution from causing irreversible damage to our planet and, indeed, our society.

I will focus particularly on air quality, as it is about this issue that I have mostly been contacted by my constituents. The concentration of nitrogen dioxide in the air in my constituency is falling, but in many areas it still exceeds the legal limits put in place to protect us. There are 453 London primary and secondary schools in areas that exceed legal air quality limits. I have recently spoken about improving air quality at Heath House school in my constituency, and to children at Torridon Primary School, who have written beautiful letters to me about climate change. Children are clearly leading the way on this, which is to the credit of our schools and our teachers. It is time we took notice, time we paid attention and time we took action.

The busy South Circular Road runs through my constituency, and many will know of the tragic death of Ella Kissi-Debrah, which has been linked to spikes in nitrogen dioxide in that polluted hotspot. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of her mother, Rosamund, who works tirelessly to campaign to improve air quality. I am delighted that the Mayor of London has taken action to tackle the problem in London, including with the ultra-low emission zone and low-emission bus zones. ULEZ will improve air quality, and by 2025 no primary or secondary schools will be in areas exceeding legal air quality limits, while the gap in air quality between high and low-income areas of London will be reduced by 71%.

We must live more sustainably. We need transformative action, and it is important that we do this. I urge the Government to recognise the scale of the problem, to declare a climate emergency and to begin legislation for a net zero emission target as soon as possible.

4.53 pm

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): First, I congratulate my constituent Maddie Evans from St George's School, Harpenden, who has managed to make it out of school to come to this debate. I think she is somewhere up in the Gallery, or at least I was told she was. I congratulate her on that, and I hope she will not get into trouble for doing so. [*Interruption.*] Let us move on.

I do not want to repeat what has already been said in this debate, but it is important that we recognise that no party has a monopoly on virtue on this subject, and most of the speeches so far in the debate have made that clear. There are some things to celebrate: 2018 was a record year for renewable energy, and CO₂ emissions have reduced year on year in every year of the life of this Government. This is the Government who banned microbeads and who have reduced plastic bag usage by over 85%. It is also the Government who support nuclear power, which helps us in our overall aims in this area.

However, I was very taken by the excellent speech by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). He talked compellingly about the act of political persuasion. We need to take our constituents with us on this journey; people from “planet politics” should not be telling them how they should be taxed more or have their cars taken away. We have to take our constituents with us. How do we do that? We need to show them that their lives can be better and richer—richer in both the social and economic senses—as a result of making the changes towards decarbonising our economy. How do we do that?

I thought I would give some examples of what we are doing in Hitchin and Harpenden. We are installing many more electric car charging points. We are improving our cycle routes, such as the Nickey line, which connects the village of Redbourn with Harpenden. That not only reduces car usage, but makes people fitter and happier through cycling. We are protecting our chalk streams such as the River Mimram. Heartwood forest, a new forest of almost 1,000 hectares, is just north of the village of Sandridge in my constituency and protects biodiversity in Hertfordshire.

I am listing all those things not only because I am a very proud constituency MP but to say that if we can show people how their day-to-day lives can be better and richer as a result of taking into account the climate emergency that we are declaring today, we can persuade them to make the larger, more systemic changes that I think we all realise we need to see.

4.56 pm

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): I am relieved and pleased that today my party is urging the Government to declare an environmental and climate emergency. It is our duty to do so on behalf of every citizen of not only the UK but the world: those who do not have the chance to raise their voices in this place and those who have raised their voices outside here in many towns and cities across the country and beyond our shores.

There is a climate emergency. We have no more time to speculate, discuss, dither or hesitate and taking action is now urgent. Now is the time to listen to the experts, scientists and groups such as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and ClientEarth. There has been plenty of discussion here and in the media in the past few weeks

about the protests, the school strikes and the young people who have forced the climate emergency on to the news agenda. At a time when only one issue has been completely dominating all our agendas in this place, those protestors have forced us to notice that, while we have been distracted elsewhere, our planet is breaking down.

The devastating impacts of the warming of the planet cannot possibly now be ignored. Food production, agriculture, our oceans and wildlife and the very air that we breathe are all of course vital to sustaining life on earth itself. We are denying ourselves and future generations the most beautiful treasures that our planet has to offer, such as our coral reefs, which we have allowed to be all but entirely destroyed. Our greed and desire for instant, throwaway products that float out to sea, destroying the ocean wildlife, has got to change. We need to let go of our dependency on the quickest, fastest and easiest and learn to reuse and recycle as part of our everyday lives.

In my constituency, air pollution is a very serious concern. Despite that, our council has inadequate and outdated air monitoring equipment that, according to local experts, is unfit for purpose. One such expert is Professor Stephen Peckham, director of the Centre for Health Services Studies at the University of Kent. He set up Canterbury Clean Air, of which I am proud to have been founding member, a few years ago. Together, the group used more suitable monitors, which could measure particulates such as PM_{2.5}. The levels recorded were much higher than those recommended by the World Health Organisation. The levels of NO₂ and ozone, or O₃, also regularly exceed national hourly limits. According to Professor Peckham and his team, those pollutants cause significant health problems, especially among children, whose lungs become stunted.

I join my colleagues across the House to urge the Government to see the situation as the emergency it is and allow us to tackle climate change urgently.

4.59 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in this debate. I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend and neighbour the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on the Front Bench; he will remember when we cycled up the A21 together.

The local infrastructure starting to emerge in west Kent is extremely impressive, and the work done by our local councils in greening the areas where we live is fantastic. This is not just a domestic debate, however. In fact, it is particularly not a domestic debate. As we declare a climate change emergency today, it is essential that we remember that. Privileged as I am to chair the Foreign Affairs Committee, it is important to look around the world and see where the threats appear. For example, when we look at the low-lying fields of the Mekong and the threats to rice production, which feeds so many millions—indeed, billions—in south-east Asia, or when we look at the south-east of China and see many intensively inhabited areas of that country at threat, it is important that we talk about this question not just for ourselves but for the whole world.

Many Members will have heard me being critical of one aspect of China this morning, so they will perhaps forgive me if I reflect on a different aspect. China's work on reforestation and changing and reversing the

desertification of many areas of land is inspiring. What that country has done to promote better green policies in certain areas is in many ways an example to all of us from which we need to draw very important lessons. The threats we see are not just problems for south-east Asia; they affect us here in the west. For example, when we look at some of the triggers—I do not mean all—of the Syrian civil war, which has led to mass migration and very severe political repercussions in Europe, it is impossible not to look at the challenges of climate change in that country and the impact they have had on farmers. Talking about the rise of al-Shabaab in the Maghreb and the Sahel without talking about climate change is just impossible.

As we talk today about climate change, we are talking fundamentally not just about the environmental security of our homes and the dreadful curse of fly-tipping poisoning some of our waterways, which we see in west Kent and, sadly, probably in other areas too, but about how we structure a world to deal with the inability to address those threats unless we reverse some of the impacts of climate change. I welcome this debate very much and I agree that this is an emergency.

5.2 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) on her excellent, compassionate and warm maiden speech. I feel I have been very lucky over the years with my constituency neighbours, and I am absolutely delighted not to be the only woman ever elected to Gwent any longer.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak up for the many constituents who have contacted me urging support for the motion, which calls for this House to declare an environmental and climate emergency. In fact, the Welsh Labour Government did just that yesterday. I hope we do so today to instil the urgency that is crucially needed. Climate change is wreaking havoc on our wildlife and our habitats, and is putting lives and homes at risk around the world, with the poorest in the world bearing the brunt. Last year was the fourth hottest year on record, and our UK summer was declared by the Met Office to be the joint hottest since records began. As the motion acknowledges, we need an urgent, rapid and large-scale response by the UK Government and, of course, by Governments around the world. Incremental change is not enough.

In Wales, we have been ambitious for the actions set out in “A low carbon Wales”, the first statutory decarbonisation plan. It contains 100 policies and proposals across all sectors of our economy to drive down emissions in Wales. We were one of the first nations in the world to make sustainable development a constitutional duty. We have consistently supported and promoted renewable energy generation; put a planning moratorium on fracking; and supported the development of tidal lagoons. In Wales, we recycle more than anywhere else in the UK and are in touching distance of being the world’s top recycling nation.

We cannot do this alone, however. We need the UK Government to deliver on the areas that are not devolved. The UK may have been a global leader on climate change, but the task is getting much tougher. Onshore wind deployment has fallen by 94% and offshore wind cannot plug the gap. We have removed support for

solar and have failed to deliver on the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon, which would have had huge potential for Newport too. Those are lost opportunities to reduce carbon emissions, and to build the green jobs and economy of the future, of which Wales could be a key part.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which runs the Newport Wetlands reserve in my constituency, highlighted last week that the loss of species including pollinating insects, the destruction of habitats and damage to ecosystems pose as great a threat as climate change. This debate centres on the impact of humans on the natural environment, and there are difficult choices to make, not least in my corner of Wales, on road building and the challenges of looking after workers and communities reliant on carbon-intensive sectors.

This week I received a huge bundle of letters from year 5 and 6 pupils from Magor Church in Wales Primary School, as part of their campaign on plastics. One young pupil, Katie, said in her letter:

“I want to help but I can’t do it on my own.”

I think that echoes the views of many young people calling for action to protect the planet. We should harness the passion of young activists such as my constituents, to protect their future.

5.5 pm

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): Like many colleagues from across the House, I agree that we are in a climate emergency and should act accordingly. Somerset County Council and other councils around the south-west have already taken the lead on this, and I am glad that other councils, and hopefully the Government, will follow suit.

The right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) gave a very good speech earlier on the responsibility that we in this place have for leadership, honesty and persuasion over the challenge that lies in front of us. It reminded me of a TV series that I am sure many colleagues will have gorged on: “The West Wing”. There is an episode around 10-word answers, and “This is a climate emergency and we must act now” is a 10-word answer. That is the easy bit; we can all say that and mean it and genuinely want to do something about it. However, the bit that comes next is hugely challenging, and that is where we have to start having conversations with our constituents.

The shadow Business Secretary has some great ideas on this, but at the weekend I saw her on television talking about subsidies for fossil fuels. Referring to the EU’s accounting of it, she meant things such as the 5% VAT on heating fuel and the forgone taxation from the refusal to implement the motoring fuel escalator. To say those are subsidies for fossil fuels is fine—we have to tackle those issues; we use fossil fuels too much for heating and transport—but let us not pretend by using the line “subsidies for fossil fuels” that there are not enormous challenges about which we must be honest with our constituents.

From that comes the whole issue of boiler and car scrappage, and how we do that in a socially just way, because invariably those least able to replace their boilers or cars are the ones driving the most polluting cars or using the least efficient boilers. It is a hugely difficult challenge, about which we must have an honest discussion, as we must on the requirement to bring about carbon

[James Heapey]

capture and storage or to look at hydrogen as a means for allowing our heavy industry to continue. We have to be honest about the costs of doing that, but also about the advantages.

Time prohibits me from going through a whole list of things that I think we—as a Parliament, across the House—can lead on. We can sell a vision of a life that is better, more comfortable and more sustainable, but we will not do it if we jump on easy-to-grab soundbites such as “subsidies on fossil fuels”, and then pretend that to eradicate those subsidies would not bring a profound challenge to our cost of living. The challenge is enormous. We must stand together.

5.8 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the thoughtful speech from the hon. Member for Wells (James Heapey). I begin by congratulating the newest Member of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones), on her maiden speech.

Moving on to the subject matter, the science is absolutely clear: the climate is warming and the global mean temperature is rising, enhanced by human activity. The protestors I met last week said that, the young people I meet daily in my constituency tell me that and my family tell me that. We need to act. I received a thoughtful letter and petition from students at Ysgol David Hughes comprehensive school in my constituency, who went on strike. Our young people get it.

To be fair, my local authority is a leader in the United Kingdom on recycling, the Welsh Government have a good record on recycling and Surfers Against Sewage declared the isle of Anglesey a plastic-free county. I am proud of our local record.

I say this to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy because it is important—and I worked with him when he was in opposition and our party was in Government, and I give him credit for his consistency: Wales spends twice as much on energy efficiency measures as the UK Government, and Scotland spends even more. Northern Ireland, which does not even have a sitting Government, spends one and half times more than the UK Government. These are important matters to highlight, because we are going backwards, and England is the largest of the four nations of the United Kingdom. We need to do more. I understand the point about austerity, but all parts of the UK—local authorities and the nations’ Administrations—have had to deal with austerity as well. We need to concentrate.

We built a consensus in the House around the Climate Change Act, and I was proud to be a part of that. We were world leaders. We now need to reset the energy button, which is why I want to concentrate on power. We need to invest in our natural resources more. Subsidy is not a dirty word. All technologies in this country were once subsidised. Oil and gas were 100% subsidised. The Secretary of State will know what I am going to say: we need to invest more in tidal and wave energy. It is so predictable. We need to do it now. First-of-its-kind technology will be very expensive, but if we do not do it, we will be back here in years to come saying, “We just about missed out target”. We could meet our target with a proper funding system for large energy infrastructure projects. I will work with him to ensure that happens.

We should consider the Welsh Water not-for-profit model. It puts customers first and our environment first. We in the House must follow suit.

5.11 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): On Friday, the RSPB launched its “Let Nature Sing” track and accompanying video, which we should promote as much as we can. The track brings attention to the fact that we have 40 million fewer birds today and reminds us of birdsong. It is a call to action. We can add to that the loss of pollinating insects, the destruction of habitats and the 1 million species under threat. These problems alone are reason enough to declare a climate emergency, and I am glad to be speaking in this debate.

The Government must commit to and grow a low-carbon economy. The country wants us to accelerate action and lead the world. I want briefly to mention the sustainable development goals. They have not been mentioned yet, but they include clear commitments to helping the world’s poorest countries address climate change, and there are things that we, as a global leader, can do.

At home, there are things we must do. Getting it right will reduce the demand on the NHS; create and spread wealth across all corners of the UK, which is of particular interest to Cornwall; reduce demand on energy supply; provide warm and comfortable homes, as the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) made clear; support small businesses and create skilled workforces, especially in construction and the renewables sector; boost the car manufacturing industry and innovation in greener fuels; and support sustainable food production.

Practical measures are needed. Cornwall Council is one of the first councils, if not the first, to commit to being carbon-free by 2030. We are talking about funding and accelerating the work to address fuel poor homes; launching a car scrappage scheme to support poorer families to move to more fuel efficient vehicles; and increasing support such as that provided by Salix Finance, which provides 100% interest-free loans to public buildings, including schools, so that they can put renewable solutions on their roofs and reap the benefits once the loans are repaid.

We are also calling for the introduction of the environment Bill, which the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), assured me in a recent debate will happen immediately after the next Queen’s Speech. In that Bill, we must establish the nature recovery network, invest in woodland recovery and incentivise landowners to adopt nature-friendly practices. Finally, people in Cornwall are calling for citizens’ assemblies to be established to identify solutions both nationally and locally and give people a stake in how this country moves forward.

The Government must take a lead. Councils such as the Duchy of Cornwall want to get on top of this agenda, conquer this and be a force for good, but they need Government policy and funds to allow them to do it.

5.14 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): So often as politicians we talk about what is politically possible, but with the climate crisis we need to move from the art of the

politically possible to the science of what is necessary. When you are drowning, you do not ask yourself, “Ooh, what is politically possible?”; you do whatever it takes to survive. When the banks crashed in 2008, the political consensus in this place was to save them by any means necessary. According to the National Audit Office, the cost was £1.2 trillion, which meant 10 years of austerity, public service cuts and vast human suffering. But now, instead of a banking collapse, we face a climate and ecological collapse. We face catastrophes of biblical proportions: droughts, pestilence, famine, floods, wildfires, mass migration, political instability, war and terrorism. Global civilisation as we know it will be gone by the end of the century unless we act.

What has been the response from the Conservatives? I will try not to be too partisan. We have seen the green light for fracking, fossil fuel subsidies boosted by billions, onshore wind scrapped, solar support axed, the green homes scheme eviscerated, zero-carbon homes abandoned, the green bank sold off, the Swansea tidal lagoon stuffed, and Heathrow approved. If Tory environmental policy in 2010 could be summed-up as “hug a husky”, the 2019 policy looks more like “Shoot it, skin it, and boil it down to its bones.”

It was against that background—with the science of the climate crisis over here and Government policy over there—that Greta Thunberg, the youth strikers and Extinction Rebellion appeared. They arrived at the climate crisis debate like gatecrashers at a premature funeral, smashing through the window in a shower of glass to announce to a hushed congregation that the patient was still alive. Their message to this place is simple: “The time for incrementalism has passed. Act now, change now, or be swept away by those who will.”

This motion offers us a chance to fundamentally restructure our economy to deliver good, secure, well-paid jobs as we mobilise to decarbonise our economy on a grand scale. It offers us a chance to reinvigorate and strengthen our democracy, to massively reduce social and economic inequalities, and to protect and restore vital threatened habitats and carbon sinks. We must onshore the global financial system, bringing it back under democratic control.

That brings me to my final point. Navigating global society through the perils of the 21st century will require two key things: global co-operation, and human ingenuity and passion on a scale hitherto unseen in our entire history. President Kennedy summed it up in his moon-shot speech of 1962. He did not ask what it would cost; he asked instead what it would take to succeed. He said:

“We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win”.

5.17 pm

Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con): It will come as no surprise to anyone in the House that I shall advocate nuclear as the most game-changing, transformative way in which to tackle the climate problem and significantly—seriously—reduce our carbon emissions. There is, quite simply, no alternative. Nuclear is unparalleled. It is safe, proven and efficient technology. Its capability to generate clean energy 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for 60 years is incredible.

Rolling out the Government’s third-generation nuclear reactors would generate more than 18 GW of clean, safe, low-carbon energy, while also creating thousands of jobs, apprenticeships and training places and improving local communities. I speak with some experience, having lived in a nuclear community for 43 years and having worked in the industry. Because the last Labour Government failed to invest in new nuclear, the last power station to be built was Sizewell B. Our current power stations are coming to the end of their long-serving lives, which means that our carbon emissions will soar, as they have in Germany and Japan. If Germany had invested the same amount that it invested in renewables—\$580 billion—in nuclear, it would now have zero carbon emissions.

This Conservative Government are rightly shouting loudly and proudly, having celebrated 90 of the cleanest hours last Easter, and 2018 was the cleanest, greenest year ever in the United Kingdom. Renewables are great, but they are geographically limiting, and intermittent by their very nature. Last June, wind turbines were operating at only 4% of their potential. This Government are the first to take decarbonisation seriously, with Hinkley Point C now under construction. I welcome with great anticipation the small modular reactor competition, the UK consortium, and advanced modular reactors, which will enable us to reduce waste in the industry. I also welcome the energy White Paper and the regulated asset-based financial model, which I very much hope will ensure that we can reduce the cost of new nuclear as well.

The Leader of the Opposition has consistently argued against nuclear power. He voted against Sizewell B and against Hinkley Point C; he has campaigned against nuclear his entire working life.

The evidence is clear: denuclearisation increases carbon emissions. Countries around the world are now realising this, and I know this Government are taking decarbonisation seriously.

5.20 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The climate change debate has moved on rapidly in recent months, and let us all agree on one thing: we are no longer here to debate whether this problem is happening. Look at what is happening to our planet: from the scorching hot week we had in February this year to the blistering hot summer last year, our climate is changing even in the UK before our very eyes, but while these ice-lolly weather patterns might be a gift to some of us in the western world with some capacity to adapt, the price we pay for them as a planet is catastrophic. We see what is happening to our climate in the UK and its effects, namely extreme weather, both hot and cold, of increasing frequency, but we must always remember that our country is predicted by climate scientists to be one of the least affected by global climate change.

In 2019, when we think about and debate climate change action it is not enough simply to coo over David Attenborough and give ourselves a pat on the back for shining a light on what is happening to our world; as other Members have said, we must act and we must act now. This is the biggest issue humanity has ever faced, and it requires us to be bold and to do much more than just speak out. Indeed, Greta Thunberg put this better than I or any other Member could:

“To do your best is no longer good enough. We must all do the seemingly impossible.”

[Chris Elmore]

But what can we do? Well, for a start, we must support today's motion, which is about acting decisively to lead the way and being a catalyst for change both here in the UK and internationally. The magnitude of this issue demands cross-party consensus and it demands that we act swiftly. Taking this first step today must be the start of us taking the right path at this most precarious of crossroads.

I cannot speak out in this debate without putting on record how deeply disappointed I was when on her first day in office one of the Prime Minister's first acts was to abolish the Department of Energy and Climate Change. What message did this send to the rest of the world? It sent the message that the UK was no longer a leader on climate change, but was instead resigned to being a follower. Let us not forget that under the last Labour Government we became the first country in the world to legislate legally binding carbon budgets, in the Climate Change Act 2008.

I will conclude now, given the time limit. I want to leave hon. Members, and particularly the Government, with this point. What if the French fire service had known about last month's fire at Notre Dame 10 years before it happened? What if we had known about any of the terrorist atrocities across the world 10 years before they happened? Just think what preventive action we would have taken if we had had that level of foresight and known about those catastrophes, and countless others, a decade ahead of them happening. With climate change we have that foresight and, crucially, the means to do something about it. The legs of the stool are there, as it were, but there is still one missing: us, and that is all it takes for this whole thing to fall over.

So when we leave this place today and go back to talking about other important matters such as no-deal cliff edges, let us all commit to remember one thing: if we think the no-deal cliff edge is scary, it is barely in the foothills of what the climate cliff edge could look like.

5.23 pm

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): It will come as no surprise to Ministers sitting on the Treasury Bench that I rise to speak about energy efficiency.

I was fortunate enough to go to two schools on Friday, Shocklach and Willow Wood, and both sets of pupils talked to me about the importance of the climate to them, but they also asked what we are doing about it—and that is what this debate is about. I am very pleased that the Government have brought forward their green growth strategy. There is so much positive action that the Government have taken, but I have to say that I do think we have made one mistake: removing the zero-carbon homes standard. It is wrong that we are now building homes that will need to be retrofitted; we have a lot of homes that need energy efficiency measures installed now, and I want to talk about some of the benefits we could deliver by introducing energy efficiency measures.

If £1 billion was put into bringing the energy performance certificate standard up to C we could save every family £270. We could put £270 back into their pockets and create approximately £51 billion-worth of revenue for the Exchequer as that programme rolled out annually. It would also save 25% of our energy consumption, which would

be the equivalent of the output of six nuclear power stations the size of Hinkley Point C. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison), who made the case for nuclear, but I would also argue that we absolutely need to ensure that our homes are energy efficient—not only because of the savings in electricity generation, but because the CO₂ and carbon savings are estimated at about £34 billion-worth of cost and the air quality improvements are estimated at about £4.1 billion of cost.

An excellent document has been prepared by the Energy Efficiency Infrastructure Group and I urge the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to encourage the Chancellor to put that document into his red box to read before the spending review. We have seen how Germany has harnessed low-interest loans to generate £8.4 billion-worth of home improvements by homeowners that were virtually paid for by the VAT receipts on those sales. That was a self-financing project, which is one way to help to tackle this problem.

5.26 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): We are 10 years away from the edge of the biggest crisis that humanity will ever face. No ifs, no buts—if this is left unchecked, it will happen in our lifetime. The actions that we take tonight, tomorrow and in the coming days and weeks—and, crucially, over the next decade—will determine the course of history.

What have we already seen? What is coming to us if we do not act? We have seen the melting of global ice stores, shifting seasons and migration patterns, extreme weather—we have certainly seen that already in the UK—and droughts, not only in developing countries but across the world. We have also seen wildfires, as my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) said, and the degradation of our coral reefs, many of which have been lost forever. We see rising food prices hitting the poorest hardest, and we see deforestation not just by humans but by invasive species that thrive in warmer temperatures. That is our backdrop. The question today is not whether we should act; it is, what on earth can we do to act quickly enough to reverse some of the damage we have already done and prevent the damage that we could inflict in the future?

This is fundamentally an issue of global justice. Climate change is already hitting the poorest hardest, and as we help them to rebuild and develop their communities, we must avoid prescribing for them the old models of growth that have led us to this situation. Instead, we must promote new, sustainable development models. That is why we on this side of the House are committed to stopping aid spending on fossil fuels, and I hope that the Government will meet us in that commitment.

I want to speak briefly about protests. To those who joke and laugh at the millions of schoolchildren and street protesters taking part in climate strikes, and who brand them truants or virtue signallers, I say this: "You are on the wrong side of history, and we will act without you." Let them look at this debate today and see how well subscribed it is. The protesters have clearly got our attention.

So what comes next? We must support today's motion and become the first country in the world to declare a climate emergency, but we must also have radical change in our economy after that. In our energy system,

our transport, our agriculture, our waste processing and everything in between, we must put forward the following test: is this short-term gain going to result in long-term consequences for our climate? Would fracking pass that test? Of course it would not. These questions must also be asked by international Governments and by our local government. I am proud that Labour colleagues going into the local elections have committed to making Nottingham carbon zero by 2028. That is on the ballot paper in our local elections. The Government should help to meet that energy target by electrifying our trains. It is absolutely absurd that we are buying new trains that will be carbon emitters.

The question we have to ask ourselves is, do we want to be the generation that had the greatest knowledge of what we are doing to our world but chose to do nothing? Surely not. We have been debating this issue for nearly four hours and I have not heard a dissenting voice, so it looks as though we are going to declare the emergency today, but tomorrow we have to act.

5.29 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): Britain has a good record in recognising the global threat of climate change and taking steps to address it. That said, the threat of climate change is growing, and more action is required on more fronts. Tomorrow, the Committee on Climate Change will provide its recommendations for how to shift the UK's long-term climate target to net zero emissions by 2050, and I anticipate that the Government will respond positively and proactively. That will complement the measures already being taken, which embed tackling climate change in the nation's DNA.

The industrial strategy leads into the clean growth strategy, from which sector deals are derived. The offshore wind sector deal, which the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth launched in Lowestoft in March, is helping to revitalise the local economy, and ScottishPower has set up its operations and maintenance base in the dock. Also, an offshore engineering training facility is under construction at East Coast College.

The low-carbon economy offers enormous opportunities to grow our domestic economy and to create expertise that we can export around the world. Oil and gas extraction on the UK continental shelf has played a crucial role in the UK and East Anglian economies for over 50 years, and the industry has an important role to play in the transition to a low-carbon economy. The skills and expertise required in the sector overlap to a large degree with those required in offshore renewables. The two industries are already working together on such innovative projects as gas-to-wire, whereby gas from the southern North sea gas fields is generated into electricity offshore and then transmitted to the shore.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend welcome the £355 million that has been invested in Scotland's offshore wind industry by the UK Government between 2010 and 2018?

Peter Aldous: I do welcome that investment. The two industries go hand in hand. In oil and gas basins all around the world, one will hear Scottish, Geordie and Norfolk and Suffolk accents, and we must ensure that that continues to be the case long after we have extracted the last drop of oil from the North sea and after other countries have moved to forms of renewable energy production.

We need to look closely at what we can do better in many areas, and I will briefly mention four of them. First, the Suffolk coast has been at the forefront of the battle with rising sea levels for a millennium, and the challenge has intensified over the past decade as climate accelerated the rise in the level of the North sea. Innovative schemes have been produced locally to defend both Lowestoft and Kessingland, and it is vital that they are properly funded. Secondly, the roll-out of smart meters is in many respects the elephant in the room that no one talks about. We are not doing well enough, and we need to do better. Thirdly, we were wrong to ditch the zero-carbon homes initiative. It needs to be reinstated, and we must step up plans to retrofit our existing housing stock, thereby reducing fuel poverty. Finally, electricity storage has a vital role to play, but it is threatened by Ofgem's targeted charging review proposals. They must be reviewed, with full implementation delayed until 2023.

Millions of people around the world are imperilled by climate change day to day. We need more of what we are already doing, but on more fronts and with a greater sense of urgency.

5.33 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The failure to act with sufficient ambition to avert the climate catastrophe will be the greatest moral failure of our time. The industrial world's destruction of our planet is essentially the story of a single lifetime. The planet has been brought from seeming stability to the brink of catastrophe in my lifetime, so we have to turn things around in our lifetimes, too. It is the most awesome responsibility, but it is also the most amazing opportunity.

When people look back at this moment, it will not be those blockading bridges or going on strike from school that history will judge severely. It will be those who shut their eyes and blocked their ears to the scale of the challenge. I pay tribute to the work of Extinction Rebellion and the youth climate strikes, because they have already made a difference. The sheer number of people in the Chamber today is testament to that.

We need to be serious. Declaring a climate emergency should not be a few words before we move on with business as usual. Business as usual is climate appeasement. We need change. We need the kind of change we have when we face, for example, conflict or war. We need that kind of single-minded mobilisation, because extraordinary things can happen at extraordinary times. Back in 1938 and for the six years that followed, at that wartime moment, we reduced our use of coal by 25%, we reduced our use of private cars by 95% and public transport use went up by 13% because we had a shared sense of emergency. My plea for today is that we do not just use these words about emergency but that we should be serious and act on them.

Conservative Members sometimes challenge me to say that they have done better and to congratulate the Government on their actions, but it is hard to do that when, for example, the Secretary of State refused to answer my question about aviation expansion. The bottom line is that we cannot be serious about a climate emergency and continue with aviation expansion, Heathrow expansion and fracking. The Government have slashed zero-carbon homes, shafted solar power and banned onshore wind, which is wrong. We need to call them out.

[Caroline Lucas]

At the same time, we also need to say there is an incredibly positive agenda out there for the drafting. There is a positive agenda on a green new deal, and I am proud that a new environmental justice commission was launched yesterday. The commission will be chaired by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), the former Member for South Thanet and me, and it will look at the green new deal, at the mass mobilisation of resources into renewable energy and energy efficiency and at getting transport and agriculture right. We can do that in a way that is driven by workers. We can make sure that no one loses out in the transition and that there is, indeed, a positive story about how we can have a better life for all.

Right now, the statistics are grim. We are one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. Fifty-nine scientists said last year that we have lost 60% of the population of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles in my lifetime. That has to change.

5.36 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): As we have heard, there is much common ground across the Chamber today. Indeed, I am sure there is much common ground across the UK, but the UK cannot tackle climate change or protect the global environment in isolation. We can boast many achievements, but recent weeks have perhaps shown that we have not shouted loud enough about them. Of course, there is always more we can do.

Just last week, I met a Member of the Youth Parliament representing Erewash, Chad Fowkes, to discuss his “Last Straw for Ilkeston” campaign. To help raise awareness of the amount of single-use plastics discarded as litter, Chad has organised a clean-up of the Erewash canal. He shows genuine knowledge and passion for the issues facing our environment and, of course, he persuaded me to help him with the clean-up.

There are many unusual ways in which constituents highlight the issues that concern them. On climate change, one way that grabbed my attention was the handmade messages sent as part of the “Show the Love” campaign, which was far more effective than the hundreds of emails we get every day, and it made me sit up and think about what we are doing to the climate.

There are numerous ways in which we can show leadership in tackling climate change, and one way is through investing in technology. On a recent visit to Ethiopia, in the middle of what we would call scrubland, I saw a few community buildings, one of which had solar panels on its roof with the sole purpose of powering a solar fridge for vaccines. Interestingly, the solar-powered fridge and the associated technology was developed in Bognor Regis. I am sure we can do more to invest in novel technologies to aid developing countries and to increase our exports, which is definitely a win-win situation.

I take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) on his ten-minute rule Bill yesterday that would create a legal obligation for the UK to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. In doing so, we would be the first G20 country to make such a commitment—2050 may seem a long time away but, thinking back 30 years, 1989-90 does not seem too

long ago. The net zero carbon emissions ambition would, yet again, show the world that we, as a nation, are true global leaders.

I said at the start of my speech that we do not shout out enough about our achievements, and I want to finish by talking about some of them in the short time I have left. The year 2008 was Britain’s greenest year ever; the World Health Organisation has said in relation to our clean air strategy that the UK is an example for the rest of the world to follow; and greenhouse gas emissions have fallen by 23% since 2010. I could go on and on. We need to shout louder and show that we are a true global leader.

5.39 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Let us remind ourselves why we are here: thousands, if not millions, of young schoolchildren protested on the streets, and that is why we are suddenly taking this issue seriously again. I share some of the sentiments expressed by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). I, too, feel a sense of shame, and I think we all should. What have we done since we have known that this climate catastrophe faced us? Since 2001, we have had Al Gore and “An Inconvenient Truth”, but what have we done since? We have not done enough, and that is why we are here today.

It worries me that we are creating a comfortable consensus and a sense of complacency, with the idea that we just need to do a little bit more, and we are done. No; we need to do a lot more. It is about political choices, and this Government have done far too little. Since the Liberal Democrats left government, the Tories have abandoned climate change as an issue. Subsidies for renewables have been slashed, the Green Investment Bank has been privatised, the proposal for zero-carbon homes has been abandoned and a meaningless target of phasing out new petrol and diesel cars by 2040 has been adopted.

I am disappointed that even though I keep asking the Government about ceasing to support fossil fuel industries such as fracking, I do not get a straight answer. That is one of the simplest things that we can do, because fracking is a fossil fuel industry. Not only do we need to phase out the old industries, but we should invest in renewables and not even consider developing new fossil fuel industries. When we talk about consensus, I hope that the Government will be serious and stop supporting the fracking industry. In the same way, I found it very disappointing to hear a Conservative Member say yesterday that he would not have been elected if he had supported onshore wind. What decisions are we making if we say to ourselves, “I won’t be electable if I support onshore wind farms, because people don’t like the look of them.”? We have to take leadership and do the right thing. I do not blame people, but I will blame us, as politicians, if we do not take leadership.

I want to finish by saying something quickly about consensus. I believe we need consensus and buy-in from the people of this country, and I strongly believe in citizens’ assemblies. Through citizens’ assemblies, we can create consensus about the urgency of tackling this issue, what we can do and how we can do it fairly, so that we burden not those who can least afford it, but those who can most afford it, with the costs. I hope that the Government will listen to this debate and urgently

take up some of the demands that have been made, particularly what I and other Members have said about fracking. There is a consensus for stopping fracking, and I believe there is a consensus for continuing with onshore wind. Please, Government, listen. We can make a difference.

5.43 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) echoed many of the good things that have been said today, by people from all parts of the House, about a cause—climate change—on which we must unite. The key to this is not just calling climate change an emergency, but taking action to show that we mean it. I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to zero net carbon emissions by 2050 and to planting millions of trees across the country to help to protect our part of the planet. I hope, too, that the Government pull together a cross-departmental plan to deliver that nationally and help us to lead in the world by, for example, using DFID funds to continue the good work of its climate change unit to protect rainforests in Indonesia.

Locally, in Gloucestershire, achieving that means resolving the air pollution on the A38 by Llanthony and the huge A417 Air Balloon problem, as well as finishing the cycle paths on the canal and in the Golden valley from Gloucester to Cheltenham. It means doing much more about litter and Project Refill for water bottles; I hope that our schoolchildren will join me in taking those things forward. It also means closing the residual waste tip at Hempsted and replacing it with grass valleys harvesting solar power in due course. Both locally and nationally, we need to look again at what we will do about onshore wind, and above all at how to use the world's strongest tide on the River Severn and around the Welsh coast. More generally, around our nation's coastline, marine energy remains a largely untapped source of green energy.

I want Gloucester to be at the forefront of a green revolution. We are already home to the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Robinswood hill, Barnwood arboretum, EDF Energy's nuclear operational headquarters, the Kingsway green sustainability group and an MP on his cherry-and-white bike. We can make real progress on all the things I have mentioned and help to turn an emergency into an opportunity, for a better city, a greener Gloucester and a zero-carbon United Kingdom.

5.45 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I have requested a climate change debate a couple of times in the past couple of months, so I am delighted that we are having this one today.

I was delighted to attend the session with Greta Thunberg a week ago. Many of us who were there will recall that she kept repeating the line, "Are you listening? Can you hear me?" She was right to be sceptical. Some of us remember the Al Gore film and book from 2006 and the Stern report from the same year. Sadly, the six key messages from that report are as valid today as they were then.

The world's first Climate Change Act was introduced by the then Labour Government, with whom I am proud to associate myself. Their commitment not only to

reducing CO₂ but to having 100% zero-carbon homes by 2016 was a terrific ambition. It was picked up by the coalition Government in their 2011 Budget, but has sadly since fallen by the wayside, as has been mentioned.

It is claimed that there has been a 37% reduction of our territorial CO₂ emissions, but in reality, once aviation, shipping and imports are taken into account, there has been only a 10% reduction. That is why the climate change strikes by young people and the Extinction Rebellion action has been so important: they have brought us all together to discuss this important topic.

As Greta Thunberg said, climate change is the easiest and most difficult challenge faced by humanity. But is it really that hard? It is clear that system change is urgently required, whether that is through changes to the sustainable building code, building at higher densities in our communities, or changes to the planning process, all supported by better infrastructure and public transport. We should be looking at existing properties and how a wholesale programme plan for "pay as you save" home energy insulation could be installed throughout the country. This is the sort of thinking that we need, alongside favouring onshore wind turbines and uprating our power grids to ensure that we can all use electric vehicles, whether cars or cycles. Look at Germany, where 900,000 electric bikes were purchased last year, as against 64,000 in the UK. Staying in Germany, Munich set itself the ambition to be 100% powered by renewable energy by 2025 and is on target to achieve that.

As a county councillor in Warwickshire, I was proud to propose that we made all of our pension fund fossil-free. Sadly, that proposal was not accepted, but I wish all authorities would consider that step, because it is the sort of wholesale systemic change that we need. Likewise, I proposed a Warwickshire energy plan to introduce renewable energy for all citizens in Warwickshire. Yes, the challenges are systemic and behavioural, but we can address them. We just need the political will.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am sure colleagues will appreciate that it is almost impossible to get in everyone who wants to speak, but we will get more people in if colleagues take perhaps two minutes instead of three minutes, to be generous to others. I shall leave it at that.

5.48 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate.

I absolutely understand the concerns about climate change that have been registered loudly recently, and it is absolutely right that we take them into account, but it is also hugely important that we talk about the progress we have made so far and about building on it, rather than looking at the issue with too much fear and ignorance. I am proud that the UK leads the way, with the most impressive performance in the reduction of emissions among G20 countries. We have managed to reduce emissions by 44% since the 1990s. It is absolutely key that we drive forward, but we should do so in the belief that we can reach the ambitious targets that we have set ourselves.

[Huw Merriman]

Let us take renewables as an example. Back in 2010, only 6% of our electricity was generated from renewables; now, we are at almost 40%, so we should be optimistic. We should tell ourselves that we can do more, but we should also be proud of what we have done and try to lead the way when it comes to the rest of the world. My big concern is what is happening in China. It used to be the case that 70% of our power was reliant on coal. We have reduced that to the point where coal-fired power stations should be phased out by 2025. That is great news, but in China 70% of its power is reliant on coal, and it is currently building hundreds more coal-fired power stations.

The reality is that even the big steps that we take will not make that much of a difference to our one earth, but the small steps that the Chinese can take will make a huge difference. I would like to see this country—this Government—using our soft power to lead China and tell it that it is not acceptable from an environmental or even an economic perspective for it to continue using fossil fuels in the way that it does. We should use our expertise and innovators to try to take China to a better place. The reality is that China pollutes more in a single year than the UK has polluted in 100 years. China will soon be responsible for more pollution than Europe and the US put together, so it is vital that we press the Chinese to do more.

I want to send out the message to young people that, yes, they should be concerned, and that, yes, we should listen to them, but please let us start on the basis that this country has done more than most across the globe and has got itself into a better position. We will deliver more—we are committed to delivering more—but let us deal with the facts and not just the ignorance.

5.51 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): It was 307 years ago that Thomas Newcomen demonstrated the first working steam engine up in Dudley Castle. It was put to work pretty rapidly, pumping the water out of Lord Dudley's coal mines. Over the next three centuries not only did James Watt and Matthew Boulton go on to perfect the steam engine in Handsworth, but Frank Whittle led the country into the steam age.

From our region, we are very proud of our role in this nation's industrial revolution, but we are conscious too that, as the region that sparked the carbon revolution, we have a moral responsibility now to lead the zero-carbon revolution. That task would be an awful lot easier if the Government could provide to our region four basic ideas—four basic bits of support. First, on energy, we produce just 0.3% of the country's renewable energy. It is pretty difficult to install onshore wind in a place as dense as the west midlands, but we could absolutely roll out solar. It would be much easier if the Government reintroduced the feed-in tariffs that they so unwisely eliminated just a few years ago.

Secondly, transport is the biggest source of carbon emissions in our region. As the Secretary of State knows, we want to be the world centre of battery technology and the electric vehicles revolution in our region. That would be much easier if the Secretary of State paid heed to the Select Committee report and sorted out the

muddle around the elimination of carbon-emitting engines and went for its recommendation of 2032 as the deadline for getting rid of carbon cars or vehicles.

Thirdly, on homes, we could decarbonise our housing stock much faster and lift 300,000 people out of energy poverty if we had control of eco-funding at a regional level. Finally, when it comes to replanting our forests, we should be insisting that our airports become carbon-neutral and ask them to pay an endowment to help us replant the Arden Forest and let it reconnect with the national forest planted just north of Lichfield. These are all things that we can do. We want to lead. We need a Government who help us.

5.53 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Of course there is a climate emergency. The science is very clear: we cannot continue pumping more greenhouse gases into the planet's atmosphere. We need to get to net zero. I was enormously proud yesterday to co-sponsor the net zero carbon Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk).

Yesterday morning, I stood in the control room of National Grid, watching a screen the size of a wall. It was possible to see where all our electricity comes from and where it goes to; the power that has already been generated by those mammoth wind farms in the North sea; the impact of the solar panels as they are lit up; the pumped storage that time-shifts the electricity from one period of time to another; the coal-powered stations that are going down and down and soon will be no more; and, really importantly, those vast interconnectors between ourselves and the continent, which make our own electricity more resilient.

There has been great change in our infrastructure in the past decade, but we need to do more, because even if every home had a solar panel on its roof and every vehicle today was electric, our grid could not cope. The good news is that that change is coming. By 2025, the grid will be able to cope with 100% zero-carbon inputs and every new home in this country will have no fossil fuels to heat it. There is more change coming; I am really looking forward to tomorrow's recommendations from the Committee on Climate Change.

I hope that the recommendations talk more about how we can enable more energy efficiency to save money as well as carbon, and about how we embrace the transition to electric vehicles, in which we are already leading in the EU. I hope that there is more about how we can continue to support our world-leading crop scientists, and our world-leading work on carbon capture and storage, so that we can continue to heat our homes without using more carbon even on cold, sunless and windless days. I also hope that the recommendations mention how we can support our woodlands and our peat bogs.

Most of all, I hope the Committee on Climate Change embraces and encourages the work that we are doing across the world through the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Foreign Office, and our leadership in bringing countries together. I hope that those countries all come to London next year, because it is only by leading across the world that we will win this fight for the climate.

5.56 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): We need action on so many fronts to tackle this climate emergency, but time is limited so I will speak about just one. Unsurprisingly, it is about the fact that 30% of our global greenhouse gas emissions are attributable to our food system.

If we do not make changes, the food and farming system will singlehandedly use up our Paris climate agreement emissions budget within the next 30 years, yet there is still a woeful failure to rise to the challenge, and there is no excuse. There have been endless wake-up calls, including from the UN, the IPCC, EAT-Lancet, Chatham House, academics from Harvard and Oxford, and many more—I have a big pile of reports in my office—yet politicians are still hitting the snooze button.

Lots of things contribute to the climate impact of our food system: the use of fossil fuels and synthetic nitrogen fertilizers on farms, methane emissions from ruminants, transportation and refrigeration. If food waste were a country, it would have the third largest carbon footprint, behind China and the USA. However, the biggest impact is from land use. Some 48% of UK land is used for animal agriculture, and 55% of that is used for animal feed, rather than for growing food that is directly eaten by humans. The destruction of the Amazon rainforest is driven by industrial farming, which destroys habitats, biodiversity and natural carbon sinks.

It has been more than 10 years since I held a debate in Westminster Hall on the environmental impact of the livestock sector. To say that the reaction I got then was hostile is an understatement, but it now feels like there is a breakthrough. This breakthrough is being led by the public, and the private sector has responded to that public demand. It is not being led by politicians. I really think we need to rise to the challenge and start talking about it. We need a net zero emissions target by 2040 in the Agriculture Bill, which the NFU now backs. We also need to reward farmers who reduce their carbon footprint, to plant more trees and to store more carbon in the soil—and yes, we need to accelerate the trend towards healthier, more sustainable diets by reducing red meat and dairy consumption by at least 30% by 2030.

Last night, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) and I attended an event in Soho hosted by the Meatless Farm Company, which is calling for people to sign up to a meatless consumption target. It commissioned research by Joseph Poore of Oxford University that showed that if people replaced one red meat meal a week with a plant-based meal, it would cut UK greenhouse gas emissions by some 50 million tonnes—that is a reduction of 8.4% or the equivalent of taking 16 million cars off the road. I call on all the politicians in this place who profess to care about climate change to take up that challenge.

5.58 pm

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): As a mother, doctor and the MP for Sleaford and North Hykeham, I am committed to ensuring that our children inherit a world that is cleaner, safer and greener than we found it. This will be achievable only with a serious long-term and ambitious response to tackling the threat of climate change. The importance of this issue to members of the public cannot be

underestimated. Indeed, in my own parliamentary office we have seen 10 times more correspondence this month on climate change than we have seen on Brexit.

This is clearly an issue of great importance to the country and my constituency, and I am very glad that the Government see it as such too. We have been a leader both at home and abroad in leading the fight against climate change. We have reduced greenhouse gas emissions in the UK by 25% since 2010, established the international climate fund to provide £5.8 billion to help the world's poorest to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and played a crucial role in delivering the historic 2015 Paris agreement. This Government have achieved all this by decarbonising the economy at the fastest rate of any G20 country since 2000.

I have been proud to play my part through the work of the EFRA Committee in scrutinising the Environment Bill. That Bill, which will come to the Commons soon, will put the 25-year environment plan on to a statutory footing, introduce a set of environmental principles to guide future Government policy making, and establish a world-leading environmental watchdog. It will create a green governance framework that will ensure that Parliaments, for years to come, keep the environment at the heart of their decision making. I look forward to its introduction soon.

It is a common refrain that all politics is local, and climate change is no exception. Reaching the ambitious goals that were set will require action at all levels of government. In Sleaford and North Hykeham, we are lucky to be served by district and county councils that take their role in reducing emissions seriously. For example, North Kesteven District Council has reduced its carbon footprint by an incredible amount—almost 70% in the past 10 years.

Some of the concerns that we have seen on this issue have been due to how climate measures might affect the economy, but actually those fears have been misplaced, because rather than being a shackle on our economy, green energy has been a boost for it. Since 2010, our renewable energy capacity has quadrupled, and right now there are 400,000 people in the UK working in low-carbon businesses. I have had the pleasure of seeing the benefits that renewable energy can bring first-hand in my constituency at the Sleaford renewable energy plant, which burns straw to generate enough energy for 65,000 homes and saves 150,000 tonnes of CO₂ per annum in the process. I believe that the Government's commitment to the environment is clear to see.

6.1 pm

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I refer the House to my entry in the register, especially in relation to solar power and community renewable energy.

I have three small ideas for the House today: reform of capitalism, engagement in Europe and beyond, and the future of technology. On capitalism, when people say that we need a system change, they tend to be referring to a change in the energy system, but I think we need to be bolder and go wider. We need to reform our whole economic system, and that requires reform of capitalism. Nothing else will be a sufficient response to the young people protesting; nothing else will be radical enough. Decarbonising capitalism means reforming the rules for our banks, stock exchanges and pension funds to force them to take account of climate risk. If people

[Sir Edward Davey]

think that is radical, well, the Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, agrees with it. Many people agree with it. We, and this Government, are getting behind the curve on the financial reforms we need. If we made them, we would radically transform the situation.

On European engagement, when I intervened on the Secretary of State earlier, I pointed out that Britain had led climate action at EU level. By winning stronger EU action, Britain influenced the United States and China, and through that we influenced the United Nations, and that led to the Paris climate treaty. Action at European level was critical for global action on climate change. As a Minister, I spent two and half years of very solid climate diplomacy across the EU, but a lot of it in Warsaw, because Poland was the issue. We worked with the Poles, we got a compromise, and we moved them over. Because of that, the whole of the EU adopted a greenhouse gas reduction target that the EU's Climate Change Commissioner had told me was impossible. We got right to the far end of our ambition, and it was Britain leading that ambition, not going down to the bottom, as is sometimes said about us in Europe. If we are at the table, we can make that difference. Brexit is a climate disaster in itself, because it is reducing this country's soft power and influence.

Finally, when I became Secretary of State, I was told by the *Daily Mail* and various other people that renewables were too expensive, and did I not know that the sun does not always shine and the wind does not always blow? Because of the policies we introduced, renewables are now the cheapest option, and that is fantastic for this country and the world. Intermittency, which is the other problem, is fast being solved through storage, interconnectors, the smart grid and demand-side response. If we add in tidal power and CCS, we can have the base load to sort out the problem relatively quickly. The solutions are there. We need the political will and determination to drive them through and meet this climate emergency.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am afraid we have not done that well at my idea of Members voluntarily speaking for two minutes, so I am reducing the time limit to two minutes. I am sorry, but I want to get as many people in as possible.

6.5 pm

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I shall rush what I have to say, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It may well help if we understand what we mean by “state of emergency”. Section 1 of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 states that an emergency is

“an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the United Kingdom”.

It then lists those different events. I contend that we are in a state of emergency, and we should respond accordingly.

My main point is that we are here today because of Extinction Rebellion. People came to London—many of them from Stroud; some say that it was born out of Stroud—and they danced, sang, made speeches, got arrested, disrupted and stuck themselves to things, including my party leader's fence. It is important to understand that the protests were about bringing home to us what

we should be doing—and what we are doing today—which is declaring a state of emergency, so that we genuinely do something about climate change.

We cannot park this until 2050. We need to do things now, over the next 10 years. We need to halve our carbon emissions over that time, to stand any chance of reaching our target by 2050. We have to stop fracking. We have to stop airport expansion. We have to end fossil fuel subsidies. One thing we have not talked a lot about today is waste disposal. Waste cannot be disposed of by a massive expansion of incineration, because that will add to our emissions. I hope we will get the message and do radical things, and then the people who came here and got arrested will have done it for a purpose.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Change UK): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You may not be aware, but the Defence Secretary has just been sacked. Have you had any indication that the Prime Minister will be coming here to speak?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): No, I have not, and we need to get on with the debate. I call Daniel Zeichner.

6.7 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I think we were all impressed by the passion of the children across the country who have taken action over the last few weeks and those in Extinction Rebellion who had never been involved in protests before.

We can all talk about climate change, but seeing the evidence at first hand makes a real difference. I was fortunate to visit the British Antarctic Survey in Cambridge last week, where Dr Huw Griffiths, who I was paired with in a Royal Society scheme and who was just back from the Antarctic, and Professor David Vaughan showed me their extraordinary ice cores. Ice cores are dug down deep into the ice, forming a pathway back into the past, with little bubbles from centuries past captured from the atmosphere. They are able to chart the rises and falls in temperature and emissions in the atmosphere and show exactly what has happened to our climate over the last few millennia. The chart shows temperatures going up and down, up and down, and we should be entering the cooling period, but the chart shows that temperatures are going up. That graphic representation makes it all clear.

That is why the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was so right last year to demand “rapid”, “unprecedented” and “far-reaching” transitions. We are not seeing that from the Government. For example, we have not seen cuts in road transport emissions, so why were the Government so pathetic in their response to suggestions that they look again at the fuel duty escalator? For goodness' sake! It was introduced by a Conservative Government. Why was there such a negative response to Labour's brave suggestion to restore our bus services by transferring money from vehicle excise duty? Those are the kinds of things that will make the difference—not honeyed words, as we heard from the Secretary of State, but rapid, unprecedented and far-reaching transitions. That is what we need.

6.9 pm

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): I want to remind Members why we are even here to debate the climate crisis in the first place. We are not here because of an international effort co-ordinated by world leaders, the recent cyclone in Mozambique or the increasing incidence of climate disasters wreaking havoc across our planet. We are here because, last August, a small group of schoolchildren decided to walk out of school to take a stand against climate change, and they have inspired a global movement. In one sense, this is testament to the great power of protest and a cause for hope in future generations, but it is also an indictment of our global political leadership. Frankly, it is an embarrassment that it should take a group of schoolchildren to pressure us to act.

The younger generations have exposed the abject failings of the world's decision makers. We saw these failings on display just last week, when the Secretary of State for International Trade seemed to legitimise climate change denial. His comments displayed a stunning level of ignorance about climate change—an ignorance that runs throughout the Tory party.

Make no mistake: climate change is happening at a terrifying pace. Only through urgent and co-ordinated action can we tackle this crisis. Doing nothing is simply not an option. I have been contacted by many of my constituents about this very issue. As the MP for Warrington South, I have called on Warrington Borough Council to declare an environment and climate emergency. In this country, we led the way in the industrial revolution, and it would be fitting if we were the architects of a green revolution today. Parliament must vote to declare a climate and environment emergency today.

6.11 pm

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate. There can be no more denial, no more delay and no more hesitation. We are facing a climate emergency, and unless we take urgent action, climate chaos will wreak devastation in communities across the globe. Cuts to renewable energy mean that, on current trends, the UK will be carbon neutral only by the end of the century—more than 50 years too late.

This is too late for our children, and they know it. Children and young people have been leading the way on this. As the UK Student Climate Network recently wrote:

“We will be facing...climate breakdown...if those in power don't act urgently and radically to change our trajectory.”

We must hear these words. I pay tribute to the school climate strikers, along with Extinction Rebellion. More importantly, I want to pay tribute to the many students, children and young people in my constituency who have written to me about the climate crisis, particularly those from Alderbrook school. One year 6 student wrote to me that “it is heartbreaking to know that our generation is going to suffer from the chaos that we haven't created.”

That is what will happen if we do not rise to this emergency because the science is clear.

The student strikers chanted

“system change, not climate change”,

and that is what we need—that is a fact. We need a green economy, investment in renewable energy and a ban on fracking, and we need to decarbonise our society. We need this for climate justice and for social justice.

We need an economy that puts people and our planet before profit. This is an emergency, and we cannot afford to wait. We must act.

6.13 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): May I first put on record the excellent work of the Hornsey and Wood Green climate emergency activists—they invited me to a meeting well in advance of Greta Thunberg's visit and were ahead of the protesters—and the schoolchildren from schools in Hornsey and Wood Green who marched on London to demand change?

Transport is the most emitting sector of the UK economy, responsible for 27% of greenhouse gas emissions, and the figure increases to a staggering 40% if we include our share of international shipping and aviation. That is the one we can really do something about at the three levels of government. First, the Government must fund bus services—end of—and there is an election tomorrow where that will feature in big style.

Secondly, at local level, I was the council leader when we introduced the first 20 mph speed zone in London. At first it was considered ridiculous by the local papers, but it has now become rather fashionable. It is very much welcomed, for the sake of their lungs, by many young people and families.

Thirdly, I want to put on the record the work being done by the Mayor of London. That is not easy, as a lot of people will be affected. The ultra low emission zone in central London went live earlier this month. It is a very brave move, which later we will consider normal although at the moment it is a little uncomfortable. Well done to the Mayor and all our councillors who work so hard, day in, day out, on recycling, transport, cycling and all the things that make our environment better.

Finally, I want to put on the record the work being done on children's asthma and respiratory health by Ella Kissi-Debrah's mother, a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby). She has worked so hard to convince others of the importance of climate change and transport.

6.15 pm

Jo Platt (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): As a planet and as a country, we stand at a crossroads. In the month of Extinction Rebellion, Greta Thunberg's visit to our country, and countless emails and conversations with constituents, we must ask whether we will use those interventions as a much needed wake-up call to take the urgent action we need. Alternatively, will we just make more excuses to create further delay and brush our country's future under the carpet once more?

We all agree that we need a cross-party approach to this crisis, but looking at this Government's record I fear that they are leading us down the path of excuse and delay. They have banned onshore wind subsidies, they are axing Labour's solar panel subsidies, and their attempts to reduce emissions have stalled.

Then we come to the Government's fracking policy. Fracking is a dangerous, disruptive and disastrous method of fuelling our country. It extracts fossil fuels at the expense of our environment and our communities, and the environmental risks from fracking to former coalfield sites are clear, so in Leigh we have expressed our total opposition to it—it does not have our consent, and the Government should follow Labour's lead and ban it.

[Jo Platt]

In my constituency, the site of one former colliery is now a renowned 200-hectare country park and nature reserve, where over 230 species of bird have been identified. I suggest that sites such as that have been of greater benefit to our town than any fracking site could ever be. Rather than turning to the energy of old, we should be looking at how we reduce our emissions and help people to make greener choices. That starts with bringing railway stations back to our towns.

All this does not have to be burdensome; it can be full of hope, opportunity and positivity. But we must get on and act—the next generation is watching and judging.

6.17 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): Over six months ago, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that we had just 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe. The leading scientific experts in the world told us in no uncertain terms that urgent changes were needed to cut the risk of extreme heat, drought, floods and poverty. To put it another way, we should take urgent action before catastrophic life loss occurs. No such urgent action has taken place.

At the World Economic Forum in January, Sir David Attenborough told world leaders that we are destroying the natural world—and with it, ourselves. But no real urgent action followed. We have known for decades now that climate change was a threat to our planet. Many have devoted their lives to the climate change cause, to wake the world from its complacency and make it understand the gravity of the situation. But human beings are not great at planning and preparing for their future, and even less good at planning for the benefit of future generations.

I am very pleased that last month Bedford Borough Council voted unanimously to declare a climate emergency and committed to a six-month project to identify actions needed to achieve its 2030 carbon neutrality target. We heard from scientists who talked of the deafening sound of huge glaciers calving off the Greenland ice shelf and said that the current logging and burning of tropical forests releases more carbon dioxide than our remaining forests could possibly absorb.

I urge this Government, like Bedford Borough Council and other local authorities, to show true world leadership and declare a climate emergency. Nothing short of a green revolution will do. I am very happy to support the motion.

6.19 pm

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): The UK Student Climate Network, the FridaysforFuture movement and Extinction Rebellion—these movements for climate action, driven by passion and activism, follow proud traditions of movements for change throughout our history, such as the trade unions. This week, the Communication Workers Union, at its annual conference in Bournemouth, also debated climate change.

I was pleased to see recently cross-party political talks. Positive commitments emerged from those talks. Sadly, there was no Prime Minister and no Conservative party representation.

To conclude, I want to reflect on a recent meeting I had with a young constituent of mine, Alexander. He had come to one of my surgeries in Moodiesburn concerned

about the lack of action on climate change. He made an overnight journey last week from Moodiesburn to London to participate in the climate change protests. He said to me, rephrasing a quote from a world war two book he had read:

“Britain’s honour and its national interests are at stake. Our planet is under attack and there can be no further delays on declaring war on climate change, whatever the other nations decide to do.”

How right that statement is. There can be no further delays. We have to act now. It is time for the UK to declare a climate emergency.

6.21 pm

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): On Monday, I was privileged to host students from the fabulous St Bonaventure’s boys school in my constituency, who are working with the East London Citizens Organisation and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, CAFOD, learning about politics and campaigning for social justice and a brighter future. They wanted to talk to me about housing, Brexit and the violence that has blighted our community, but most of all they wanted to talk to me about climate change. Their dedication and knowledge gave me hope.

Xavier told me that we need to stop trees being destroyed for developments in the UK. Ethan told me how important it is for us to invest more in research and development to produce the green innovations that will help us to reduce emissions. He wants to become a scientist and help with those challenges—I reckon he’ll do it. Arpon told me we needed to stop fracking and rely on renewables—not just because of the carbon consequences, but because of the impact on clean water and the local environment. Ethan—another Ethan—told me how inspired he is by the idea of a green new deal in the US, and what will make a green industrial revolution here. Thomas told me that we need so many, many more charging points for electric cars.

Thomas is right, Arpon is right, Xavier is right and Ethan—both Ethans—is right. What we need is a genuine commitment from the Government to act. Oceans rising, deforestation, wildfires, hundreds of millions at risk of flooding, displacement, drought, disease and starvation. Mass extinction, with huge numbers of species lost. That is what we face. We need a commitment to implement green policies on a scale that matches the enormous challenges that face us. Transformation of our economy, homes, transport, agriculture and energy systems. Transformation of our entire society, creating greater social justice as well as securing our very future on planet Earth. We know what we need to do. Let’s get on with it.

6.23 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): We have heard an awful lot about the various approaches we should be taking, but what we have not heard about—this is important—is the impact this is presently having on some of our communities. I am going to do what many MPs do—talk about my constituency. Do not switch off, because what is happening in Fairbourne will be happening in other communities around the United Kingdom and around Wales in the years to come.

The sea is rising 4.7 millimetres a year in Barmouth. That is not exclusive to Barmouth; it is happening everywhere. The spring tides—they do not just happen in spring, but occur 24 times a year—are now higher than the level of the land in Fairbourne. There are 470 properties, with 1,200 people living there. There is a masterplan, but it has very little budget and virtually no statutory power. Some reckon the sea defences, which cost £6 million over the past eight years, can protect for 40 years. It is reckoned that they can be protected at a cost of £10 million, but we do not know where those people or their houses will be in 40 years' time.

One person has understandably written to me, but she does not want her MP to talk about the challenges faced by Fairbourne. She says that the council and the environment authority are wrong, that the sea is not rising, and that, if it is, that is an unmitigated disaster for everyone, so there is no point in doing anything at all. To quote from recent correspondence:

"Fairbourne is a happy and friendly place to live and everyone gets on with life. So please don't go stirring up old news now."

Après moi, le déluge.

Hon. Members can see the political incentive to keep quiet. The easiest thing to do would be to keep my head down, save for the fact that that is the crux of the problem with our short-termism, our self-interest politics. Fairbourne is what a climate change emergency looks like. It is slow, but it is happening, and we have little response to it.

6.25 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): In the 1970s, as a teenager, I first got involved in political activity through campaigning on the environment and against nuclear power. It is amazing the change that has happened since. Then we were dismissed as cranks and eccentrics; now that thinking is mainstream.

However, understand that the question now is not whether human activity threatens the survival of the planet. It is not even whether we need to do more to curb that activity. The question before us now is whether it is even possible for us to accelerate what we are doing in order to avoid a tipping point, when the damage becomes irreversible and the downward trajectory unstoppable. That point does not come in 2050; it comes in about 10 years' time. That is why this is an emergency and why the Government need to do more.

Let me give a couple of examples of where the Government should do more. I eat red meat. I should eat less of it—as we all should. However, hon. Members can go into any supermarket in this country and buy a kilo of beef for less than a kilo of green beans. We need the Government to take action with our food producers, using every lever at their disposal, including tax, subsidy and regulation, to make sure that families in this country can eat nutritious food with a low-carbon footprint without putting themselves at an economic disadvantage.

Another example is that I come to this place by train from Edinburgh, but only because the taxpayers pay the fare. If they did not, I would have the same dilemma as everyone else in my constituency, because on any day of the week it is cheaper to fly from Edinburgh to London than to take the train. That is a ludicrous and unsustainable situation. To cure it, we need a radical and rapid expansion of public transport in this country, the like of which will give the Minister nightmares. Not enough is being done;

I am sorry to break with the consensual backslapping. Things need to change, and we need the Government to do more.

6.27 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I heard Greta Thunberg speak at the meeting here last week, where, on behalf of her generation, she demanded that we declare a climate crisis and take serious, effective action based on what scientists tell us. At that meeting, and again today, we heard lots of warm words from the Environment Secretary, but he is always weak on new action. If this country is to justify our reputation as world leaders in carbon reduction and on the environment, far more needs to be done.

I have time for three points. First, the Government should reverse the decision to build a third runway at Heathrow, which will add 6 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year, making Heathrow the biggest emitter of CO₂ in the UK, as well as adding yet more to local air pollution. As Department for Transport analysis shows, it will produce no net benefit to the economy anyway.

Secondly, we have seen good work on air pollution by London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who has just introduced the ultra low emission zone and who took the Government to court over their illegal air pollution plans. However, we need Government intervention to help the Mayor and other forward-thinking local leaders, including by initiating scrappage schemes and significantly investing in and supporting clean and green solutions for transport and for waste and recycling.

Thirdly, I suggest that the Government support and listen to a citizens' assembly on climate and ecological justice. The Government plan to take us out of the EU, which has, among its other environmental policies, ensured that UK beaches are now clean and pollution free. At the same time, they will roll out the red carpet for President Trump, who claims that global warming is a hoax and has pulled the US out of the Paris agreement. On the climate and environmental crises, let the warm words be matched by serious action.

6.29 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): On behalf of my constituents, I want to declare a climate change emergency. I have received compelling correspondence about the need for us to declare one, 10 years before we see irreversible change to our climate the likes of which we will not be able to comprehend. I was struck by the call from my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), who said we needed a national mission of the likes we have never seen before to solve this problem. We need to grasp it in the same way the Americans did with the space race. We need to set national targets to decarbonise and be the first nation to truly enter the green era of industrialisation.

The nation that I represent, Scotland, was the first to industrialise in the industrial revolution. It saw the most rapid industrialisation of any country in the world. We will have to adopt the same sort of bigger imagination and purpose if we are to achieve that, but I am afraid that the Government at all levels are singularly failing to grasp the urgency and the burning need to adapt radically. On the one hand, I hear great rhetoric, but on the other hand, I see valuable projects in my constituency

[Mr Paul Sweeney]

being defunded, such as the climate challenge funding for housing associations and other local organisations. In one breath, the Scottish Government are declaring a climate emergency, which I welcome, while also defunding local projects in my constituency.

Likewise, I would like to see a national project to fully develop public transport across our country. It is a critical issue that is causing social dislocation. We have seen privatisation and fragmentation of our public transport system in this country. Why are we not seeing a radical project to re-municipalise, reintegrate and establish affordable, convenient and comprehensive public transport across the country? That would be the radical change needed. We could utilise it to grow our industrialise base as well. We have huge capability in bus manufacturing in this country. Let us, for example, set a target to be the first nation to have completely decarbonised bus travel across this country. Labour has made a radical proposal for a totally free and comprehensive bus service across the whole of Scotland. That is the sort of radical thinking we need, and we need it now. The Government need to act.

6.31 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): The IPCC said we had until 2030 to avoid a 1.5° rise in global temperatures. We must get to net zero carbon by 2030 at the latest, not by the Government's target of 2050. How do we get there? What must be done? First, we need to repurpose the Treasury and economic policy. In the short term, all Government spending, priorities and programmes should be assessed against our climate goals. The next spending review needs to be a climate emergency spending review. Too little of Government spending is on climate change priorities. By contrast, 25% of the EU's budget for 2021-27 will be climate related.

We must underpin an industrial retooling of our whole country and our productive output for the 21st century. Many of my colleagues call that the green new deal—a reimagining of FDR's great rebuilding of America—but I call it a Marshall plan for the environment. We must work alongside our European partners to build a new, clean, fossil-free Europe.

The UK also needs to account for its exported carbon. The Government claim to have achieved the world's sharpest decline in emissions, but what about the embedded emissions in our all products? The sustainability research institute at the University of Leeds has developed a model to reallocate those emissions from industries to the final consumers of products. This model, developed by John Barrett and Anne Owen, is a world leader in terms of working out the UK's carbon footprint. Will the Secretary of State meet them and adopt this model?

Finally, we need a new climate economics. The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate concludes that the choice between tackling climate change and boosting economic growth is a false choice. Instead, it says that economic growth and reducing emissions are mutually beneficial. Fitoussi, Stiglitz and Sen, three of the best economists in the world, have done substantial work for the French Government to measure societal wellbeing in ways that go beyond traditional measures such as an economy's GDP. The UK Government need to look at measures that supersede gross domestic product and focus on solving our climate emergency.

6.33 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): We have heard many claims from Government Members about the progress that the Government have made on climate change, but the fact is they have systemically demolished the policies put in place under the Climate Change Act 2008, introduced by a Labour Government, and increased public spending on fossil fuels. We all remember David Cameron's "Let's get rid of the green crap" comment. He began the process of comprehensive policy reversal. This was accelerated by the current Prime Minister, who famously, on her second day in office, showed her commitment to tackling climate change by abolishing the Department.

The International Monetary Fund reported in 2015 that the UK had spent £26 billion on fossil fuel subsidies in 2015, much of that going overseas, since 85% of the UK's coal demand was being met through imports. In 2015, the UK subsidised fossil fuels to the tune of three to four times what it spent on renewables, contributing in the process to catastrophic global climate change effects.

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth agrees that action on climate change is necessary. A month ago, however, I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), about the UK's woeful performance in relation to the Aichi biodiversity targets. In 2010, we pledged to meet the 20 targets by 2020—next year—but we are on track to meet just five of them. We are falling down particularly on target 20, which relates to the mobilisation of financial resources. Although they signed up to those targets, the Government now describe them as "nebulous", and are talking about the next set of targets. As one of my constituents said,

"they are ignoring the targets, but looking forward to Britain being ahead in the next set of targets... Is this parliament or a sketch from the Tracy Ullman show?"

6.35 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): Let me begin by endorsing the idea of a citizens' assembly on climate change. Such an assembly would present us with a real opportunity to put aside party politics and deliver a real mandate for action on climate change. The Irish citizens' assembly recently looked into the issue. It faced up to some difficult trade-offs, but the consensus reached by that group of citizens from across Irish society provides a strong public mandate for renewed efforts to tackle climate change. I urge the Government to consider establishing an assembly here in the UK to give citizens a voice in this fight.

Liverpool has set the bold aim of becoming the world's first climate positive city by the end of 2020. It will seek to remove more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than it emits each year. The city council is working with the Poseidon Foundation to help to offset its carbon emissions by incorporating blockchain technology in the council's day-to-day operations.

Last summer, the International Development Committee started an inquiry into UK aid for combating climate change, and yesterday we agreed to publish our report next week. Climate change cuts across everything, and the effectiveness of all UK aid spending depends on addressing it. We have been struck by the Government's incoherent approach, especially in relation to the support

given to fossil fuels by UK Export Finance. Global Witness told us that that was leading to circumstances in which

“the UK government is providing climate aid with one hand, and exporting the UK’s fossil fuel pollution with the other, all the while undermining its climate action credentials”.

We need coherence and consistency. It is incumbent on the Government today to respond to the climate emergency in both their domestic and their international policy, so that we can ensure that combating climate change is at the front and centre of everything we do.

Debate interrupted.

Speaker’s Statement

Mr Speaker: Before I call the next speaker, I must advise the House that I have received notification from the petition officer for the constituency of Peterborough, in respect of the recall petition for Fiona Onasanya. The recall petition process for the constituency of Peterborough, established under the Recall of MPs Act 2015, closed today at 5 pm. As more than 10% of those eligible to sign the petition have done so, I advise the House that the petition was successful. Fiona Onasanya is no longer the Member for Peterborough, and the seat is accordingly vacant. She can therefore no longer participate in any parliamentary proceedings as a Member of Parliament. I shall cause the text of the notification to be published in the *Votes and Proceedings* and in the *Official Report*.

[The notification will appear at the end of today’s proceedings.]

Environment and Climate Change

Debate resumed.

6.38 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I pay tribute to Greta Thunberg and the school strikers, including those from my constituency, and to the protesters whom we saw outside Parliament last week for ensuring that climate change is once again at the top of the political agenda, where it must be. Under this Government and in this global context, their actions are necessary.

The Government have failed on climate change. Since 2010, a raft of policies and initiatives that were driving progress have been scrapped. Today, Conservative Members have called for action on energy efficiency, yet the Tory Government's cancellation of the green homes scheme means that the retrofitting of insulation is 5% of its level in 2012. We should have been building on those initiatives to make further progress, not talking about the extent to which we have moved backwards.

In the very limited time that is available to me, I want to raise an issue that has not been mentioned so far today: fossil fuel divestment. Part of the system change that we need to see involves taking money out of dirty, damaging, exploitative fossil fuel extraction. We can do something about that here, in this place. Both my local councils, Lambeth and Southwark, have committed to divest their pension funds out of fossil fuels, yet our parliamentary pension funds remain invested in fossil fuels, despite 100 Members writing to the trustees last year calling on them to divest and remove our money from fossil fuels and invest it in sustainable industries. I call on all Members here to join that call.

We need the Government to act comprehensively at the scale required by an emergency. Climate change demands that it is the prism and the underpinning principle of all our political and economic decision making. We must act to address this emergency.

6.40 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I would like to know whether our desperation to seal trade deals with other countries, especially the United States, will inhibit our ability to talk candidly with them about the need for them to change tack on climate change, because I want the Government to embed in any future trade agreements legally binding commitments to reduce carbon emissions, as we can do everything humanly possible in this country to reduce our carbon footprint, but if we continue to trade with the rest of the world as we do now, our efforts will be for nothing.

Our economy is changing rapidly and it is now possible for people to order goods from almost anywhere in the world and for them to be on their doorstep within a matter of days. To the consumer, that is one click of a mouse with no climate impact at all, but if one counts the carbon footprint of original manufacture, transportation and packaging, it begins to look a lot less pain free. We have talked in here about some of the awful working conditions delivery drivers have to put up with in the gig economy, how they often have to pay for their own—outdated—transport and how they have to drive convoluted routes to get to their destinations. That business model is not sustainable for them as individuals and is not sustainable for the planet.

And what about the packaging? We are always talking about how we need to tax the online giants more, so let us tax those who do deliveries for the miles they send their products and for the ludicrous amounts of cardboard they use when doing so. I am sure it would not take long for them to develop more sustainable ways to deliver their products.

As we heard from the Leader of the Opposition earlier, WWF has said that humanity has wiped out 60% of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles since 1970. Should that fact alone not cause us to reconsider what we are doing? We are the dominant species on this planet but that dominance should be used responsibly, not to drive everything else to extinction, not only because it is wrong but because, if we do that, our own extinction will surely follow.

We have to take responsibility for our actions—all of us. We have to declare a climate emergency and then we have to act on it. That is the most important thing: we have to take action, not just today but every day from now on in.

6.42 pm

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): My city of Oxford has not just declared a climate emergency, but is putting in place the UK's first ever zero emissions zone and is also convening right now a citizens' assembly to discuss measures to deal with that climate emergency. If we decide collectively in this House that we have a climate emergency, we must act on it, and we need to do so above all in three areas.

First, house building standards were watered down appallingly under the coalition Government. We have been told there will be changes on energy efficiency, but we need to go further. The Government not only need to change on energy efficiency, but also need to make sure we are protecting wildlife in every new development, particularly those between Oxford and Cambridge.

Secondly, we need concerted action from central Government to promote environmental innovation. At present, we are relying on enthusiasts, volunteers and individual companies and councils to drive that change. That is not good enough. I am very proud of project LEO and project ERIC in Oxford—big projects changing our energy infrastructure locally—but they need to be backed up by Government investment otherwise this will be piecemeal. This should be mainstream, not just a matter for enthusiasts.

Finally, we must be honest about the challenges we face; I agree with the Secretary of State that we have got to be honest. I am sick and tired of hearing people say they care about the environment and then the next minute tweet out criticism of a policy like the ultra-low emission zone. I am very proud of those who say, "Yes, we've got to take those difficult steps and have those difficult conversations," including London Labour MPs such as my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous).

We are facing up to it; we are dealing with this in a grown-up manner, and that is what Government should be doing, not, sadly, making the sort of short-term politically expedient points that we so often hear greeting environmental measures. Let us grow up, just like those kids have been doing when out in the streets; that is what we need to do in this place.

6.44 pm

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): I would like to talk not only about what the national Government can do but about what local councils can do. There will be elections tomorrow in High Peak and in rural districts across the whole of England, in which local people can show their commitment to taking the measures needed to tackle climate change by voting for Labour councillors who are putting forward practical proposals to tackle it.

Labour councillors on my council in High Peak voted to ban fracking and to declare a climate change emergency, in the face of opposition from Conservative councillors, who have not taken the actions that we need in this area. They are not proposing to introduce proper passive housing standards, and they are not legislating for clean air; they are not even monitoring it properly. Where they are monitoring air pollution, they are refusing to release the results, even from outside schools, despite the fact that parents are concerned about their children's health.

Not a single public charging point for electric vehicles has been installed in High Peak for the past four years under that Conservative council, yet people are crying out to be able to use electric vehicles. They are also crying out to be able to use public transport, but we are seeing our buses cut and our train services not being supported. It is the Labour councillors who are out there fighting for our bus services and working with local companies and local people on cycle routes to ensure that people can cycle to work and use their cycles for leisure, to reduce emissions in a practical way, not just by doing things like banning fracking but by supporting renewable energy in a positive way at local level. That is what every local person across rural England can do tomorrow: they can back policies that will support the environment and make this change real.

6.46 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): It is an honour to close today's debate. It has been the kind of debate that justifies why the public go to the ballot box to put us here. We have had 63 collegiate, wise and passionate speeches today, including from the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who talked about farmers being displaced by the salination of their land, and from my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), who made my favourite comment of the day when he said:

"When you are drowning, you do not ask yourself, 'Ooh, what is politically possible?'; you do whatever it takes to survive."

We also heard the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones), and I have to say that Newport will be proud of her tonight, as will her predecessor, who I am sure is smiling down today.

We also heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), who was applauded right across the House for his groundbreaking work on climate change. He said that every political issue that we consider must deal with climate change. In that vein, I want to pay tribute to the many colleagues who have not had the opportunity to speak today but who have been leading the charge on climate change, not least my hon. Friends the Members for Workington (Sue Hayman), for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) and for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), who are sitting behind me today.

The great Salford poet and songwriter Ewan MacColl once wrote, in a song about hiking on the moors:

"I may be a wage slave on Monday, but I am a free man on Sunday."

Now, whether or not you like his music, or his politics, I think there are three things we can take from that on which almost everyone in this House would agree. First, the environment is not something separate from ourselves, something out there; it is part of our freedom. When we talk about the environment, we are talking about the places that mean the most to us, about our food, about the air we breathe. We know that 70% of the world's oxygen is produced by marine life, but that life is threatened by ocean warming and acidification caused by the carbon put into the atmosphere.

Secondly, climate change and the environment are not luxury concerns. It is working people who benefit the most when our public spaces flourish—urban or rural—and it is the poorest, both at home and internationally, who will be hit first and worst by the climate emergency. As we have heard today, it is working people who have the most to gain from a green industrial revolution that could transform our economy, creating hundreds of thousands of good jobs. We on this side of the House estimate that retrofitting the UK's housing stock could create 160,000 jobs right across the UK, and that offshore wind could create 120,000 jobs by 2030, largely in coastal towns and regions that have struggled for decades.

Thirdly, our climate and our environment are in deep trouble. We do not have to look far to see that climate change is already a disaster for many across the world, from the cyclone that recently struck Mozambique to the protracted droughts in east Africa. If we continue on our current path, we face unimaginable losses for every Member's constituency and for people and communities across the world. But here's the thing: it does not have to be that way. We are running out of time, but there is still time, so let us use it well and start today by declaring a climate emergency.

What does it mean to declare an emergency? The motion sets out some guidance. It means reducing our greenhouse gas emissions as rapidly as possible and down to net zero before 2050, with short-term targets for the green energy transition and sustainable modes of transport. It means properly funding environmental protection domestically and legislating to reduce waste, moving towards a zero-waste economy. It means capturing the green jobs of the future and mitigating the impact of transitioning to a low-carbon economy on workers and regions. It means bringing wildlife and biodiversity back to levels that I am too young to remember but by which, as we know from David Attenborough, nobody is too young or too old to be captivated. Perhaps more than anything, declaring an emergency means that we will devote the time and resources to the problem that are commensurate with its scale. We can start that today by declaring a climate and environment emergency. The motion gives us a basis on which to act, and that is why I commend it to the House.

6.51 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): This excellent debate has been vigorous and well subscribed, as befits a subject of such profound importance. What has been established so

[Greg Clark]

clearly is that a deep sense of responsibility for protecting and improving our environment is shared across both sides of this House.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) for her maiden speech. She used warm words about her predecessor and said that he used his sense of humour to engage with people. I think she has bought his book on how to be an MP, but her speech today showed that she is already making great strides, so I do not think that she needs too many lessons. Having been in front of her predecessor at the Select Committees on which he served, I know that he could also be a fierce interrogator, and I am sure that she will learn that skill as well.

Like the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey), I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), who gave a profound speech, reflecting on some of the lessons of leadership both in his term as Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and as leader of the Labour party. He was right in saying that moral authority comes from being able to act, and that is one of the reasons why, even though we are a small country in terms of the contribution we make to emissions, we have the moral authority that comes from being a leader. We must continue that with our action. He pointed out that we of course have different visions of how we get there, which is legitimate, but that is not to decry the motivation we share.

My hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) offered a good example of what we can do in our constituencies. We should look to the climate vision on her website to see whether we can emulate it across all our constituencies to embrace our role as local leaders, as well as leaders in this place. My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) reminded us that nuclear has played and will play a distinguished role in ensuring that we can generate power free from emissions.

Finally, I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) whose work in opposition on producing a paper on the low-carbon economy established considerable consensus across this House and was seminal in shaping the Climate Change Act 2008, which the right hon. Member for Doncaster North led—I know that he will recognise that contribution.

The tone of this debate underlines why we should not create division in this House where there is none. When it comes to environmentalism and climate change, one of this country's proudest achievements is that we have displayed to the world in international forums an impressive national determination to lead our country and the world, with the baton of responsibility being passed from one Government to their successors.

Mrs Thatcher, as many Members have said in this debate, was the very first global leader to acknowledge at the UN

“what may be early signs of man-induced climatic change.”

Her speech in 1989 bears rereading for those who may not be familiar with the profundity of her anticipation of the problems with which we are grappling. It is not just the anticipation of the problems; she was a woman of action. If we think back to what she did—it was

thought impossible at the time—virtually to eradicate CFCs across the world. She described the task of Government

“to follow the best advice available. To decide where the balance of evidence lies. And to take prudent action.”

Over the years, we have done that.

The last Labour Government passed the Climate Change Act with cross-party support, and the right hon. Member for Doncaster North will acknowledge that the Conservative party, then in opposition, participated in amending the Bill to increase the ambition from 60% targets to the current 80% targets. When it started its life, the Bill included a 60% target; and when it left this House, the target was the 80% proposed by the Stern review.

If we take the motion as moved, there is no reason to fracture the consensus that has been such an important feature of this area. The first sentence of the motion reflects what we have recognised all along: the need to reduce emissions is urgent and compelling and we should heed the advice of the scientists who comprise the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. We have always considered that to be right, and I am glad we agree.

The second sentence rightly calls attention to the consequences of global warming for the natural environment and society. Going back to 1990, again, Mrs Thatcher said:

“Weather patterns could change so that what is now wet would become dry, and what is now dry would become wet... The character and behaviour of plants would change... Some species of animals and plants would migrate to different zones or disappear for ever.”

The third sentence of the motion calls on the House to increase the UK's targets under the Climate Change Act and to ensure that we capture the benefits of the low-carbon economy. As all Members know, the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry) and I commissioned the Committee on Climate Change, after the Paris accord, to advise us on precisely how we can reflect this raised ambition in our targets. As we know, it will publish that assessment tomorrow. We did not ask for that advice in order to ignore it; we intend to act on it, and we are proud of the progress we have made.

I have been reading some of the policy documents that were being debated when we were forging this consensus in 2008. Between 1997 and 2007 our greenhouse gas emissions were increasing, and they were increasing at the rate of 2% a year between 1999 and 2004. Since then, we have transformed our performance and our reputation. Since 2000, few countries in the world, and none in the G20, have gone faster than Great Britain in decarbonising their economy. We will continue to set the pace over the years ahead, during which the battle to halt catastrophic climate change will be won or lost. We intend to win.

The motion concludes by urging further action to restore our natural environment and to create a circular economy. Through the environment Bill, the Agriculture Bill, the industrial strategy and our clean growth strategy, we will do precisely that.

I hope we can maintain this common purpose. The hon. Member for Salford and Eccles set out her party's position. There is not one person who joins my party

who is not concerned about the heritage of our planet. Conservation, preservation and the inheritance of future generations are a deep instinct of every Conservative. It is not new; nor does it sit at variance with our governing policy. Indeed, our traditional concerns for the environment and a prosperous economy should not be seen as in contradiction to each other. As we consider the threats from climate change, let us remember that, without prosperity, people also become extinct. Enterprise has been the greatest rebellion against extinction in the history of the world, so the economy and climate change have to be brought together.

The only thing that will work to deal with climate change is where the market is adapted to ensure both prosperity and the conservation of our environment. I am proud that Britain is an advanced capitalist nation, but one with a deep respect for its environment.

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Main Question accordingly put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House declares an environment and climate emergency following the finding of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change that to avoid a more than 1.5°C rise in global warming, global emissions would need to fall by around 45 per cent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero by around 2050; recognises the devastating impact that volatile and extreme weather will have on UK food production, water availability, public health and through flooding and wildfire damage; notes that the UK is currently missing almost all of its biodiversity targets, with an alarming trend in species decline, and that cuts of 50 per cent to the funding of Natural England are counterproductive to tackling those problems; calls on the Government to increase the ambition of the UK's climate change targets under the Climate Change Act 2008 to achieve net zero emissions before 2050, to increase support for and set ambitious, short-term targets for the roll-out of renewable and low carbon energy and transport, and to move swiftly to capture economic opportunities and green jobs in the

low carbon economy while managing risks for workers and communities currently reliant on carbon intensive sectors; and further calls on the Government to lay before the House within the next six months urgent proposals to restore the UK's natural environment and to deliver a circular, zero waste economy.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am proud to be part of a Parliament that has passed a motion declaring a climate and environment emergency. However, I want to draw attention to the fact that the motion included a certain set of actions for the Government to carry out. It calls on the Government

“to increase the ambition of the UK's climate change targets under the Climate Change Act 2008 to achieve net zero emissions before 2050, to increase support for and set ambitious, short-term targets for the roll-out of renewable and low carbon energy and transport, and to move swiftly to capture economic opportunities and green jobs in the low carbon economy while managing risks for workers and communities currently reliant on carbon intensive sectors; and further calls on the Government to lay before the House within the next six months urgent proposals to restore the UK's natural environment and to deliver a circular, zero waste economy.”

Mr Speaker, may I ask what parliamentary levers are available to this House to ensure that such action is taken?

Mr Speaker: The process of government, and the process of scrutiny of Government by Parliament, otherwise known as continuing debate.

Mr Nicholas Brown: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In view of your statement to the House earlier about the results of the Peterborough recall petition, I hope it is helpful, if you will allow me, to inform the House that I will move the writ for the by-election at start of business tomorrow.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. That is certainly informative, and I appreciate what the right hon. Gentleman, on behalf of Her Majesty's official Opposition, has said.

Children's Funeral Fund

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

Mr Speaker: I appreciate that colleagues are in a state of some animation, but I would very gently point out that the subject of the Adjournment is the children's funeral fund. This is a matter of the utmost seriousness and sensitivity, and the track record of the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) in relation to this subject is long established and widely respected. I am sure that colleagues remaining in the Chamber will wish to hear what the hon. Lady has to say and what the Minister offers by way of response.

The question is—we want to hear it; we really want to hear it—that this House do now adjourn.

7.3 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Anyone who has visited my office here in Westminster will be able to testify that one of its walls is chaotically adorned with a vision of my world. There are newspaper articles, thank-you cards and notes from colleagues and constituents to remind me that I have an army of support and that campaigns can be won. There are family photos and pictures of Swansea to cheer me up on the difficult days—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Carolyn Harris: I certainly will.

Mr Duncan Smith: While the hon. Lady gets her breath back, can I just say that many Conservative Members absolutely and totally support her? We think that she has been marvellous in running this campaign, and we are urging our Government to act on her behalf.

Carolyn Harris: Thank you.

On the wall of my office, there are invites for meetings, receptions and dinners—mostly to remind me where I need to be, and when. Among all that sits a letter, which has probably been pinned up longer than anything else. That letter is on Downing Street headed notepaper, signed by the Prime Minister and dated 10 April 2018. In that letter, the Prime Minister promises that she will introduce a children's funeral fund. It hurts me greatly that more than a year after I received the letter, it still hangs on my wall as unfinished business.

I do not need to tell Members my story, because they have all heard it many times before.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): My hon. Friend has been a sturdy campaigner for this cause for a long time. I am glad the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) recognises what a great champion she has been for such a great cause. I wish her every success in future.

Carolyn Harris: Thank you.

What I will tell the House is that nothing prepares you for the loss of a child. The devastation is unimaginable for anyone who has not experienced it. It almost destroyed me, and if it were not for the fact that Martin's brother, Stuart, who is now a strapping 34-year-old, still needed his mam to look after him, who knows where my life would have ended. It is almost certain that my passion,

my determination and my absolute desire to help those in vulnerable positions have somehow been born out of my grief.

It was not easy standing in the Chamber and sharing my own heartbreak, but it was something that I knew I had to do. Thirteen months ago, the Prime Minister finally announced that she would be introducing a children's funeral fund in memory of Martin, and I felt like my pain would at least benefit other people, so it saddens me to stand here today, more than a year after that announcement, to ask again for this fund to be put in place.

There are others in the Chamber who will understand the pain that I speak about; in particular, the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) will be able to relate to what I have said. I know that, regardless of political loyalty, he sees the children's funeral fund as a desperately needed emergency provision.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con) *indicated assent.*

Carolyn Harris: The Welsh Labour Government have implemented the fund. The Scottish Government have implemented the fund. Councils across Northern Ireland have implemented the fund. I really do appreciate that the Minister has been supportive of my ask, and I actually feel quite sorry for him that he has to respond to me and explain why England has not followed the rest of the UK.

Let me describe two incidents that have happened today. I have had an email from parents not 100 miles from here whose three-month-old baby is in a mortuary, and they are unable to take the baby out of there because they do not have the money to pay the local authority fees. To make the comparison with Wales, I also had an email from Tŷ Hafan, a Welsh children's hospice, to tell me that because of the Welsh children's funeral fund, parents can now afford headstones, which would not have been affordable if they had had to pay for the funerals. That is the difference that the fund makes.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The hon. Lady's bravery is remarkable and it is a privilege to be here to show support for the cause that she has championed. We should not have to be. The example she gives is that of just one of many families who have suffered the extraordinary pain and trauma of losing a child, with many of them having suffered financial sacrifices because their children had long-term conditions. Then, to add insult to injury, they are unable to pay for a funeral. That is why this change must come in urgently and Conservative Members will do everything on our side to make sure that that happens.

Carolyn Harris: Thank you very much.

In the press release last year when the introduction of the fund was first announced, Downing Street estimated that around 4,350 children die under the age of 18 each year in England, leaving grieving parents facing thousands in council fees for burial or cremation costs. That same press release went on to quote the Prime Minister saying:

"No parent should ever have to endure the unbearable loss of a child—a loss that no amount of time will ever truly heal. But in the raw pain of immediate loss, it cannot be right that grieving parents should have to worry about how to meet the funeral costs for a child they hoped to see grow into adulthood... That is why I have asked for the Children's Funeral Fund to be set up in England. For Carolyn, in memory of her son Martin, and in support of all those parents overwhelmed by such harrowing loss."

I remember at the time thanking the Prime Minister for showing compassion and helping to provide a glimmer of light in the darkness that surrounds families when a child dies. I did not expect more than a year later to be waiting for her to honour the commitment she made. I am struggling even to find the words for how disappointed and hurt I am that we have yet to see the fund become a reality.

Every day, 12 families face this heartbreak. That means that, since this promise was made, 4,600 families will have had to find the money for their child's funeral. Fair Funerals UK estimates that the average cost of a cremation is £3,596, while that of a burial is £4,561. That is a lot of money for families to find.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I am deeply sorry that my hon. Friend has had to call this Adjournment debate today because of the failure of the Prime Minister to keep her promise. She mentioned the cost of a burial. For some parents of particular religions, a burial is the only option for them, and they cannot move their child from the mortuary to the undertaker without having the funds in place. Does she agree that there are particular impacts on particular communities across England because of the absence of the fund?

Carolyn Harris: I totally appreciate my hon. Friend's intervention, but the pain is just as painful regardless of religion or culture.

As parents, we all want to give our children the very best that we can. In death, that becomes even more important. When a dignified funeral is the very last gift that a parent can give their child, money should not be a barrier, but sadly, at around £4,000 for a funeral, it really is.

Announcing that a fund will be introduced and then holding back from providing the money was unacceptably cruel to many parents, including to me. The up-front fees payable to the local authority and a coffin are the two necessities that no funeral can take place without. In these circumstances—without funds, but keeping everything basic—the money to cover those two essentials would allow parents to bury their children without cost. All we ask for is that every parent be given the compassion and respect that they deserve to help them through their grief. The Prime Minister has offered a vague promise of the summer, and I hope that she is true to her word. This summer, it will be 30 years since I lost Martin. Thirty years is a lifetime, yet some days it feels like it was only yesterday. The pain does not get any better; it is still very raw. I miss that little boy so much and my heart breaks that I will never see the man that he was meant to be.

The Prime Minister made a promise. She promised to deliver the fund for Martin. She needs to honour that promise for my little boy, for me and for every other parent who faces the unbearable heartbreak of losing a child.

7.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): I am pleased to see you in the Chair, Mr Speaker, as it highlights the importance of this debate and—I say this having known you before you were Speaker—your interest in this area.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing this hugely important debate. It gives me the opportunity to update the House and to reaffirm the commitment made by the Prime Minister on something of huge importance not only to this House but across our country.

Before I begin, I want to take the opportunity to pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her tireless campaigning on this important issue, which, as she says, sadly touches the lives of many families. As she has so incredibly movingly reminded us today, she has herself suffered the tragic loss of a child—her son, Martin, who I appreciate will always be her little boy—and I feel deeply for her.

It is to the hon. Lady's outstanding credit that she has been willing and able to draw on that most painful of experiences to press for so positive and important a measure. Her constituents and this House should be incredibly proud to have someone such as her representing them and as a Member of our legislature. I am very proud to say that, having got to know her since I have been in this House, but particularly since last year when I took up ministerial office, I can begin to call her a friend as well.

I know that many hon. Members across this House have supported the hon. Lady in her endeavour. It is right that I mention my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who is now also the junior Minister in the Department for Work and Pensions with responsibility for this area—jointly with us in the Ministry of Justice. When it comes to delivering this, I hope she will accept that she would struggle to find two junior Ministers more determined and willing to deliver for her, both because it is the right thing to do for our country and because it is the right thing to do for her and for many other parents across the country. I pay tribute to the work of a number of campaigners and organisations across the country, and to bereaved parents who, like the hon. Lady, have summoned up the courage—however hard that is—to speak up and join this campaign.

The commitment to develop a children's funeral fund for England was announced by the Prime Minister at Easter last year. As she said in that announcement, no parent should ever have to endure the unbearable loss of a child. Although nothing can ever truly heal the pain of such a loss, as the hon. Lady has shown, we must recognise that, as the Prime Minister said, in the darkest moment of any parent's life there can still be a little light if there is the support and care that they need. The Government are committed to ensuring that that support exists for those who lose a child. I have known this Prime Minister for a very long time, and while she has many priorities, there are some that are particularly important and personal to her, which run through everything she tries to do, and I think that her personal commitment on this issue is very much there.

The children's funeral fund is being established in recognition of the fact that it cannot be right for grieving parents to have to worry about meeting the cost of burying or cremating their child. It is in memory of the hon. Lady's son Martin, and in support and memory of all parents who experience this most painful and tragic of losses, that the Prime Minister made the commitment to establish this scheme. Under the scheme, parents will no longer have to meet the costs of burial or cremation. These will instead be met by Government funding,

[*Edward Argar*]

meaning that parents will no longer be subject to the sometimes significant variation in charges across the country. The hon. Lady also highlighted the elements that she considers the basic essentials that need to be covered: the fees from the local authority and others, and the coffin. I share her view.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I echo everything that everybody has said. I also consider the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) a friend. She has dealt with this campaign with what we Welsh would call *hwyl*, and she is to be congratulated on that. When these final decisions are being taken, may I just urge the Minister to bear in mind the phraseology that the hon. Lady used—that this is the last gift of a parent to a dead child? It is not just a pounds, shillings and pence coffin and headstone; it is the whole emotional issue. If we keep that in mind, we will get the right outcome.

Edward Argar: As ever, my hon. Friend puts his point simply but eloquently, and he is absolutely right about the prism through which we should be looking at this matter.

The scheme that we are envisaging will not just bring England into line with broadly comparable arrangements in Wales and Scotland. I am keen that we go a bit beyond that where we can. The children's funeral fund will complement other measures to support grieving parents, including the social fund funeral expenses payment scheme and the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018, which was enacted last September. But I do understand that, alongside the welcome for the fund across both sides of this House, hon. Members and others clearly and rightly want to see the scheme in place as soon as possible, and to be reassured of the continued commitment to and progress towards that.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said on 6 February at Prime Minister's questions, it is important that we get this right. We have therefore been working hard across Government to identify the most effective way to deliver the fund. For all the clear simplicity of what it seeks to do, it is none the less a complex and challenging policy legislatively and in delivery on the ground, bringing together a number of Government Departments, but it is a challenge that the Government and I have willingly accepted.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): My hon. Friend knows—as do you, Mr Speaker—that, inspired by the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), I have been a champion of this fund and have indeed highlighted funeral poverty more generally. He speaks about the complexity across Government, and I understand that, but there is an absolute need for clarity where parents are concerned. When people have lost a loved one, particularly a child, they are vulnerable, and they need a very clear indication, as does the funeral industry, of exactly how this will work in practice. Can he give us an assurance that that will be the case?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I should, in recognising the contributions made by Members across both sides of the House, recognise his contribution to this campaign and this debate, and indeed that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith),

who has taken a very close interest in it. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) has, I believe, just become chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on funerals, so he will continue to be active on this. He is absolutely right. We do need to get the scheme right. We need to make it effective and legal, but as simple as we can. We are working to devise a comprehensive publicity programme to ensure that both the funeral sector and, of course, bereaved families are fully informed and fully understand how the fund will work, and how they can access it, in advance of its launch.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Could not the complexity be simplified if we just asked what they did in Scotland and Wales and replicated it? If it can be done speedily in Scotland and Wales, and in local authorities in Northern Ireland, why can it not be done speedily here, after the long and fantastic campaigning of my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris)?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He is right that we can draw on the lessons from the devolved Administrations, and I will touch on that subsequently. However, there are different arrangements in, for example, Wales around the provision of coffins. I agree with the hon. Member for Swansea East that that is an essential part of this. We are looking to see if we can bring that within the scheme in a way different from that used in Wales. There are differences, and there is also a different legislative context given the devolution settlement—I will touch on that in a minute.

I entirely accept that for those dealing with the terrible burden of bereavement, progress has been slow. I want to reassure the House that, as the Prime Minister announced in the House on 27 February, work is on track in each of the areas I mentioned: a clear policy, a legislative vehicle to ensure that it is legal, and a strong and robust delivery mechanism to deliver the fund this summer.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for the work that she has done in this area, which is really second to none. In November last year, I sat in the living room of one of my constituents as she lay on her sofa stricken by grief having lost her 16-year-old son to knife crime. Her grief was compounded by the family's inability to pay for the funeral that she wanted to give her son. Will the Minister accept that with every passing week, there is more urgency to this issue and to delivering this money so that it can benefit families who are facing a situation than none of us would wish on anyone?

Edward Argar: I want to give at this Dispatch Box a very clear and succinct answer: I agree entirely with the point that the hon. Lady makes. I will come on in a moment to what I have been doing to take a close and personal interest in making sure that this is driven at pace.

Mr Duncan Smith: I mean my hon. Friend no criticism, because I am a huge supporter of his—I think he is doing a great job, as is the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who I am incredibly pleased to see on the Front Bench—but I just want to press him slightly on this. Having sat in government for six years

and run a Department, I know that when you really want to, you can get these things done—excuse my language, Mr Speaker—pretty damn quickly, so I simply say to him that there may be something else that has been blocking this. If it sits in the Treasury, then I would hope that he might indicate that, because he will find that the pressure on the Treasury should be enormous right now. These are not large numbers in economic terms but they are large in human terms. I simply say to him that if anybody is saying that this is an unjustified cost, I promise him that I will give him every support I can, as I have before, to chase the Treasury on this matter. It should be told: do it now.

Edward Argar: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He is right to highlight that it is not about numbers; every single individual matters. I am clear that we must deliver on this commitment. This should not and will not be about the money. I hope that all Government Departments—including the Department for Work and Pensions and, I am sure, Her Majesty's Treasury—will wish to play their full role in ensuring that this is delivered expeditiously and properly.

Since I assumed responsibility for this, my officials have been working hard to develop both the necessary legislative vehicle and a delivery mechanism to ensure that it works on the ground. That has involved detailed discussions with the devolved Administrations, which the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) asked about, to ensure that we learn from them, that we do not inadvertently create a cross-border gap in provision and that everyone has coverage.

More than that, as I alluded to earlier, this has required close working across Government to ensure that the children's funeral fund is compatible and works well alongside other state provision and, importantly, that it fully fulfils the vision for the scheme of the Prime Minister and the hon. Member for Swansea East. To reflect that, our intention is that provision should be universal and free at the point of need.

As I mentioned, this work has been complex. However, I want to reassure the House that we are very close to putting the final details in place for all three elements. In response to the point made by the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and others, I expect and am sure that all Departments will be equally seized of the importance of delivering this, and I reassure her that the priority I attach to this means that I have weekly project meetings with the officials delivering it and receive daily progress updates on each of the outstanding elements, so clear am I in my determination to deliver this.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I do not doubt for one second the Minister's sincerity, or indeed that of the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince). The Minister has mentioned the summer and says he is having weekly meetings, but can he set out a more definitive timetable for when this will be implemented? "Summer" could be any time from June to September. It would give some reassurance to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East and the families if we had a more detailed date or a month.

Edward Argar: I cannot give a detailed date. The hon. Gentleman, as a savvy Whip, will read into this what he will. I have said that this will require a legislative vehicle,

and given my determination to do this for the summer and given that the House would need to be sitting to deliver on that, that might give him an indication of my intention.

Sir John Hayes: I want the Minister to know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), myself and, I hope, the hon. Member for Swansea East, will be going to see the Treasury Minister next week. I have just texted him to tell him.

Edward Argar: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for updating the House on that.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East and others involved in this. What we are hearing from the Minister about how government works across England is really alarming. The fact that the Prime Minister driving a policy change is so complicated in England, whereas our friends and colleagues across the United Kingdom can make these decisions more quickly, is a lesson for Government in how England is represented in this place. I hope that lessons about the complexities through which the Minister has had to drive this will be learned for other policy areas.

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, but I would say to her that, as I mentioned earlier, we are not seeking simply to replicate what has been done by the devolved Administrations. We are looking at other aspects and seeing whether there are ways in which we might go a bit further. That does add complexity, so it is not exactly replicating something that is already there. However, she makes her point, as ever, courteously but forcefully.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Edward Argar: I will not, I am afraid, because I am very conscious of time, and I want to conclude and wind up this debate properly.

I will endeavour to keep the House updated on progress—I know the interest in the House—and I will seek to provide more detailed information on both policy questions and delivery and, where I can, on the legislative timing as soon as I am able to do so. I would like once again to thank the hon. Member for Swansea East and other contributors to today's debate. No parent ever expects to bury their child, but the sad reality is that it happens, and perhaps more often than many of us realise or wish to acknowledge. For those who suffer such a tragic loss, the emotional burden, as she has said, is unimaginable. It is simply not right that, in addition, families should have to worry about what is probably an unexpected and, for some, totally unmanageable financial burden.

My commitment, the Prime Minister's commitment and that, I believe, of Members on both sides of the House is clear. Let us make the hon. Lady's vision a reality in our communities. We will deliver on the Prime Minister's commitment, we will finish that unfinished business this summer, we will give bereaved parents the support they need, and we will do it swiftly and effectively in tribute to all of them and to the hon. Lady.

Question put and agreed to.

7.30 pm

House adjourned.

Recall of MPs Act 2015: Member for Peterborough

Text of the notification received by the Speaker:

Recall Petition 2019—Public Notice of Outcome of Petition Petition to Remove the MP for Peterborough, Fiona Onasanya	
Petition signing period	Tuesday, 19 March 2019 to 01 May 2019
Constituency	Peterborough
Recall condition	The relevant recall condition was due to Fiona Onasanya MP being convicted of perverting the course of justice and sentenced to be imprisoned for 3 months and no appeal being upheld (as per section 1(3) of the Recall of MPs Act 2015).
Petition successful	Yes

Recall Petition 2019—Public Notice of Outcome of Petition Petition to Remove the MP for Peterborough, Fiona Onasanya

Number of electors eligible to sign the petition	69673
Number of electors who validly signed the petition	19261
Percentage of electors who validly signed the petition	27.64%
Number of rejected signing sheets due to:	62
No official mark	0
Unmarked or void for uncertainty	62
Total number of rejected signing sheets	62
Name: Gillian Beasley (Petition Officer)	
Date: 01 May 2019	

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 1 May 2019

[MIKE GAPES *in the Chair*]

District Council Finances

9.30 am

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered district council finances.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I am very pleased to have finally secured a debate on the finances of district councils, which is an important subject. The fact that we got the debate now is testimony to the popularity of debates in Westminster Hall. I shall speak about a report that was published by the all-party parliamentary group for district councils in July 2018. Since our return after last year's summer recess, I have consistently been applying for the debate, and we have finally got it, and with local elections tomorrow, it is extremely timely—persistence has finally paid off.

I am a Member of Parliament representing a district; I represent the borough of Rugby. I am a former district councillor and member of that authority, and very proud to have represented my community on the council and to have the opportunity to represent it in Parliament. As a former member of a district council, I strongly believe that they have a vital role to play in the next few years in shaping and delivering Government strategy, supporting local growth, building the homes we need and providing the preventive services that are necessary for sustainable health services.

To set the context, there are 192 district councils. In two-tier areas, they deliver 86 of 137 essential local government services to 22 million people, which is 40% of the population. District councils cover 68% of the country by area. One of their most important functions is as the housing and planning authority; they approve 90% of planning applications in their areas and enabled over 91,000 new homes to be delivered last year.

I am very proud to say that my local authority, Rugby Borough Council, saw 584 dwellings completed in 2017-18. It is a great example of a district that looks favourably on house building and development, and it has a very progressive attitude. I know the Minister saw that on his recent visit to Halton, which is an excellent example in my constituency of house building at scale, with a development that will consist of 6,200 homes by the time it is completed.

In two-tier areas, the county council area is divided into a number of districts, which each have an independent district council. I firmly believe that district councils are closer to their residents than are the vast majority of other forms of local government, which is one of the reasons I strongly believe that they should be protected. Rugby town hall is in the middle of our community. It is accessible by all residents and immediately identifiable; it gives a sense of identity to our community. I know there are pressures that are leading some areas to consider alternative arrangements—in particular, there is a move towards unitarisation—but in my area that would be neither practical nor in the best interests of our residents.

Districts operate on a size and scale that makes sense to local communities, and they have a unique understanding of the residents they serve.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): May I take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate? Blaby District Council and Harborough District Council, led respectively by Councillor Terry Richardson and Councillor Neil Bannister, are both excellently run. Does my hon. Friend agree that any proposal for unitarisation of the Leicestershire area is not welcomed by the district councils?

Mark Pawsey: I share the views of my hon. Friend in believing that districts are the right-sized and best-located authorities to deliver a substantial number of services to local residents. I fear that some of that connectivity and identity would be lost in a larger organisation.

I will now talk about some of the things that district councils have been able to do. One key issue that came out of our report is that district councils have a proven track record of devising innovative solutions to transform public services by taking a lead in improving services and providing outcomes for people through better collaboration. That is a really important point, which we will come back to again and again. It is driven by a financial imperative in some instances, but in many ways it is driven by the desire to do things better.

District councils have a proven track record in building better lives and bigger economies in the areas they serve. Through their roles in planning and housing, they act as the building blocks for local economic growth, and in many ways districts work collaboratively with each other and alongside newly established local enterprise partnerships to deliver growth and support local businesses and industry. I believe that district councils also protect and enhance the quality of life by safeguarding our environment, which is an issue we will be considering later today in the Chamber. Promoting public health, leisure and a sound environment is an important role, creating attractive places to live and where people will want to raise their families and build an economy. Districts are also tasked with the challenge of tackling homelessness—again, their proximity to the people and knowledge of individuals is important—and the duty to promote wellbeing.

For district councils to deliver for their residents and the businesses in their area, it is important to ensure that they have sustainable and suitable levels of funding, which is the matter I want to address. It is why the all-party parliamentary group for district councils, which I chair, held a formal Select Committee-type inquiry on the finances of district councils. We published our report, "Delivering the District Difference," in July 2018. I want to put on the record my gratitude to the 60 local authorities that provided written evidence to the APPG, and I thank the seven district councils, including Rugby Borough Council, that came before us and provided oral evidence to the APPG in Parliament. I am also grateful to many parliamentary colleagues who sat on that committee, particularly the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), who took part in the evidence sessions and is here today.

Our report was a major piece of work, and we collaborated with the District Councils' Network to ensure that we were working closely with the sector. I thank the

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DCN for its valuable contribution to the report. In our evidence sessions, it came across loud and clear that district councils under financial pressures have identified innovative and efficient ways of doing things differently to provide better value for money to local taxpayers. A recent Local Government Association report found that district councils have saved £224 million through sharing services with other districts and bodies, which is far more than any other type of council.

I will give some examples of shared working arrangements that my local authority, Rugby Borough Council, has with others. Rugby has a shared service on building control with Warwick District Council and works on procurement with our neighbours, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council. A particularly useful case study in Rugby involves its working closely with Daventry District Council to provide local crematorium and cemetery services. On its own, neither authority was of a sufficient size to be able to deliver these services efficiently, and my constituents wishing to use crematorium services were obliged to make lengthy journeys to either Coventry or the other side of Warwick. There had been an aspiration for such a service in Rugby for some time, but it was recognised that, in isolation, Rugby was not of sufficient size to deliver it. By working with Daventry and providing a facility on the border between the two authorities, we have ensured that the residents of both local authorities have great provision.

National Audit Office figures show that district councils have experienced the most significant real-terms cut in spending power between 2016-17 and 2019-20, which has required them to be enterprising. One of Rugby's overarching corporate priorities is to become financially self-sufficient by 2020. It is seeking to reduce its reliance on the sometimes arbitrary and variable central Government funding sources and take control of its sources of income through local taxation arising from economic growth and investment income. When I was a councillor, I was always aware of concerns that the pots of funding might or might not be available. They were sometimes arbitrary or time-limited, which meant that it was difficult to plan for the long term. Rugby aims to be financially self-sufficient so that it is no longer reliant on those variable sources. That will ensure better provision for my constituents in the long term.

All councils have had to work hard to achieve more with less. Between 2010 and 2020, councils in England will have lost almost 60p of every pound of central Government funding. For district councils, that equates to almost £1 billion. I know the Minister recognises the role that districts have played in identifying savings, and is aware of the burden that they have shouldered in recent years.

Alberto Costa: I thank my hon. Friend for his generosity in giving way again. The district councils in my constituency have highlighted the ever-increasing cost of waste and recycling services. Proposals to scrap a charge on green waste collection and introduce weekly food waste collections, although laudable, are likely to put significant financial burdens on district councils. Does my hon. Friend agree that, should district councils implement those changes, proper and full support is needed from central Government?

Mark Pawsey: There is a role for central Government, but those are local, devolved matters for district councils. One of the good things about district councils is that, because they are close to their residents, they know and understand what is best for them. My hon. Friend draws attention to the important role that district councils play in environmental matters, which are of real concern to residents.

In recent years, districts have been given more freedoms and powers to stimulate their local economies. In our report, we urge the Government to commit to retain current incentives to help district councils deliver the homes that the country needs. We are keen to see the retention of the new homes bonus. My local authority in Rugby has a very progressive attitude to new house building and is doing well from the new homes bonus, which enables local residents to support the principle that it has adopted.

During our inquiry, the all-party group heard evidence about the savings and efficiencies that can be made in social care by increasing district councils' capacity to deliver preventive services. Mannie Ketley, the head of service and chief financial officer at Rugby borough council, told us:

"What the districts have shown, working in conjunction with the county council, is that a very much joined up approach has been of huge benefit, so I am confident that as groups of authorities come together, districts are well placed to support in the delivery of social care...Something for districts to consider, or certainly for government to consider, is our role from a prevention perspective and the ability to allow district councils to levy a prevention precept much like upper tier authorities are able to levy that social care precept. There is a huge amount of recognition of the role district councils play at the prevention end of the spectrum".

They do that through, for example, the provision of recreation facilities that enable people to get out into the open and enjoy the countryside.

The evidence and insights that the all-party group received led us to make seven key recommendations. We identified measures, flexibilities and incentives to stimulate local growth. I want to put them on the record and share them with parliamentary colleagues. The first and most important is that no district council should find itself in the position of negative revenue support grant. That would mean that councils hand over to the Government a proportion of the tax that they raise locally, which would be a real disincentive to grow the local economy. I will come to the way in which our proposals have been addressed.

We argued that the fair funding review should reverse the decline in district council spending power. We suggested that districts should be allowed the freedom to introduce more incentives. We said that measures to increase district spending power should include greater flexibility to raise revenue and introduce incentives to support local growth.

I have already referred to the new homes bonus. We argued that the baseline should be removed, and that there should be a long-term commitment to the new homes bonus. In fact, we went further and said that district councils should be given more financial incentives to deliver more homes. The time available to local authorities to spend right-to-buy receipts should be extended, and districts should be allowed to retain 100% of those receipts.

We spoke about our concern about the lifting of the borrowing cap—I will come to how the issues have already been dealt with by enabling district councils to spend the entirety of their funding. We drew attention, as Mannie Ketley did, to the role that districts play in prevention as housing and planning authorities. They provide leisure and recreational facilities, install home adaptations, tackle homelessness, offer debt advice and deliver social prescription. We also spoke about the need to establish a health prevention fund to support projects that deliver preventive services, which would in turn reduce the financial burden on adult social care.

I am delighted that the Government allocated extra funding in the 2018 Budget and the 2019-20 local government finance settlement, and that two of our recommendations have already been acted on. Just a week after we published our report, the Government announced that they would cancel the negative rate support grant for 2019-20, recognising the disincentive effect. The removal of negative RSG has meant an average saving of more than £350,000 for every district council that would otherwise have faced negative RSG, and more than £50 million overall.

On our recommendation that there should be no further changes to the new homes bonus and that the baseline should be removed, the pot of £18 million is welcome. For my local authority, Rugby Borough Council, no change to the existing threshold means that it would not receive any new homes bonus funding for the first 150 homes delivered each year. The Government have also announced the lifting of the housing borrowing cap, which will be a very significant and helpful move for districts, and more money has been made available through the rural services delivery grant.

The all-party group is delighted that the Government have responded and listened to the voice of districts. We are grateful for that response of recognising the need for change and listening to the voice of districts. At the conclusion of the debate, I hope that the Minister will update the House about the other recommendations that our all-party group made, in particular our call for greater freedom to deliver preventive health services. It is important to invest in such services for the broader welfare of our citizens. I will also be grateful if he outlines what consideration he is giving to the introduction of further freedoms and incentives for districts to grow their local economies.

As the Government look at the technical detail behind the future funding formula and business rates retention, I hope that the Minister will provide some reassurance that districts will continue to receive their fair share of funding. For many local authorities, there is a lack of clarity, and further rates reductions for some will mean a less reliable basis on which to plan budgets appropriately. All organisations, whether in the private or the public sector, benefit from a longer-term perspective, but the funding available from April 2020 remains unclear, as is how it will be distributed and the means of delivery. It is vital for the 2019 spending review to provide the right level of funding for local government, enabling councils to perform their role. Rugby Borough Council, for example, tells me that it faces several risks from the forthcoming funding reform and has concerns about whether it can continue to deliver the high level of services it provides.

The recommendations in our report have many positive aspects across all districts. I am delighted that the Government have already adopted many of them, and I look forward to hearing from the Minister what steps the Government will take in respect of the other recommendations we made.

9.52 am

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I congratulate my friend, the hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), on such an excellent exposé of the funding of district councils. I am delighted to be part of the group and to have played a small part in an excellent report. I look forward to engaging with the Minister again, and with my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), so that we can at least bring attention to bear on this important topic.

In advance of the debate, I asked my district council in Stroud what main aspects it would like the Minister to look at. I pay due regard to the council leader, Doina Cornell, and the head of finance, Andrew Cummings; both contributed to an outline of what they saw as the main funding formula issues. It would be pointless to go over the same ground as the hon. Member for Rugby, but I will reinforce what he said, which was borne out by the Local Government Association and the District Councils' Network, both of which made excellent reports to allow us to make our contributions today.

Stroud would like the Minister to dwell on four main points. I have a couple of subsidiary ones, which I will talk about at the end. First—overwhelmingly so—is the issue of uncertainty in the sector. Local government in general faces uncertainty about the future funding regime; the forthcoming spending review will obviously have an impact on the finances of the sector from 2020-21, but we are also not sure about the new fair funding review, the changes to the new homes bonus and the resetting of the business rates baselines—they will all come together. They could be good news, but they could put local government under even more pressure.

My district was in a sense saved by the Government's decision not to pursue the negative revenue support grant. We are one of the areas of the country in the business rates retention pilot scheme, but that is coming to an end and I am interested to know the Government's future thinking. That all adds to the mood of uncertainty, however, and such a background makes it difficult for local authorities to set budgets. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton will have things to say about that.

On resetting the business rates baselines, the Government have made it clear that that is the direction of travel in which they wish to go, but they have not quite said how they intend to get there. So much depends on how the moneys already there are redistributed, and that will have an impact on district councils because we tend to be at the end of the train, rather than driving it—some of us might hope for a much greater say in how things are going.

That level of uncertainty is multiplied by the potential changes to the new homes bonus system. In Stroud district, that contributes £1.8 million, which is a not inconsiderable sum, and one that is important in allowing us to balance our budget. Again, will the Government say what they intend to do? We are talking about what

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the changes will imply after this year. If some of the suggestions are implemented, sadly many authorities including mine stand to lose out very badly.

Another big bugbear is the limited ability of small district councils to raise money through council tax. District councils are limited to a 3% ceiling, whereas upper-tier authorities have been granted some dispensation with the social care precept. The police have also been allowed to raise a much greater sum. I am a great fan of parish and town councils, and one of the reasons I am a fan is that they set their own budgets; they take the responsibility and are not capped.

The result—I do not know whether this is the case in Rugby as it is in Stroud—has been some offloading of responsibilities on to parish and town councils. That might be laudable, because the idea of subsidiarity and running things as locally as possible has merit, but the problem is that parish and town councils might be running things because they have to, because the district councils simply do not have the resources—although that gets us to pay attention to the difficult scenario of the threat of closure of such services. The District Councils' Network is therefore clearly lobbying for what is called a prevention precept—the hon. Member for Rugby intimated that—and it will be interesting to know the Government's attitude to that.

On housing, quickly—I am mainly looking at the funding per se of the councils—there are problems. Stroud District Council owns its own stock; it bought it for some £97 million. We are proud that we have built something in the order of 230 new council houses, which is a considerable increase for a small district authority. We could have the argument about the right to buy, which some of us feel is a real disincentive, but the problem is that although notionally the Government have said that the cap on borrowing has been removed, real hurdles remain in the way of driving forward that programme. At the moment, therefore, we are at a standstill, which is really disappointing, because it would be the way to deal with at least some of our problems of homelessness and of other means by which people get into the housing sector. I hope that the Government will look at what is happening, and why there is not the drive towards what some of us want to see, which is council housing at least being part of the solution, rather than being seen as a marginal element.

I have a couple of final points to make. Planning is always a real bugbear, because we are forever expected to provide more housing, which is right, and more jobs, which is right. The problem is that there are not necessarily the means to do that. The Government's formula means that Stroud is being asked to provide something like an extra 48% on top of its normal provision, and the question of how that will be done is causing real heartache in communities. There are very few ways in which the provision of services can be guaranteed if the housing is provided, so the Government need to look at their planning proposals. That is all bound up, because it affects the new homes bonus, which is the incentive, but if the funding is not carried through, there is very little benefit for local authorities and the people they represent.

Waste is a difficult issue. Stroud District Council has a proud record of collection. It is one of the greenest authorities in the country and has a good record for

collecting food waste. I will not go into the politics of this, but we have a new incinerator about to go live and the county is starting to remove tax credits for recycling. That is totally bizarre, because we talk about the need to drive up recycling and to avoid waste. I could go on at great length about that; I have said many things in the past about it and no doubt will in future. Would the Minister look at some of the ways in which the smaller district local authorities are penalised by what I see as a mad dash towards incineration?

I share the desire of the hon. Member for Rugby to get this topic heard. It is a pity that a few more people are not in the debate. We are a bit of an endangered species because so many authorities are going unitary. I was talking to the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) about that, because in Bedfordshire they are in the process of doing that. I support unitary—the Minister responded to my debate on unitary—but until Gloucestershire grasps the nettle, we have to do the best we can for our district. Many people look to that authority for the bulk of their services.

I hope the Minister listens to the need for certainty and proper funding, and that he recognises that those authorities are doing valuable work on waste and new housing, and more particularly on the services that are so important to everyday life.

10.2 am

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) on securing this debate, although its importance is not reflected in the number of speakers. Nevertheless, that does not mean that the work done by district councillors across England is not critical and life changing to millions of people. I place on the record my thanks to our councillors of every colour, and I wish every candidate success, in different degrees, in tomorrow's local elections.

The vibrancy of local democracy is what communities are all about. Most of us have come into politics through local government, because we are passionate about the places we live in and the power of positive politics to make a difference. District councils reflect that in a special and unique way because of how grounded they are in the local population. They are important also because they are the primary deliverer of neighbourhood services. I think about what makes an area somewhere decent to live; it is those neighbourhood services that make life worth living—a decent park, good quality countryside, clean and safe environments, and access to cultural facilities such as libraries. They all make up the fabric of our local communities.

There are tensions between districts and councils, but generally they work well together and, between them, provide good quality services for our communities. Like every council in England, they are under huge financial pressure. It is a bit simplistic to look at a spreadsheet, which we do whenever there is a local government finance debate, and to dismiss the cash cuts to district councils as being quite small. Their budgets, however, are much smaller. The percentage loss, particularly across critical neighbourhood services, has been profound in many district council areas. Rugby has experienced a

real-terms cut of 47% to cultural services for recreational sport, open spaces and tourism. People feel the impact of austerity even at a district level.

That brings me to the fair funding review. We can all argue about how we have ended up here—we do that on a regular basis. The challenge, which is similar to that for adult social care and children's services, is that most of the issues should not be party political. They are not political—they are about the delivery of public services in local communities. Regardless of the places we represent and live, we all want good quality public services to be available to everyone.

Political parties need to unite on some of the issues—local government does that anyway—and find long-term, sustainable solutions to how we fund local public services. We have a fair funding review today, but who knows when a general election will be called? A change of national Government matters almost more to local councils than to any other part of government, central or local, because it has a direct implication for how they are financed.

Every Government have always moved money around to favour the areas where they have strong representation. When there was a Labour Government, my locality had enough money to fund public services. It was never quite enough because we always wanted to go further and do more, particularly on housing and the local economy. Then, we had a change of Government and there was a shift. There is a good chance that when the cycle comes back around, the reverse will happen. That is not the way to fund sustainable public services. It does not give credit to our public servants who work for local authorities and it is not fair on the local councillors who have to deal with that cycle of spending turmoil. It is not right for the taxpaying public, either.

On cross-party consensus, the Local Government Association—I declare an interest as a vice-president—carried out an independent review of local government funding a number of years ago. It looked at the then current state and at what type of future structure could provide sustainability and value for taxpayer money. We need to look at some of those ideas.

Mark Pawsey: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, who seems to be making a pretty strong case for local authorities becoming self-sufficient. Is that what he is arguing?

Jim McMahon: I understand the calls for that, but I stop short of it, or anywhere near it, because the ability to fund local government public services is so heavily dependent on property taxation, which causes huge geographical inequalities across the country. We want a funding formula and structure where funding follows need. If we give local authorities financial independence there will be significant winners but also significant losers. My strong view is that council tax places a disproportionate burden on local taxpayers in terms of overall taxation. It has been expected to fund too many local public services while the central Government grant is being reduced. Business rates are near breaking point. Those taxes serve a very important purpose, but they also have significant limitations.

Whether it is a district or unitary council, the connection between the tax people pay and the neighbourhood universal services they receive is very healthy for democracy

and transparency in governance. I am not sure whether the same is true of social care and children's services, which in general benefit a smaller number of the local population. Those services are targeted, not universal, and have no relationship to local property values in 1991 or the business rate base that has been built up over hundreds of years. At some point there will have to be a separation of the two, for a purer connection between the council tax that people pay locally and the neighbourhood universal services they receive in return. There should be a properly assessed fair funding formula to ensure that funding goes where older people need care, children need social services, and homes need to be built to resolve homelessness. If we were to do that, it would be a start.

The LGA's independent review also recommended that there ought to be an independent body to assess the total requirement across England. It would not, of course, set the Treasury's Budget, but it would make recommendations to the Treasury about the total sum local government needs for the requirements placed on it by central Government. If the recommended sum was £1, the Government might decide to provide 90p of funding and distribute that according to an independently assessed fair funding formula.

Another suggestion, which has huge merit, is that we should establish local public accounts committees. Our councillors see on a daily basis where money is spent in their areas by a range of Departments, in a way that almost no other elected representative does. That provides important insight into how money could be used to better effect. Establishing a local public accounts committee would effectively allow a local authority to hold the ring on all the public sector spending in its area—to ensure that there is no duplication, that any gaps are identified and filled, and that people can work more collaboratively for better public services. Our councillors have proved, and all the evidence shows, that they are best placed to deliver public sector efficiency. They are rooted in the community, they know how to deliver public services, and their insight would help the whole of Government.

To be honest, however, even after all that, there is still not enough money in the system. We know that there will be a funding gap of more than £3 billion by the coming financial year, and by 2024-25 that gap will have increased to £8 billion. The truth is that people are living longer and need care. We know that if we do not give them care in their homes, we will put pressure on the acute sector and the NHS. We also know that children need safeguarding. We can have good processes and screening in place, but ultimately we have to provide protection for young people. The threats are increasingly complex, particularly with the growth of online social media and so on, and councils need the capacity to deal with that. Many are struggling under the weight of those two pressures.

Will the Government meet us halfway and agree to take some of the politics out of local government spending, for the benefit of all of local government? Will they be radical in challenging the Treasury to cough up for once and provide the money that is needed to fund local public services? Will they show leadership and stop pitting council against council? This is not about urban areas and rural areas, or counties, shires and unitaries; this is about local people and local public services, and every man, woman and child in England deserves decent public services.

10.12 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) on securing the debate and on his work in this place to champion the role of district councils, which he does with passion and eloquence. I have been in this job for just over a year; I have enjoyed all the work I have done with him, and district councils are lucky to have such a champion for their cause in this place. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), who deserves credit for his focus on the issues concerning district councils.

While I am on the subject, my good friend John Fuller, the president of the District Councils' Network, is an irrepressible advocate and champion for district councils. I am sure the only reason there is slightly lower attendance at the debate than usual is that everyone is out campaigning hard in their local communities for the district council elections. I join the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) in wishing everyone well on Thursday.

We are here to discuss the "Delivering the District Difference" report, which was released some months ago. I was pleased to be able to attend its launch, and I pay tribute to everyone who contributed to the production of that fantastic document. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby pointed out, it highlights that district councils are at the heart of our communities and our system of local government. They cover two thirds of the country and deliver 86 out of 137 essential local government services.

I am fortunate to come from a two-tier area, with fantastic district councils in Hambleton and Richmondshire. I have seen as I have travelled around the country visiting countless other districts that they deliver high-quality services, ensure excellent value for their local taxpayers and, as we heard from all the Members who contributed, remain incredibly close and connected to their communities. We should be very grateful for that.

I am pleased to say that this Government are determined to continue supporting district councils. We heard about the seven points in the report, but I thought I would frame my remarks by looking at the two things the District Councils' Network highlights as the key roles of district councils: building stronger economies and providing better lives for their citizens. In discussing those two overarching roles, I hope to pick up at least the seven specific points in the report, as well as others that Members raised.

District councils are integral to the UK's future prosperity. We talk a lot about the Budget, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is an important figure, but our prosperity as a nation will be built bottom-up, community by community, neighbourhood by neighbourhood and district by district. District councils have a vital role in driving economic growth in their areas—indeed, only that economic growth can pay for the vital public services that we all care so much about.

When talking about what we have done, business rates are a great place to start. The business rates retention scheme is yielding strong results; local authorities estimate that they will keep more than £2.5 billion in revenue from generating growth this year, on top of the

core settlement funding we debate so much in this place. In the current year, there are 15 75% pilot pools, which were selected through a competitive bidding process. They cover 122 local authorities, 83 of which, crucially, are district councils. We heard from the hon. Member for Stroud about the importance to his area of being part of that pilot programme last year. We plan to deliver 75% retention to the entire country from next year. That will give districts even more control of the money they raise through their own economic success.

On a related theme, building stronger high streets is one of the great pressing issues of our time. This Government understand that a thriving high street is at the centre of any local community's vibrancy and success, and it is a mark of our confidence in district councils that we have trusted districts to lead the way. We announced a £675 million high streets transformation fund in the last Budget, and, as we are seeing, districts will take the lead in applying for those funds. The changes we are making to our planning system are pivotal to giving districts the power they need to shape their local high streets and areas. District councils are also at the heart of the Government's ambition to achieve nationwide full-fibre broadband coverage by 2033. The revised national planning policy framework requires priority to be given to full-fibre connections in existing and new developments.

While I am on the topic of growth, I want to pay tribute to the innovative work across local government to drive up efficiency and creativity. We have seen the merging of district councils in East Suffolk, West Suffolk, and Somerset West and Taunton, as district councils seize the opportunity to improve services and drive efficiencies for their communities. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby about the creative shared working agreements that his local council has entered into, striving at every turn to provide better value for money for its residents by improving service delivery. We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa), who is no longer in his place, about the fantastic work by Harborough District Council and the efficiency it has created with its neighbour, Blaby District Council, to ensure that its taxpayers benefit from low council tax bills and high-quality public services.

Districts are well placed to innovate in that way. Given their smaller size, they can be agile and quick to respond. I see them as the entrepreneurial arm of local government, as was demonstrated in the recently announced £7.5 million local digital fund, which I was pleased to initiate and launch. Two of the successful bids for the first round of funding included a host of district councils, which will use that funding to explore ways they can use cutting-edge artificial intelligence technology and better data management in their authorities. I have repeatedly highlighted the social prescribing model of Adur and Worthing Councils as one that others should look to follow. They have been consistently at the cutting edge in driving digital transformation in local government.

Economic growth is not everything we should be focused on. As the District Councils' Network has mentioned, creating better lives for our residents is equally important. Indeed, district councils are at the heart of helping the most vulnerable in our society to live those better lives.

We saw in the report and heard in the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby much about the important role that district councils play in prevention. Although clearly we are not fully there yet, we have seen Government responding to that need and recognising the important role that districts can play. For example, the disabled facilities grant is part of the Government's commitment to help older and disabled people to live more independently. We established the grant to help local authorities to fund home adaptations, keeping people in their homes. The grant has more than doubled to over £500 million this financial year. Indeed, Rugby District Council has been allocated more than £2 million since 2015. Hopefully that represents a positive step in the direction of recognising the role that districts can play in prevention. If not fully the way to a precept, it is certainly a step in the right direction.

My hon. Friend also touched on homelessness and rightly highlighted that districts are on the frontline of reducing homelessness. Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, between April and June last year more than 10,000 households secured their existing accommodation or were helped to find alternative accommodation through the new prevention and relief duties. Local authorities received an additional £72 million to carry out the new duties and are leading policy implementation through their role on the homelessness advice and support team.

We heard from the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton about the importance of parks, and I fully agree. Parks create communities that we want to live in, and make people proud of the area that they call home. They are the green lungs of our society.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): One thing that district councils do is planning, ensuring that we have an ordered and adequate amount of housing land available and so on. Is it not also important that there should be adequate funding for enforcement? In my area we have the two excellent district councils, North Hertfordshire and East Herts, but East Herts is having to spend a lot of money tackling cases of intentional unauthorised development, particularly by Travellers. Such action is very expensive. Does my hon. Friend agree that adequate funding needs to be allowed in all settlements for such enforcement?

Rishi Sunak: My right hon. and learned Friend makes an excellent point about an issue on which he has represented his constituents many times in this place. Just last week I responded to my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) in an Adjournment debate on this topic, and I highlighted that exact issue. Enforcement is important, as a recent consultation picked up.

Although this area is not my specific responsibility, the Secretary of State is considering, and I think has already committed to, making more funds available later this year—£1.3 million, I believe—to district councils through the planning delivery fund to tackle this exact issue, and I know that my colleagues in the Home Office are considering greater powers for the police and other bodies to enforce in the first place. I hope my right hon. and learned Friend knows that the Government take seriously the inconvenience and distress caused to

settled communities through illegal and unauthorised encampments, and that we are committed to making improvements.

It is important that parks and green spaces are well funded. That is why the Government launched the £1 million pocket parks fund in 2016, which led to the creation of more than 80 new green spaces for local communities to enjoy. That fund had a phase 2 earlier this year, with almost 200 new pocket parks created. Districts are again playing the lead role in that work.

Jim McMahon: The Minister needs to demonstrate some balance and reflect that there have been real-terms cuts in open space funding of 41% and in sports and recreation of over 70%. If the Government are committed to parks, open spaces and a quality environment, what will they do to replace the funding cut so far?

Rishi Sunak: Funding for all green spaces and such services is not ring-fenced by central Government. It would not be right for me, sitting in Whitehall as a Minister, to dictate to every single local authority how it should prioritise its resources between social care, homelessness, parks and planning enforcement. Every area will have different priorities, and it is right that local authorities make those decisions. The Government recently unveiled a range of initiatives around parks—not just the pocket parks programme but an additional several million pounds of funding for the renovation and upkeep of parks or children's playgrounds that have fallen into disrepair. We have established the Parks Action Group to bring people from the industry together, and we funded the Heritage Lottery Fund and the National Trust with money for their accelerator to innovate new parks models. Indeed, we are also developing a new apprenticeship standard for 21st-century parks managers. On parks and green spaces the Government are firmly on the front foot, supporting local areas to ensure that their green spaces are there for their communities.

To the hon. Gentleman's broader point, I would be the first to acknowledge that all local authorities, whether district, upper tier or unitary, have faced difficult times over the past years. They deserve enormous tribute for the fantastic job they have done in ensuring high-quality public services and public satisfaction in what they are doing at a time of constrained finances. That is thanks to their innovation and creativity, as was put so well by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby. We all know why we were in that situation: when the Government came into office in 2010, we were left with a £100 billion deficit, and savings had to be made across government. Again, I pay tribute to those in local government for playing a starring role in helping to bring our public finances back to a sustainable position.

Housing was mentioned by many speakers. Building the homes that our communities need is another great challenge of our time, and the Government have placed trust in districts to help solve it. One key recommendation in the report was the removal of the housing revenue account borrowing cap. That was the No. 1 request from districts, and I am pleased that the Government have responded to that, which has unleashed the potential for districts to get on and build the homes we need. Similarly, the Government listened to district council calls for continuity and stability on the new homes

[*Rishi Sunak*]

bonus and responded by committing an additional £20 million to maintain the baseline this year, ensuring that district councils will receive more than £300 million in new homes bonus payments in 2019-20. Through all these measures, we are making every effort to create a housing market that works for everyone, and in doing so creating a country that works for everyone.

The hon. Member for Stroud mentioned uncertainty, and I acknowledge that issue. We are at the end of a spending review period, so naturally there will be some uncertainty as one set of programmes comes to an end and we wait for the spending review for certainty about what will replace them. The Government recognise the role that incentivising districts and authorities more generally to build houses has played in helping to get the number of new homes up to its highest in more than a decade. There were more than 220,000 last year, and I am sure that at this moment my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing is considering how best we can continue to incentivise local authorities in the new spending review. I am always committed to providing certainty as early as possible for councils of all stripes so that they can make the long-term plans that we have heard are so important.

It is worth dwelling for a minute on housing. I visited the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby to see the fantastic work of his local council, replacing old high-rise blocks and improving the stock of houses for social rent. As my hon. Friend said, the council deserves credit for being on the front foot, forward thinking and keen to get on and provide the homes that our young people, and indeed all our communities, need.

I thank my hon. Friend for calling the debate on this vital issue. On my list of seven things, the one I have not touched on is freedom and flexibility. Perhaps this goes to the heart of the tension between the Government and the Opposition on how much to trust local government to get on with it. I am firmly and instinctively a localist. I want to be able to give and devolve powers down to the lowest possible level. It is good for our democracy and for our civic society if decisions are taken closer to the people they affect. I will be arguing where I can during the spending review process for greater freedoms and flexibilities for all local authorities. Indeed, at every meeting and engagement I go to, I ask local councillors, whether they are from parish or town councils all the way up to big metropolitan devolved mayoral administrations, for the ideas they have that I can debate, kick around with the team and put into the mix when we come to the spending review.

Jim McMahon *rose—*

Sir Oliver Heald *rose—*

Rishi Sunak: I will first take an intervention from the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton.

Jim McMahon: It is part of the nature of this place that we can be mischievous at times, but let us not be under any illusion: this tension is not caused by trust in local government. We all respect the role that councillors play and we trust them to know what is best for their area. Fundamentally, this is about the sustainability of

local council finance and the historical local tax bases that inform an entirely devolved financial model. That is the only tension—this is not about trust; it is about financial sustainability.

Rishi Sunak: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I will now take an intervention from my right hon. and learned Friend.

Sir Oliver Heald: Does the Minister agree that freedom and flexibility, particularly in housing, can provide settings for housing estates that fit the local area? Hertfordshire has a lot of garden conurbations—Welwyn garden city, Letchworth garden city, and so on—and we try to create settings for future buildings that include those garden features where possible. Other parts of the country also do their thing well, and over the past 30 years, housing settings—particularly public housing, but also more generally—have improved hugely, and that is down to the offices of district councils.

Rishi Sunak: I firmly agree with my right hon. and learned Friend. Planning and housing can be contentious in local areas, but one way to relieve that tension is to ensure that local communities feel that they are shaping the developments taking place around them. I saw that when I visited my right hon. and learned Friend's constituency, and his point is well made.

The hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton asked the Government to be radical. They have been radical by introducing neighbourhood planning. They have devolved planning power to local communities, often at parish or town level, so that that community can create its own neighbourhood plan, supported financially by incentive payments over the last few years. That plan is then given significant and strong legal weight in the planning process, which puts local communities, at a small level, in control of their destinies on the ground. That is central Government sitting here in Whitehall, being radical, and trusting and empowering local communities to construct the housing that they need and think appropriate for their areas.

I can debate this issue with the hon. Gentleman, but we must recognise that there are two sides to this coin. If one argues for more freedom, flexibility and trust in local government, one must also believe that local governments are able to shape their own destinies. It is no good saying that local governments are not able to sustain themselves and require constant handouts from central Government, yet also saying that they should be empowered to do everything they want. If central Government are shovelling money around the system, national politicians will always rightly be in charge of that system of redistribution. The more that money is raised locally, the more that local government will have the right to say, "Let us do things the way we want. You do not have the right to dictate to us what we do because you do not provide us with our funds." There will of course be differences in the abilities of different areas to raise funds, and there will always be some element of redistribution, but local areas cannot be considered completely static entities with no ability to be creative, dynamic and improve their financial sustainability.

Jim McMahon: If the Minister is arguing in favour of growing the local tax base, we are entirely in agreement. If local authorities can demonstrate that through their

actions they have grown the local economy, and therefore the local tax base, we should discuss how they benefit from that success. That is not the same, however, as the historical inherited tax base that many local authorities rely on for their funding, which includes the housing stock and business rate base. We need to separate out the two things. We need fair funding to ensure that public services are properly and sustainably funded, and a proper incentive for local authorities to grow the local economy and tax base.

Rishi Sunak: I am pleased to say that that is exactly what the Government are doing. The fair funding review is a blank sheet of paper on which we can consider the relative needs of local areas. It is bottom up, and driven analytically and empirically by the evidence, so that we figure out the right element of need for each local area, and then add a system of redistribution to ensure that funding gets to the right place. I am pleased the hon. Gentleman supports the incentive mechanism. An argument I hear a lot—I think I have also heard it from him, so I am glad if I misheard it previously—is when councils say that they have no ability to grow and will therefore need more handouts. I would take issue with that. Yes, the starting bases may be different, but that does not mean that areas cannot look creatively and entrepreneurially at how to create growth and generate resources for their local community. I believe in growth and driving prosperity locally, because I think that is the only sustainable way to pay for public services. Whether money comes from national or local government, it will come only if the economy is growing and generating tax revenue, and that is why I am keen to focus the conversation on driving economic growth.

This has been an excellent debate, and I was glad to hear all the contributions on the importance of district councils. Funding is important, and the big point is the elimination of the negative revenue support grant—I am not entirely sure that the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton supported that when we unveiled it in the local government finance process. That is worth almost £153 million to the local government sector. District councils were big beneficiaries of the Government ensuring their commitment that the business rates baseline

would not change over that period. I am glad that the Government were able to meet that big ask, which benefited 140 shire districts.

We all agree about the vital role of our district councils, their connection with communities and proximity to those affected by their decisions, and the importance of those decisions in ensuring that communities enjoy stronger local economies and better lives. It is my pleasure to represent district councils for the Government. I pay tribute to everything they do, and will continue to champion them for as long as I have this role.

10.36 am

Mark Pawsey: The debate has focused mostly on finance and funding, but it has been a valuable opportunity to consider the important role that district councils play in communities, and the important functions that they deliver. I am grateful to colleagues who spoke about the roles of their district councils and some of that innovative work, and to the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) for his reference to the neighbourhood services that district councils provide. It seems that there is a benefit to the delay between asking for a debate and securing it, because it gave the Government time to respond to many of the issues raised, and I am pleased they have taken those points on board.

I was interested in the Minister's emphasis on stronger economies and the role of district councils in building those economies and developing high streets. I am also delighted that he took on board the bit about better lives. This is not always about finance and pounds and pence; it is about lifestyles and the benefits that councils can bring to the lives of individual residents. I am grateful to the Minister for his remarks, and for the opportunity, once again, to highlight the important role played by district councils.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered district council finances.

10.38 pm

Sitting suspended.

England Coastal Path

11 am

Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect on landowners of the proposed England Coastal Path.

May I say how nice it is to see you in the Chair, Mr Gapes? I applied for this debate following representations from a number of small landowners in my constituency who face having part of their land expropriated by a Government agency, without compensation and against all their objections. That agency is Natural England, and the land being expropriated is being used as part of the England coastal path, which seeks to ensure that the public have access to England's beautiful coastline.

While in some quarters that might be seen as a commendable and worthwhile aim, it is worth pointing out straight away that the justification for the original legislation for the coastal path was seriously flawed, because 70% of the coastline was already publicly accessible and an additional 14% was owned by the Government or large industries, with only 16% being in the control of private landowners. In addition, significant areas of that 16% were sites of special scientific interest and so could not be used.

The whole project is several years behind schedule and has put an additional strain on an already stretched public purse. Even if the scheme was good value for money, which is arguable, I believe it is simply wrong to route the path, without consent, through land that has been lawfully owned, kept and maintained by small family farmers and businesses, often for many generations.

Worse still, parts of the proposed route will put at risk not only the safety of grazing animals, but some of the people who will be using the path. The people who have contacted me are not major landowners with thousands of acres, but small-scale owners for whom the businesses they run on their land are their only source of income. They are little people who feel they are up against an overbearing, mighty, all-powerful state, and they are frustrated and angry at their treatment.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Is my hon. Friend saying that small landowners are facing a disproportionate burden that is not being acknowledged by the big industrial owners of some of the land, and that that is affecting their businesses?

Gordon Henderson: My hon. Friend is right. That is exactly what I am saying, and it goes further: Natural England is not showing any common sense but treating everybody the same, and that is simply not right.

To better explain the anger, I will set out some of the complaints that those landowners have relayed to me. I will begin by highlighting what is happening on the Isle of Sheppey, which lies adjacent to the Thames estuary and forms part of the Medway estuary. Parliament has made clear that the coastal path legislation is about access to the coast, not to estuaries, but Natural England is ignoring that guidance and pushing forward its plans for a path around the Isle of Sheppey, including along the island's northern coastline.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for introducing this timely debate. Is he aware that I promoted a private Member's Bill, the Coastal Path (Definition) Bill, the main purpose of which was to omit section 301 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, which deals with river estuaries? In my constituency, the proposal is that the path should go right up into Christchurch and across the River Stour, rather than across from Mudeford to Hengistbury Head, which would be a much more direct coastal route.

Gordon Henderson: I must be honest and say that I was not aware of my hon. Friend's private Member's Bill, but since he promotes more private Member's Bills than all other hon. Members put together, it is hardly surprising that I would not remember that particular one. However, I am delighted to hear that it is not just my constituency that has concerns about the legislation.

Part of the north of Sheppey is given over to farming and holiday-related businesses. One of the families affected by the proposed route is that of Clive, Maria and Gary Phipps, who live on Connetts Farm. To survive financially, they have had to diversify into other activities, including fencing contracting, holiday lets, a farm and forest school and wild camping.

The latter activity, which allows campers to use any suitable land on which to pitch their tents, was last year judged a winner by the camping organisation Pitchup.com, with a review score of 9.8 out of 10 for cliff-top camping. The biggest appeal for those campers is that they have exclusive use of the land and the peace and quiet it provides. For a few days they are able to experience a simple life, back to nature and away from such things as interlopers, public footpaths, uninvited visitors and dogs.

Hon. Members can imagine the anger felt by the Phipps family that, despite the land's already being accessible to those paying campers, Natural England wants to include it on the coastal path. One of the problems that poses for the Phipps is that people using the path will be able not simply to walk along the clifftops, but to loiter, picnic, cycle, pitch a tent free of charge and even have a barbecue. If that happens, the whole attraction of wild camping will be lost, which would be a major blow. As Clive Phipps told me:

"Having to accept a public footpath on our land will completely destroy any business we get from the camping facility and will, I'm sure, affect the viability of our holiday lets, because most of the people who come to stay with us, value the privacy and security offered by our little piece of England."

The irony is that one of the reasons why Natural England wants to run the path through Connetts Farm is that the neighbouring holiday park owner refuses to allow access through his land. He is able to do so because the legislation protects holiday parks and, quite rightly, only allows the path to cut across a park with the owner's consent. Unfortunately, small businesses such as that run by the Phipps family are not afforded the same protection, and that is simply unfair.

Other family-run farms and businesses sited along the north Sheppey coast are similarly being discriminated against. For instance, the path would run as close as 6 metres away from the house of one of those families. The property cannot be fenced off to protect livestock and the owners have been given no clarity on issues such as liability, should people using the path injure, or be injured by, livestock.

The landowners are also fearful for another reason. The north Sheppey cliffs are unstable and steep, with regular mudslides that see the clifftop disappear. The coastguard helicopter is often called out to rescue people stuck in the mud created by the erosion, yet the proposed path will increase access to that dangerous environment. The risk is even more unacceptable because there are safer and more stable routes for walkers, further away from the cliffs. Yet Natural England refuses to listen to landowners who have witnessed so many near misses, where people straying on to the cliffs have been lucky to escape with their lives.

The danger is summed up by another of my constituents, Susan Goodwin, who told me:

“These cliffs are particularly unstable, and people are constantly getting stuck, requiring rescue by the coastguards. The local council even closed an old footpath to Barrows Brook because of safety issues. Allowing people to wander along the cliff edge is madness”.

Of course, if the cliffs were protected to prevent erosion, the risk would be reduced. Indeed, one of our local farmers put forward a proposal to protect the cliffs by using construction spoil to construct a coastal park in the area. Therein lies another irony: Natural England objected to that plan, because it wants the cliffs to erode. Mr Gapes, you simply could not make it up.

Landowners living on the Isle of Sheppey are not the only constituents who are alarmed at what is happening. Let me give a small example. Lower Halstow is a small village on the mainland that lies on the Medway estuary marshland. The area is popular with walkers, who use the well-established Saxon Shore Way—a path that opened in 1980 and gives fantastic views of the estuary and marshes. However, rather than utilising the Saxon Shore Way, Natural England is insisting on expropriating a farmer’s land to run another coastal path through the farm to the estuary, despite there being no requirement in legislation for the path to continue into an estuary. The landowners believe that that new path will rip the heart out of their farm and have a serious impact on the wildlife habitat that has been carefully nurtured over many years.

Let me quickly explain how that came about. The sea wall that protects the farm was privately funded by the family 60 years ago. That wall has helped to conserve and grow the habitat. The protection of what is an incredible Ramsar wetlands site is the responsibility of the landowners, and they do not begrudge or shirk that responsibility. Now, however, the route of the proposed path will allow free and unfettered public access across a very vulnerable site. One must question the cost implications of creating that section of the path, given that Natural England itself has said that it does not anticipate a great increase in the number of walkers along it, compared with those using the existing Saxon Shore Way.

Let me read out a quote given to me by another landowner:

“The sole benefit of this scheme is that in some areas it has created more comprehensive access for the public, something that could have been achieved with landowners in a much simpler way, using a carrot and stick approach, rather than the mighty sledgehammer of poorly constructed legislation to crack a small nut!”

I could not agree more. Frankly, this is essentially a land grab that totally contradicts Natural England’s claim

that it takes into account land management by landowners. Only somebody or some organisation that has never actually farmed could pursue such a policy.

In addition to the anger and frustration, my constituents have followed the process with growing disbelief. They simply cannot understand why their views and local knowledge have continually been ignored by Natural England. It is baffling that such a worthwhile national project is being delivered in such a draconian way, unnecessarily affecting negatively the lives and livelihoods of the long-term custodians of our countryside.

I would therefore like the Government to take the following steps to bring some common sense into implementation of the scheme: first, make it clear to Natural England that coastal access is about access to the coast and not to estuaries, such as the Medway estuary; secondly, make it clear that Natural England is not expected to provide full coastal access around estuaries and that existing paths, such as the Saxon Shore Way, are considered suitable alternative means of circumnavigating an estuary; thirdly, encourage Natural England to signpost existing estuary trails from the new coastal path, so that the public can use them as an alternative route when circumnavigating rivers and estuaries; fourthly, instruct Natural England to extend to all small landowners who offer holiday accommodation the protection given to holiday parks; and fifthly, instruct Natural England to pay greater attention to the dangers presented by cliff erosion when planning the route of the coastal path.

My constituents need help, and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to give them the help and the justice that they deserve.

11.15 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson) on securing the debate and my hon. Friends the Members for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) and for Henley (John Howell) on contributing to it. Although Lord Gardiner is the Minister responsible for policy when it comes to the England coast path, I am of course happy to respond to the debate, but I will ensure that a copy of *Hansard* is given to my noble Friend, so that he can respond to some of the specific queries that my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey has raised.

In relation to delivering the coastal path around England, I believe that the intention of the law is clear. The practice that Natural England is supposed to follow is that the needs of landowners are balanced with the aspiration to create a continuous route around the coast of England that will allow walkers to enjoy our stunning coastline, supporting tourism and the visitor economy in rural areas.

Gordon Henderson: Will the Minister give way on that, because it is a very important statement? She is effectively saying that Natural England should be using common sense and balancing the needs of the landowner with the need for a path. Is that right?

Dr Coffey: The duty is on Natural England to create this path around the coast of England. It builds somewhat on rights that were given with the right to roam under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Very specifically, Parliament, in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, placed a duty on Natural England to identify this route and a margin of land adjacent to the route for people to use for rest and recreation. Yes, this is about getting the balancing element right with the specific design of the path, but there is, as far as I am aware, no exemption for Natural England to ignore parts of the coast of our country in that regard.

England has about 2,700 miles of coastline, and 70% of that already has a legally secure right of access, as my hon. Friend pointed out. However, there is no doubt that in places the continuity of the access is patchy, meaning that walkers may find that they are unable to make further progress, sometimes even after just 1 or 2 miles, which has a detrimental effect on encouraging walking at the coast.

On completion, this coastal path will join the 2,500-mile network of national trails, which are long-distance walking routes that are maintained by trail partnerships to a higher standard than ordinary rights of way, to reflect their status and the popularity of walking in our nation's finest countryside. On some of the routes, access for horse riders and cyclists is also provided.

There are benefits to bringing the England Coast Path to fruition. My hon. Friend was right to point out that that is behind schedule; I will address that point further in my speech. In essence, access to the natural environment is known to improve our mental and physical health. Access to the coast brings a more diverse range of people together to enjoy that natural heritage than many other accessible parts of our countryside. Studies have demonstrated that improving coastal access also brings with it economic benefits for coastal communities.

Gordon Henderson: Will the Minister accept that the landowners have the right to be protected from the mental stress that has been caused to them in seeing their hard-earned income being stolen from them by what they see as state intervention?

Dr Coffey: Because this is the first time that I have heard the specifics of the issues relating to land in my hon. Friend's constituency, I do not feel qualified to provide an individual comment on a particular issue.

Gordon Henderson: But the principle?

Dr Coffey: But the principle is clear, and Parliament legislated for this coastal path to come into force and Natural England is under a duty to bring that forward. As I have said, the guidance is clear: engaging with stakeholders and landowners is a cornerstone of that approach. Nevertheless, Natural England has a duty under the law to take forward the coastal path.

Consultation and dialogue are supposed to form the cornerstone of the approach. I am conscious that landowners in my hon. Friend's constituency feel ignored. The process that Natural England must follow when identifying proposed alignments for the path is described in detail in the coastal access scheme, which is the approved statutory methodology for delivering the path.

Understanding the strategic issues present on an individual stretch and working towards solutions to any concerns should be achieved through extensive dialogue with the landowners and occupiers, as well as the local authorities and other local interests. Natural England will also maintain frequent contact with the national stakeholder organisations as it develops its thinking on suitable alignments for each stretch of the path.

I am keenly aware that we have to continue to do as much as we can to ensure that there is meaningful engagement with landowners on the more complex stretches of the path, which are currently in development. Therefore, I expect Natural England to work carefully to identify all the legal interests on any stretch, and ensure that its emerging proposals are communicated to those interested parties early and in an easily understandable way. I also expect Natural England to ensure that adequate time is given to negotiating alignments on those stretches that include particularly complex features.

The 2009 Act requires a fair balance between the public interest in having new access rights over land and the interests of those whose land might be affected by that proposed new access. In preparing its proposals, Natural England should consider all relevant factors along a section of a stretch, and gauge the need for intervention in relation to any particular concerns raised by landowners and occupiers. Where intervention is considered necessary, the principle of the least restrictive option will be applied to the scope of the intervention.

Once Natural England has published its proposals for a stretch in a coastal access report, there will be an eight-week period for owners, occupiers and others to object and make representations about Natural England's proposals. Any such objections will be independently considered by an inspector from the Planning Inspectorate, who will then make a report, which is presented to the Secretary of State, with recommendations on whether Natural England's proposals have struck a fair balance.

The final decision on the approval of Natural England's proposals will be taken by the Secretary of State, who must have regard to the recommendations in the inspector's report. With that in mind, my hon. Friend will understand why I cannot comment specifically on the local issues that he has raised, given that it is subject to that quasi-judicial process.

In my constituency, I share the challenge of coastal erosion faced by my hon. Friend. We have met before to discuss the particular challenges that he faces. Provisions in the 2009 Act mean that the route can change in response to those challenges—a process known as roll back. When applying roll back to a stretch, Natural England will consult with landowners to ensure a fair balance.

My hon. Friend mentioned a particular part of the northern coast of the Isle of Sheppey. In my constituency there is a similar area with estuaries. I am conscious of the impact of walkers not following the path and getting too close to the cliff, which entails risks, as he highlighted regarding his own constituency, as well as the impact that walkers can have on flood defences and walls, which may become the paths. Therefore, I have taken up this matter as a constituency MP as well as an Environment Minister, to ensure that Natural England considers these matters carefully when looking at both estuaries and areas subject to coastal erosion.

If my hon. Friend believes that Natural England is not considering those issues proactively in the designation of the path, I would be interested to see the details regarding that, to which I would expect Lord Gardiner to respond.

Gordon Henderson: As a constituency MP, I have raised the issue with the Minister. I have to say, her response was very disappointing. At that time I was raising the issue of cliff erosion. This path will go on the edge of the cliff. As I pointed out in my speech, the erosion could be resolved by shoring up the cliffs, but Natural England's position, supported by the Minister, was that it wants to see the cliffs erode into the sea.

Each year the path will have to be moved further back due to erosion, and eventually it will run through the gardens of some of my constituents. That is lunacy. Is it not better to use the alternative path? The options have been provided to Natural England, but it is ignoring them.

Dr Coffey: I do not know the detail of the alternative path. I do not know how close it is to the coast. Again, I will not comment on specific schemes, because ultimately I am not the decision maker when it comes to that. I will share my hon. Friend's comments with Lord Gardiner.

One reason for the delay in this process is that a European Court of Justice judgment was handed down in April 2018, known colloquially as "People over wind". It affects the way Natural England manages the impact of its proposals on sites with nature conservation designations, as my hon. Friend mentioned. That has affected the pace of the path's delivery, and Natural England has had to consider it carefully. It intends to continue to work towards opening as much of the path as possible by 2020.

I am sure that Lord Gardiner would be interested to understand more about my hon. Friend's proposals for treating people with holiday accommodation in the same way as the holiday park. I will ensure that that is brought to Lord Gardiner's attention. I would be surprised if Natural England was not taking the erosion into account, because it has done so in my constituency. If there is a lack of consistency in different parts of the country, Natural England should consider that urgently, especially regarding the proposals in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Sir Christopher Chope: Does the Minister accept that there is a lack of consistency in the approach to estuaries? Will she explain why the Government have objected to my Coastal Path (Definition) Bill, which would have

required this path to go along the coast, rather than into estuary areas? It would be a straightforward change of policy imposed upon Natural England, because it is not prepared to apply common sense itself.

Dr Coffey: I understand that my hon. Friend is keen to avoid the coastal path deviating from the line of the coast, whether through an estuary or not. It is appropriate to consider that again. Like most MPs, I think of an example from my constituency, where there is a huge detour along the path through an estuary, but in essence it is still a path; otherwise, one would need a boat to cross the estuary in order to continue the walking experience.

It is appropriate for Natural England to consider estuaries but, as with similar issues, they need to be considered on a local basis. It may be appropriate to consider other ways of getting the walker from one side of the coast to the other, depending on the nature of the estuary involved. However, it will vary by area. That is why I do not believe we can take a general, principled approach. Sometimes a detailed design is there to account for the local conditions, which will not be the same on the Isle of Sheppey or in Christchurch as they are in Suffolk Coastal or other parts of the country. Ruling out certain areas is not the right way to proceed on a national basis.

The Government are committed to ensuring that the England coast path happens, but I am conscious of the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey has raised. I have tried to use my constituency experience to inform Natural England, as it progresses the issues of the coastal path, particularly when it comes to erosion and estuaries. I will continue to do that.

I will encourage Lord Gardiner to look carefully at these issues. I expect that it will still not be possible for any letter that my hon. Friend receives to give detailed responses on the courses of action, given that Ministers have to wait for the Planning Inspectorate report, so that the Secretary of State can make a decision on that particular stretch of the coastal path.

I appreciate that some of my comments will not satisfy my hon. Friends. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey was right to bring this matter to the House's attention. It will receive further detailed consideration.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Facial Recognition and the Biometrics Strategy

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered facial recognition and the biometrics strategy.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. First, I must declare my interests, which are not directly in the subject but in the privacy and data protection space in which I practise as a lawyer, as set out in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I chair various technology all-party parliamentary groups and Labour Digital. I am also a member of the Science and Technology Committee, which has an ongoing inquiry into the subject. We have taken evidence from Professor Paul Wiles, the Biometrics Commissioner, and Baroness Williams of Trafford, the Minister in the other place. Some hon. Members have sent their apologies, which I entirely understand, because we are competing with the climate change debate in the main Chamber.

Why did the subject first come to my attention? As a consumer, I have become increasingly used to using facial recognition technology, whether I have proactively agreed to it or not. I often forget my passwords these days, because I use my face to pay for things and open my iPad and phone, although as I was saying to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), that can prove tricky when I am trying to pay for things at a distance. For many of us, facial recognition technology provides consumer services on Facebook and Google by auto-tagging friends and family members and allowing us to search our images. There is an entire debate to be had about consent, transparency and privacy in the use of such technologies in the private sector, but my focus today is on the role of the state, the police and the security services in the use of facial recognition technology.

Facial recognition technology is beginning to be used more widely. It is well known to those who take an interest in it that the South Wales police has used it at sporting events; that the Metropolitan police has trialled auto-facial recognition technology on many occasions, including at events such as the Notting Hill carnival and Remembrance Sunday, and at transport hubs such as Stratford; and that Leicestershire police has used it at the Download music festival. I am concerned that it is also being used at public protests, although perhaps I understand why; I will come on to that later in relation to our freedom of association.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate on a key subject. He has spoken light-heartedly about the competition with the climate change debate. Does he agree that in some ways, as with climate change, although only a small number of issues are currently associated with this topic, the range of impacts that facial recognition technology will have on our society and economy, on the way we work and do business, and on our trust relationships will be huge and will grow over time?

Darren Jones: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. She and I often end up in these types of debates in this place. One thing that they have in common is that the technology is changing and the services are becoming more mature at such a pace that the regulation and concerns are often slower. As legislators, we need to understand the technology as well as we can and make sure that the appropriate protections are in place.

In other spaces, we talk about the fact that I have a date of birth, I am male, I have two daughters and I am a vegan, which means that companies profile me and suggest that I might like to buy Quorn sausages that children like. There is a public debate about that, of course, but facial recognition technology is a particularly sensitive area of personal data. Such technology can be used without individuals really knowing it is happening, as I will come on to shortly, which is a big issue. It is not just police forces that are interested in the technology; some councils are using it to enforce certain rules, as is the private sector, as I say.

Facial recognition technology uses two methods: live auto-facial recognition, which is referred to as AFR Locate, and non-live auto-facial recognition, which is referred to as AFR Identify. What does Locate do? When such technologies are being trialled—although some police forces have been trialling such technologies for many years, so the definition of trial is important—cameras will build a biometric map of the face and facial features of members of the public who are walking down the high street, through a shopping centre or at a sporting or music event. That builds a numerical code that identifies them as individuals, which is matched against a database of images to identify them using the technology. That spurs an action by the police force or others, should they feel that that individual is high risk or has broken the law and some enforcement needs to be taken against them.

As I have alluded to, unlike fingerprints, which people have to proactively give, the technology is so pervasive that many people will walk past the cameras not really knowing that they are taking part in the process and, therefore, not consenting to it. As I will come on to shortly, the rules in place for the use of facial recognition technology are non-existent.

On non-live AFR, the so-called Identify scheme, I will focus on the databases that are being used. After we have built the facial image—the map or code of a person's face—we match it against a database of images. What is that database and where do those images come from? The police have watch lists of people they are concerned about. Obviously, we want terror suspects to be on a watch list so that the police can do their job properly. There has been a question about scraping social media for images that police forces can match against. Can the Minister confirm that today? If we are doing that in an untargeted fashion for those about whom there are legitimate concerns, we ought not to be. There are also custody images on databases such as the police national database, about which there are long-running concerns, as we have heard on my Select Committee. When the police take someone's picture and put it on to the PND, it stays there. It does not matter whether they are convicted and go on to a list of people with convictions—perhaps we would understand if that were the case—or they are found innocent or no action is taken against them; their images are kept on the database anyway.

We have known for many years that the way the police have been processing the facial images of innocent citizens is unlawful. In the High Court in 2012, in the case of *RMC and FJ v. Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis*, the High Court was clear that it was being managed unlawfully. The Home Office responded, albeit some years later—I am not entirely sure why it took so long to respond to such an important issue—setting out a six-year review period in which the police would have to review the images on the database to decide whether they should weed and take out the images of innocent citizens. It also said that any of us could proactively ask the police force to remove our images because we claim our innocence.

There are several problems with that. Unsurprisingly, the number of requests to remove facial images from the database has been low, because people do not know about it. The fact that people have to proactively prove their innocence to not be on a police database is also fundamentally an issue. It is well known, however: the minutes from the September meeting of the Law Enforcement Facial Images and New Biometrics Oversight and Advisory Board say that

“most forces were struggling to comply”

with the Government’s response to the High Court’s ruling of unlawfulness. In answer to my questions in the Select Committee hearing, the Minister in the other place and her officials confirmed that no additional resource had been given to police forces to respond to or promote the fact that people can request the removal of their images from the database, or to undertake the review in which they are supposed to weed out and delete the images that they are not keeping on the database.

Evidently, the system is not fit for purpose. In my view, we continue to act in a way that the High Court said was unlawful, and I know that the Information Commissioner has also expressed concern. It will be useful if the Minister sets out how the Government will act to improve the situation, not only in terms of resourcing and support for police forces across the country but in terms of honouring the Government’s commitment to build new databases, so that the process can be automatic. Technology is pretty advanced now in some of these areas of facial recognition. If Facebook is able to identify me, tag me and take an action, and if Google is able to identify me and allow me to search for myself online, surely the Government ought to be able to auto-scan images, identify people who are not criminals and automatically delete the images of them. That ought to be deliverable. Indeed, it was our understanding that such a system was being delivered, but only a few weeks ago, when I asked Baroness Williams, the Minister in the House of Lords with responsibility for this issue, when we could expect the new computer system to be delivered, there was stony silence from the Minister and her officials. They were not clear when it was going to be delivered, why it had been indefinitely delayed and whether the delay was due to financing, contractual issues or technology issues. There was no clarity about how the existing system would be fixed.

We found in 2012 that the system was unlawful in relation to civil liberties. That in 2019 going into 2020, we do not know what we are doing to fix it or how it will be fixed, it is wholly unsatisfactory. Will the Minister give us a clearer update today about when the automatic deletion service will be available to police forces?

Chi Onwurah: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way to me again. He has made some very important points about the way in which this technology is already being used by Facebook and others, but is it not the case that, however advanced the technology is, it has also been found that it can be biased because of the training data that has been used, which means that particularly those from minorities or specific groups are not recognised adequately? Does he agree that it is all the more important that there is investment as well as transparency in the police database, so that we can ensure that groups who are already marginalised in many ways, particularly with regard to police services, are not once again being discriminated against?

Darren Jones: Unsurprisingly, I agree entirely. This is part of a much broader conversation about designing technology with ethics at the very start, not only in facial recognition but in algorithmic decision making and a host of different areas where we have seen that human biases have been hardwired into automated decision processes that are delivered through technological solutions.

The Government have a really important role to play here, not just in setting the regulatory framework and building on, and really giving strength and resource to, the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation to set the national and international tone, but through their procurement of services. They must say, “We have got to get this technology right. We are going to buy these systems, but we really must see this ethics by design right from the very beginning, dealing with biases in a way that allows us to avoid biased solutions.” That would stimulate the market to ensure that it delivered on that basis.

On the legal basis for biometrics, older forms of biometrics such as DNA and fingerprints have a legal framework around them; they have guidance and rules about how they can be used, stored and processed. There is no specific law relating to facial recognition and no specific policy from the Home Office on it. The police forces that are trialling these systems say that they are using existing legislation to give them the legal basis on which to perform those trials, but the fact of the matter is that we only need to look at the dates of that legislation to see that those laws were put in place way before the technology came into existence or before it reached the maturity that we are seeing today.

There was some debate during the passage of the Data Protection Act 2018, when I, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley and others served on the Committee scrutinising that Bill, but there was no specific discussion during that process or any specific regulation arising from it about facial recognition technology. If police are relying on the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984—perhaps there is an irony in the date of that legislation—the basis and the understanding of the technology did not exist at that time, so it is not in that legislation. Even the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 is too old. The definition of biometrics in that legislation cannot encapsulate a proper understanding of the use, sensitivity and application of automatic facial recognition.

I am not alone in saying this—indeed, it seems to be the view of everybody but the Government. The Information Commissioner has opened investigations;

[Darren Jones]

the independent biometrics and forensics ethics group for facial recognition, which advises the Home Office, agrees with me; the London Policing Ethics Panel agrees with me; the independent Biometrics Commissioner agrees with me; and, perhaps unsurprisingly, civil liberties groups such as Liberty and Big Brother Watch not only agree with me but are involved in legal action against various police forces to challenge the legal basis on which these biometrics trials are being conducted. When he responds, will the Minister say that the Government now agree with everybody else, or that they continue to disagree with everybody else and think that this situation is okay?

I will now address the second part of this debate, which is the biometrics strategy. I focused on facial recognition because it is a particularly timely and sensitive component of a broader biometrics strategy. All of us who use technology in our daily lives know that biometric markers and data can be used to identify our location, identity and communications. That means that the Government and, indeed, the private sector can access data and learn things about us, and that area of technology is growing. People are rightly concerned about ensuring that the right checks and balances are in place. It is one thing for an individual to agree to facial recognition technology in order to unlock their tablet or phone, having read, I hope, about what happens to their data. It is another thing, however, for them not to be given the opportunity to give their consent, or not to receive a service and therefore not know about it, when the state is using the same types of technology.

The biometrics strategy needs to get into the detail. It needs to set out not only what is happening now but what is envisaged will happen in the future and what the Government plan to do about it, in order to protect civil liberties and inform citizens about how the data is being used. Clearly, they would not be informed individually—there is no point in telling a terrorist planning an incident that there will be a camera—but the right balance can be achieved.

Again, I do not understand why the Government are so slow in responding to these fundamental issues. It is so long since the 2012 High Court ruling on the retention of custody images, and we had to wait five years for the biometrics strategy. Imagine how much the biometrics sector in this country changed during those five years. Perhaps the Government were trying to keep up with the pace of change in the technology space, but the strategy was long delayed and long awaited.

Given my tone, Sir Roger, you will not be surprised to hear that everyone was very disappointed with the biometrics strategy, because it merely gave a kind of literature review of current uses of biometric data. There was a little bit about the plans for a new platform, which the Home Office is building, regarding how different people access biometric data. It said nothing at all, however, about the future use, collection and storage of biometric data, or about data protection. It said nothing about the Government's own use and collection of data; the need for enforceable guidelines to enable devolved decision making by, for instance, police forces across the country; how different Departments might be able to use different forms of biometric data across Government, which, evidently, is very easy to deliver with today's technology; or how the data would be stored securely.

People are concerned about cyber-security and breaches of their personal data, so what steps will the Government take in this developing space? Where will the data be stored? In advance of this debate, I received representations arguing that we should not send it to companies overseas and that it should be stored in the UK. One would think that the biometrics strategy addressed those issues, but it does not. Is the beta version of the biometrics strategy due soon, or does the Minister think that the Government have provided a sufficient response on this important field?

I do not want to keep saying that everybody agrees with me, because that would be a little uncomfortable, but there is no denying that the Biometrics Commissioner, the Surveillance Camera Commissioner and the Information Commissioner's Office have all said exactly the same thing—this biometrics strategy is not fit for purpose and needs to be done again. The Government need to be clearer and more transparent about their endeavours and make that clear to the public, not least because these areas of technology move at pace. I understand entirely why police forces, civil servants or others want to be able to take the opportunities to deliver their services more efficiently, more effectively and with more impact—we support that—but the right checks and balances must be in place.

I will touch on our fundamental rights and freedoms, because that debate does not get enough air time in the technology space. Our freedoms are increasingly being challenged, whether the issue is cyber-defence or how we regulate the online world, and also in this space. Fundamental freedoms—freedoms that we hold, or purport to hold, dear—are encapsulated in the European convention on human rights and the Human Rights Act 1998. They go to the very nature of this technology, such as the right to a private life that can only be interfered with for a legitimate aim and only if that interference is done proportionately. Scanning a load of people going about their day-to-day life does not feel proportionate to me, and there is no accountability to make sure that it is being done legitimately. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) said, if the selections that those technologies pick up are resulting in false matches or are discriminating, primarily against women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds, that also ought to be considered.

Those freedoms also include freedom of expression and of association. In public protests in recent weeks, people who dearly hold certain views have gone too far by moving away from their right to freedom of expression and to peaceful demonstration, towards criminal activity, intimidation or hostility. We should set the tone and say that that is not welcome or acceptable in our country, because having a right also means having a responsibility to use it wisely. Of course we want to protect those who want to demonstrate through peaceful public protests.

I am sure the public will say—this lies at the heart of my contribution—“Fine. Use some of this technology to keep us safe, but what is the right balance? Do we understand how it is being used? What are the accountability measures? What rules and guidance are being put down by the Government, on behalf of Parliament and the people, to make sure this is being done in a way that is not a slippery slope towards something we ought not to be doing?” We need a wider debate in public life about how we protect freedoms in this new digital age, and this issue is an example of that.

The House of Commons digital engagement programme is often a very good process for Westminster Hall debates, as it allows the public to be part of the conversation and to submit their comments. It would be remiss of me to not point out that some members of the public highlighted a certain irony in the fact that this debate was being promoted on Facebook, so I have shared their concerns, but that is still a medium through which the public like to engage in debate. Hundreds of thousands of people engaged across different platforms—way more than I was expecting—which shows the level of public interest in the use of these technologies.

As might be expected, there were two sides to the argument. The minority view on the platforms was, “I have nothing to hide. Please go out and keep us safe. Crack on, use it.” The other side said, “Actually, this is a slippery slope. I don’t know how this is used, and I’m worried about it. Why can’t I go about my day-to-day life without the police or the state surveilling me?”

I will share some of the comments. On the first side of the argument was Roy. I do not know where he is from. I wish his location had been given, because I could have said, “Roy from Sheffield”. He said:

“No objection. I’ve nothing to hide and don’t find it scary or objectionable for ‘the state’ to be able to track my movements. They already can if I’m in a car”—

I did not know that—

“and that doesn’t seem to be a problem. The added security of the police being able to track potential terrorists far outweighs any quibbles about reduced privacy.”

That is a perfectly legitimate view.

Karyn said:

“Having seen the numbers of crimes solved and even prevented by CCTV I have no objections. Today we have to be realistic, with phones listening in on conversations for marketing and plotting where we are, this is small price to pay for public safety and if you have done nothing there is nothing to fear.”

That is an interesting contribution on what is happening in the private and state sectors. We need to be much more advanced in both spheres.

That was a minority view, however. I do not have the percentage, but the bulk of comments came from people who are concerned. Chris Wylie, who many of us will have read about—he was the Cambridge Analytica whistleblower, so he clearly knows something about these issues—was firm:

“No. Normalising this kind of indiscriminate surveillance undermines the presumption of innocence.”

We should pause on that, because it is really important. Why should we be tracked and surveilled by the police on the assumption that we might be guilty of something? That does not feel right, just as it does not feel right that people have to prove their innocence to get their images taken off a police database. Chris went on to say:

“It should never be up to us as citizens to prove we are not criminals. Police should only interfere with our lives where they have a reasonable suspicion and just cause to do so.”

I share Chris’s views.

Andrea said that this was a slippery slope:

“The idea that some people have about privacy as an exclusive issue for the bad guys is completely wrong. Not only privacy prevents my acts from limiting my rights but also avoids an unjustified use of power by the Gov’t.”

Again, we should pause there. It is our job in Parliament to hold the Government to account, yet we have no strategy, legislation or rules to enable us to do so. That is a fundamental problem. She goes on to say:

“Such a huge involvement of disturbing tech could lead to a 1984-like slippery slope, one which none of us wants to fall in, regardless of their legal background.”

Jenny said:

“I believe that this would suppress people’s ability to engage in public demonstrations and activities that challenge the government, which is hugely dangerous to democracy.”

A lot of people said that if they thought the state was scanning their data and putting it on a database, they might not associate with or take part in public demonstrations. If that were to happen, it would represent a significant diminution of our democratic processes.

Lastly, Bob said:

“It makes it easier for a future, less liberal government to monitor the activity of dissident citizens. During the miners strike in the 1980s miners were stopped from travelling just on the suspicion they would attend rallies based on their home locations and where they were heading. How would this technology be applied in the future for, say, an extinction rebellion march?”

Regardless of our political disagreements across the House, none of us thinks that the state is overreaching in a way that many other countries would. However, given the lack of legislation, guidance and regulation to enable us to hold the Government to account, and with independent commissioners and regulators saying that this is not good enough, I agree with Bob. There is a huge risk in not putting in place a framework with the appropriate checks, balances and protections, not just because that is the right and important thing to do today, but because we need that framework for future Governments.

Chi Onwurah: My hon. Friend is being very generous with his time, and I congratulate him again on having raised this important topic. Does he agree, as I think he is suggesting, that the level of interest in this debate—demonstrated by the quotes he has read out—shows that technology such as facial recognition, as well as algorithms and data, needs to be publicly debated? We can make a choice as to how it is used, so that citizens are empowered. Technology should not be something that is done to people; they should have rights and controls as to how it is enacted.

Darren Jones: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The debate is a broader one about technology. How do we engage the public with these issues? I am an evangelist for technological reform, although I will not go on about that topic for too long, because it is not linked to the title of the debate. In my view, the idea that we can increase our economy’s productivity, increase wages, transform people’s working lives and reform and make more efficient our public services without using technology does not make sense. As my hon. Friend says, however, we have to do that in the right way and bring the public with us.

On a cross-party basis, we share the belief that we need to take crime seriously, and to address the increasingly sophisticated methods that criminals and terrorists may employ when trying to commit crimes or terror in our country. However, we must get the balance right, and there is a lacuna of regulation in this space. There are no legal bases, there is no oversight, and as a consequence there are no protections. That is why the Government should act now.

2.59 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) on presenting the case very well. We spoke before the

[Jim Shannon]

debate started and found we were on the same page. I am pleased to see the Minister in his place. Our comments are made with a genuine interest in arguing the case and hopefully to help the Government see the correct way of moving forward. I also want to thank the hon. Member for Bristol North West for the hard work that he and other members of the Science and Technology Committee undertake. It is painstaking work—very technical and detailed. If I was wearing a hat I would take my hat off to them for what they have done.

The issue of facial recognition is a complex matter. Of course, anyone who watches American crime dramas—I am one of those people who watches CSI and all the others from about 11 o'clock until 12 midnight before going to bed—will think it is a useful tool for identifying terrorist suspects, which can be right, but Hollywood life and real life are two very different things, and black and white is difficult to have when we consider people's right to privacy and how far we can have a security site without a Big Brother state. I am always very conscious of that Big Brother state.

I thank the Library for the background information. I read in the paper this morning of a suspect in China who was wanted in relation to the murder of his mother. He had been missing for two to three years, but facial recognition was installed at the airport and they caught him. That is one of the good things that can happen—those who thought they would get away with a crime are made accountable.

I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party group for international freedom of religion or belief. As hon. Members know, I am very interested in such issues. China has apprehended a fugitive and is making him accountable for his crime, but at the same time China uses facial recognition to fence in villagers in the far west of China. That is a very clear illustration of how that technology can be used to the detriment of human rights and religious minorities in a country that, let us be honest, is guilty of many human rights abuses. I am very concerned at how China can use facial recognition to its advantage to suppress human rights and to suppress people's right to practise their religion in the way that they would like.

On accuracy and bias, some of the information illustrates clearly that errors for low-resolution surveillance footage can exceed 10%, so there is still a question mark over the validity of the process. If as many as 10% of people are found not to be the right person, I question the validity of the process.

We cannot deny or ignore the concerns of Elizabeth Denham, the Information Commissioner. She raised concerns about facial recognition technology and law enforcement in her blog:

“There is a lack of transparency about its use and there is a real risk that the public safety benefits derived from the use of FRT will not be gained if public trust is not addressed.”

I refer to the questions that the hon. Member for Bristol North West asked, and I suspect others will, in relation to the need for public trust that the system will not be abused or used detrimentally against people. People feel strongly about this matter. How does the use of FRT comply with the law? How effective and accurate is the technology? How do forces guard against bias? What protections are there for people that are of no interest

to the police? How do the systems guard against false positives and their negative impact? That is clearly an issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (Paul Girvan) tabled a parliamentary question on 24 May 2018—

“To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to ensure that the facial recognition software that law enforcement bodies use is accurate.”

It clearly tells us that there are concerns across all four regions of the United Kingdom—England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and, obviously, Wales.

The background is clear. The courts ruled in the 2012 RMC case that it was unlawful to hold custody images without making a distinction between those who were convicted and those who were not. In response, the Home Office has introduced a system to allow unconvicted individuals to request the deletion of their images. We understand the system and that is all great, but it is an opt-out scenario; the individual must ask for the deletion of their image. I am not sure how many people would think of doing so; I suspect it would be the last thing on many people's mind, with their busy lives. I know I probably would not think of doing so. I would not know that my images have been stored away for a rainy day to be pulled out, even though I am completely innocent. The presumption, “You may well do something someday” is not enough of a reason to hold on to these things. An arrest must be made for fingerprints to be taken and stored, and yet no arrest is needed for images of a person in the background of an event to be taken and perpetually stored by successive Governments—not just this Government, but every Government that comes after, if the legislation is in place.

The excuse of cost is a weighty consideration, and so is the protection of personal identification. I say this honestly: because of my age I have lived through the height of the troubles, when cars were searched, ID was a must and the battle against terrorists was daily. I lived with that, not just as an elected representative, but as a former member of the part-time army—the Territorials and the Ulster Defence Regiment. We seem to be heading that way again. I could understand it if the Government were to make it known that they believed that retaining this process would save lives—I would understand the thinking behind what they are trying to do—but that if necessary, there would be a mechanism to have the information removed. I could understand it if there was that level of transparency. However, to say that the reason is that there is not enough money to do an IT upgrade just does not wash with me, and I suspect it does not wash with others taking part in today's debate.

I agree with the Science and Technology Committee report, “Biometrics strategy and forensic services”, published on 25 May 2018, which states:

“The Government must ensure that its planned IT upgrade...is delivered without delay...to introduce a fully automatic image deletion system for those who are not convicted. If there is any delay in introducing such a system, the Government should move to introduce a manually-processed comprehensive deletion system as a matter of urgency.”

That would be my request to the Minister. We have great respect for the Minister; that goes without saying, but we are very concerned about what is proposed, or could possibly happen, and we have to record those concerns.

I further agree that facial image recognition provides a powerful evolving technology, which could significantly help policing. I am all for that, but everyone must be clear about what is acceptable, what is not acceptable, what is held and for what purpose. That underlines my point that if it is for the sake of security, then say it and we can debate the merits of the case. If that is the purpose, let us debate it honestly, truthfully and in an informed way, to ensure that all concerns are taken on board.

I am all for targeting those on a watchlist or those affiliated with those on a watchlist, as in previous examples of terrorism on the mainland and back home as well, but let us be clear that it is happening, and let us be clear that those who take umbrage against it have the information that they need to ensure that their images are not stored even though they have not committed a crime and are not a person of interest. I am conscious of the need to protect human rights, protect privacy and protect those who are innocent, although I understand the reasons for the process.

In conclusion, I look to you, Minister, as I always do. We must have a chance to debate these issues and make an informed decision about the strategy and the justification for it. I look forward to the report's coming before us, but I must record my concerns.

3.8 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to participate in this debate under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) on securing it. My speech will be neither as lengthy nor as expert as his. My interest in this matter arises from the issue in my constituency last year when a report in the *Manchester Evening News* revealed that the intu Trafford Centre had been working with Greater Manchester police to use live facial recognition technology. I had not been made aware of that previously, and as far as I know, none of my constituents, or the other members of the public, knew of it either. Following the report in the *Manchester Evening News*, the intu Trafford Centre and Greater Manchester police suspended the pilot.

Like my colleagues, I suspect that many of our constituents would support the use of facial recognition and other technologies to prevent crime, keep us safe, catch criminals or trace missing and vulnerable people, which is something that I understand the British Transport police are considering. However, as we have heard, the use of the technology raises a number of issues, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West drew attention to. I have discussed some of them directly with local police in Greater Manchester, and at national level. I am grateful to the police officers who have spoken to me for their openness in those discussions. It is clear that the police themselves feel that there is a pressing need for the national framework that would make effective use of the technology possible. For now, they do not feel they have that.

From my perspective, and in the light of the experience in my constituency, I think that the framework will need to address decision making, who takes a decision to use such technology in a particular context, oversight and, importantly, accountability. How can such use be scrutinised and how can the police and other state authorities be made accountable to the public? I say that because what is happening could constitute a significant intrusion

into the privacy of individual citizens whose record contains nothing criminal or threatening, and who are merely going about their daily business. It is important that the use of the technology in relation to the majority of citizens should be both appropriate and proportionate.

Issues that concern me include the size and content of any watchlist that might be constructed—particularly vis-à-vis the effectiveness of the size of the watchlist. In the *Manchester Evening News* report it was revealed that 30 million people per annum visit the intu Trafford Centre. It is an iconic destination in my constituency. However, over the sixth-month period during which the technology was being deployed, only one positive identification was made. That makes me question whether it was right to draw so many members of the public into the ambit of the experiment, for what seems to be a low level of effectiveness.

We also have to consider where the technology is being used. The police themselves said to me that some events or venues will be more suitable, and some less. Also we need to consider why it is used—at whose initiative or request such technology is deployed. In the Trafford Centre the intu management themselves had suggested it to Greater Manchester police. Is it right that police priorities should be set by the wishes of private enterprises? If that can be right, and in some circumstances there can be a partnership approach between the police and private entities, if the private entity draws a disproportionate benefit from the activity is it not right that it should pay for it? Football clubs pay for additional police protection at football matches.

We have heard concerns about potential ethnic bias in the databases and technologies that are currently available. I am told that what is on the market, as it were, at the moment is better at matching north European and south-east Asian males than other ethnic categories. That relates to the countries in which the algorithms that underpin the technology were developed, but from the public's point of view we can say that if there is any ethnic disparity, or perception of it, in the way the technologies apply, it is bound to sow public mistrust. It cannot be right that we make use of technologies that do not treat all communities equally.

I have mentioned my concerns about where decisions are taken in police and other public agencies. It has been made clear by regulators that that should be at the most senior strategic level, and in my view it should be in the context of an absolutely transparent national framework. I also think we must think about mechanisms for accountability both to individual members of the public and the community that a police force serves overall.

Finally, while we are not going to halt the speed of spread of technology, and I think that we can expect more resources to go into such technology in the future, there is a question about how we prioritise resources vis-à-vis effectiveness and public buy-in. The static facial recognition technologies that have been used have excited much less contention and public concern. People can understand that the police hold a database of those with previous convictions and criminal records, and that they will check, where they have got someone whom they are not able to identify, against those records. I understand that that database is in need of new investment, which it is not currently scheduled to receive. I ask the Minister whether that might be the first

[Kate Green]

priority for investment in facial recognition technologies; can the investment that is needed in the police national database be brought forward?

I am glad we have had the opportunity to debate the matter in Parliament today. I would be misleading the House if I suggested that it was causing widespread concern among my constituents, but in fact it should be. How the technology is being used, and the context in which we are made aware of its use, should concern us all. That is not to say it should not be used, but in the absence of a clear legislative or regulatory framework for its use, I do not think it would be right for the House not to ask those questions today.

3.16 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I thank the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) for obtaining the debate. I can testify to his expertise on such issues, having served with him on the Committee that scrutinised the Data Protection Act 2018. I claim no such expertise, so I am grateful to him for succinctly explaining the operation of facial recognition technology in particular. It has been a useful debate. It is a shame that we have clashed with the climate change debate because, as the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) said, even if the issue does not cause concern among many of our constituents at the moment, it ought to. There are some important questions that we have to debate and address.

The use of biometrics by police and law enforcement is of course not remotely new, but it is clearly evolving exponentially. It can and does make a huge contribution to detecting and preventing crime; it also has an important role in eliminating innocent individuals from inquiries, and it can help to trace missing and vulnerable people, but as all the hon. Members who spoke highlighted, it poses a range of serious ethical and human rights questions. It has the potential to be hugely invasive of privacy, largely because of the possibility that the systems will operate while requests for the consent of those caught up in them will be limited; there could be impacts on freedom of assembly and association, and the operation of the systems raises significant questions about data protection. In many forms of fast-developing technology, it is a challenge for the legal system to keep pace with changing use. Understandably, there has been particular concern about automatic facial recognition technology.

All the different legal systems in the United Kingdom and beyond face those challenges, and of course Scotland is no different. We kick-started our debate on the issues in 2016 with the report of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland. It concluded that Police Scotland had been making

"proportionate and necessary use of Facial Search within PND" and that it had been operating in accordance with its own policy, Home Office policy, and College of Policing guidance. However, it identified similar concerns to those that have been raised in the debate, and the need for improved legislation, a statutory code of conduct to govern Police Scotland's use of biometric data, and better independent oversight.

The main legislation relating to biometrics in Scotland dates from 2010. The hon. Member for Bristol North West mentioned 2012 legislation being out of date already, and I absolutely accept that the 2010 measure is now too old. It predates the time when Police Scotland started to upload photos on to the police national database, in 2011. I understand that the facial search functionality of PND became generally available in March 2014. We do indeed have some catching up to do to make sure that issues to do with images and facial recognition technology are properly covered in legislation.

Following the inspectorate report, the Independent Advisory Group on the Use of Biometric Data in Scotland was established to produce more detailed proposals for plugging some of the gaps and setting up a more ethical and human rights-based framework. I thoroughly recommend the group's report—it is a fascinating read. It draws on a range of expertise, not just from members of the group, but from the police, human rights and data protection groups, and experts such as the Biometrics Commissioner, the Forensic Science Regulator and the Biometrics and Forensics Ethics Group, which advises the Home Office. The report found that

"those involved in this field in Police Scotland...appear to work to very high standards of international repute, with a good grasp of the ethical and human rights implications of their work".

It also made several recommendations about enhancing the legislative framework and oversight. Specifically, it recommended a Scottish biometrics commissioner and an ethics advisory group. It recommended a new legislative framework, accompanied by a code of practice, and made more detailed policy recommendations that I will come to shortly. I am pleased that those recommendations have been accepted by the Scottish Government. A public consultation has been held, and a biometric data Bill will soon be introduced to implement them. That is the right approach, and hopefully it will deliver the comprehensive framework that hon. Members have argued for today.

Let me turn to two of the most controversial aspects of the debate. In Scotland, 2010 legislation allows Police Scotland to retain fingerprints and DNA data from convicted individuals indefinitely. Data from individuals prosecuted for certain sexual and violent offences may be retained for three years, regardless of whether there is a conviction, and the chief constable can apply to the sheriff court for a two-year extension. More generally, data from individuals who have been arrested for an offence must be destroyed if they are not convicted or if they are granted an absolute discharge. Usual practice for photographs also follows that regime, which is slightly different from what happens in England and Wales, particularly with regard to the disposal of photographs of those who have not been charged or convicted.

Is that the perfect approach? I do not think we can answer that conclusively; we must be led by the evidence as it develops. It is perfectly legitimate to question whether a blanket policy of the indefinite retention of biometrics after every conviction is reasonable, because, as the advisory group pointed out, there is no abundance of evidence to suggest what degree of retention has proved the most useful. Biometric data is likely to be more useful in identifying the perpetrators of some crimes compared with others, but the risk of offending and reoffending involves a range of factors, including many individual aspects. In an ideal world, the length of time

we kept biometric data would be decided for each individual case, but that is not a practical approach, so we must consider the evidence gathered and do the best we can.

The use of automated facial recognition systems is hugely problematic, and our general approach must be evidence led. If such technology is to be used, it must be used only where necessary, and it must be done proportionately and on as targeted and limited a basis as possible. There are huge concerns about the impact of such technology on privacy and freedoms such as the freedom of assembly, and there is a danger of bias and discrimination. Studies have shown that such technology can disproportionately misidentify women and black and minority ethnic people, and as a consequence people from those groups are more likely to be wrongly stopped and questioned.

We must by now have sufficient evidence from forces in London and south Wales to show what automated recognition could look like in practice, what it is capable of achieving, and the price to be paid for that achievement. I will not say that I envisage no circumstances where the use of such technology could be justified—for example, it could be used to counter a specific and serious threat or danger—and I am probably somewhere between Roy and Chris in the range of views set out earlier. Nevertheless, I would be reluctant to see such technology rolled out in Scotland before the new regulatory and oversight regime is in force and before issues of bias and discrimination have been addressed. It seems sensible to stop the use of the technology elsewhere until its implications have been fully assessed and debated, sufficient checks are in place, and there is sufficient public support.

I will end with a quote from the advisory group:

“In this context, it is essential that sensitive personal data are collected only for specific, explicit, lawful and legitimate purposes. In seeking to achieve a careful balance between the needs of citizen and state, there is clearly a need for independent oversight, and for the development of a broad framework of consistent ethical and human rights respecting principles against which all biometric use for policing, law enforcement and public protection purposes in Scotland can ultimately be checked”.

The SNP supports an approach that involves a comprehensive legislative framework and a regularly updated code of conduct. We need strong oversight through a commissioner to ensure that the use of biometrics is proportionate, necessary and targeted, and respects human rights, privacy and data protection rules. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol North West on securing this debate. I hope there will be many more to come, with more MPs in attendance, as this important subject requires much more discussion.

3.25 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. This excellent discussion has been informed by expert opinion, particularly from my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones), whom I congratulate on securing this important debate. I think the public would be shocked to hear about the lack of legislative framework and guidance, and the potential for such intrusion into people's lives by the state.

My hon. Friend spoke about the need for us all to understand the technology that could be used, and to ensure that the frameworks we set out are relevant and keep pace with legislation. That must be informed by a

principles-based framework, because legislation will never keep up with the technology used by law enforcement or private operators. Several Members mentioned the police national database and the unlawful processing of custody images by police forces. That is not a good starting point for this debate, given that the Home Office's response to that issue has been poor and the delays in the auto-deletion of images are worrying.

My hon. Friend mentioned the need for ethics by design to ensure that any biases, particularly against people from BME backgrounds, are built out of such technologies from the beginning and are not allowed to be replicated and hardened. He described well the astonishing fact that there is no legal basis for these invasive, pervasive technologies and highlighted clear gaps in the biometric strategy in failing to address those issues. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke powerfully about the consequences of false positives, and raised basic questions about the rights of innocent people. Those questions should be answered. We should not need to hold this debate to speak about the right of innocent people not to have their privacy undermined, and about the police unlawfully holding images of people who have committed no crime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) spoke about her personal experience and the Trafford Centre in her constituency. She made the important point—I have had the same conversation—that the police want and need a transparent, national and consistent framework, because they feel that they have to make things up as they go along. Experiences will differ: South Wales police has demonstrated a completely different attitude from the Met's in rolling out facial recognition, and it cannot be right for people to experience different technologies in completely different ways and with different attitudes, depending on the police force in the area where they live.

Kate Green: My hon. Friend is right to say that the police want a clear, national framework, and it cannot be right that different police forces operate in different ways. Greater Manchester police has stopped using that technology altogether, but there may be circumstances where we would like it to be deployed to keep us safe.

Louise Haigh: That is completely right, and that is why this debate and the framework are so important. We cannot allow the police, with all the best intentions, to attempt to use this technology and then in some cases to mess it up—as they will—and have to roll it back. We want to ensure that the framework is in place so that the police can go ahead with confidence and the public have confidence. We must ensure that biases are designed out and that people accept the intrusion into their privacy and understand that such technology is being used proportionately and out of necessity. At the moment we cannot have confidence in that, which is why this debate is so important.

Darren Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, not least because I spoke at great length today. I did not mention earlier that we took evidence in the Select Committee from the Biometrics Commissioner that trials should be conducted on the basis of rigorous scientific guidelines and processes. The problem is that if we let different police forces do different things in different ways, we do not get clear answers on how and

[Darren Jones]

in what circumstances the technology can best be used. We need guidelines not just for the regulatory purposes, but so that the trials can be done in the right way.

Louise Haigh: That is absolutely right. I do not get a strong impression that individual police forces are learning from each other either. In the case of the Met, the word “trial” has been used for the technology’s use at Notting Hill carnival. It has been trialled for three years in a row. When does a trial become a permanent fixture? I do not think that that can now be called a trial. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that if it is a trial, we should be gathering data, and they should be informing Parliament and the public and should be addressing the concerns around false positives and ethnic biases and whether it is being used proportionately. My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston gave the astonishing figure that demonstrated the mismatch between the numbers of people who were covered by the facial recognition technology when just one individual was identified. That surely cannot be proportionate.

The question of technology within law enforcement gets to the heart of public consent for policing in this day and age, and the issues we have discussed today represent only the tip of the iceberg of potential privacy issues. So much of what defines an investigation today is data-driven. Data-driven policing and data-led investigations are transforming policing. It is already completely unrecognisable from when I was a special constable only 10 years ago. The police have the scope to access more of the intimate details of our personal lives than ever before.

The trialling of technology—including facial recognition and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West mentioned, risk assessment algorithms—has not been adequately considered by Parliament and does not sit easily within the current legal framework, but it is having some phenomenal results that we should not ignore. The identification of images of child sexual abuse rely on hashing technology, which enables law enforcement and the Internet Watch Foundation to scrape hundreds of thousands of images off the internet each year.

This week, we have had the news on what is in essence compulsion for rape victims to hand over their mobile phones for what potentially amounts to an open-ended trawl of data and messages, without which there is little prospect of conviction. That high-profile debate has lifted the lid on the ethical questions that ubiquity of data and technological advances are having on law enforcement. Nascent technologies such as facial recognition are at the sharp end of this debate. They do not just represent challenges around collecting and storing of data; they also provide recommendations to law enforcement agencies to act, to stop and search and, potentially, to detain and arrest people.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West said, we served on the Data Protection Bill Committee, where we discussed these matters briefly. We outlined our concerns about facial recognition, in particular the lack of oversight and regulatory architecture and the lack of operational transparency. I reiterate the call I made to the Home Secretary in May last year that Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary launch a thematic review of the operational use of the technology and report back to the Home Office and to Parliament.

We believe such a report should cover six key areas: first, the process police forces should and do follow to put facial recognition tools in place; secondly, the operational use of the technology at force level, taking into account specific considerations around how data is retained and stored, regulated, monitored and overseen in practice, how it is deleted, and its effectiveness in achieving operational objectives; thirdly, the proportionality of the technology’s use to the problems it is seeking to solve; fourthly, the level and rank required for sign-off; fifthly, the engagement with the public and an explanation of the technology’s use; and sixthly, the use of technology by authorities and operators other than the police.

It is critical as operational technology such as this is rolled out that the public are kept informed, that they understand how and why it is being used and that they have confidence that it is effective. The Minister has the power to commission reports of this type from HMIC and it would be best placed to conduct such a report into the use of police technology of some public concern.

We have discussed concerns about the accuracy of facial recognition tools, particularly in relation to recognising women and people from BME backgrounds—that is quite a swathe of the population! We do not know whether this is because of bias coded into the software by programmers, or because of under-representation of people from BME backgrounds and women in the training datasets. Either way, the technology that the police are currently using in this country has not been tested against such biases. In the debate around consent, it is extremely worrying that potentially inaccurate tools could be used in certain communities and damage the relationship with and the trust in the police still further.

As I said, we had some debates on this issue in the Data Protection Bill Committee, where we attempted to strengthen the legislation on privacy impact assessments. It should be clear, and I do not believe that it is, that police forces should be required to consult the Information Commissioner and conduct a full PIA before using any facial recognition tools.

I am further worried that the responsibility for oversight is far from clear. As we have heard, software has been trialled by the Met, the South Wales police force and other police forces across the country, particularly in policing large events. In September last year, the Minister made it clear in response to a written question that there is no legislation regulating the use of CCTV cameras with facial recognition. The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 introduced the regulation of overt public space surveillance cameras, and as a result the surveillance camera code of practice was issued by the Secretary of State in 2013. However, there is no reference to facial recognition in the Act, even though it provides the statutory basis for public space surveillance cameras. The Surveillance Camera Commissioner has noted that “clarity regarding regulatory responsibility” for such facial recognition software is “an emerging issue”. We need clarity on whether it is the Biometric Commissioner, the Information Commissioner or the Surveillance Camera Commissioner who has ultimate responsibility for this use of technology. It would also be helpful if the Minister made absolutely clear what databases law enforcement agencies are matching faces against, what purposes the technology can and cannot be used for, what images are captured and stored, who can access those images and how long they are stored for.

The Government's new biometric strategy takes a small step forward on oversight, with a board to evaluate the technology and review its findings, but it meets too infrequently—three times since last July, as far as I can tell—to have effective oversight of the operational use of the technology. In any case, it is clearly not designed to provide operational safeguards, and that is where big questions remain about discriminatory use and effectiveness. The lack of operational safeguards and parliamentary scrutiny may lead to ill-judged uses of the technology.

I am hopeful that the Minister can assure us today of the Government's intention to make things a lot clearer in this space, that existing and emerging technologies will be covered by clear, consistent guidance and legislation from the Home Office, that the relevant commissioner will have all the powers they need to regulate these technologies, and that our law enforcement agencies fully understand what they need to do, both before any technology or new method of data collection is rolled out, and afterwards, when an individual's data rights may have been abused. We need clear principles, and I am not convinced that the legislative landscape as it stands provides that.

3.37 pm

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. It was a wrench to come out of the climate change debate in the Chamber, but the debate here has shown that what we are discussing is extremely important. Before I start, I recognise the presence of the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), who has joined us. I will of course take an intervention if he wishes to speak.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) on securing the debate and on his excellent speech, which was rooted in genuine passion, deep expertise and a lawyer's ability to present a case and fillet the evidence. It was really interesting. Of course, the context, which the hon. Gentleman was very good at laying out, is huge. We will talk about the police and the attitude of the security services, but ultimately this is a debate about how we protect our personal freedoms in the digital age, to use the hon. Gentleman's language, and that is an enormous issue. Some hon. Members have already volunteered the opinion that the public are not yet fully engaged with the issue, and I support that from the experience of my constituency, but it is a huge issue.

The other context that we have alluded to and must not lose sight of is the backdrop of the extraordinary acceleration of the pace of change in what technology now enables for good and evil. Therefore, the debate about how far we go in supporting our police system and our security system—those who get up every morning thinking about how they can protect us—in using technology for the power of good is extremely important.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned a fundamental issue that underpins the debate. His primary charge against the Government, which was echoed by others, was that the regulatory framework, the legal framework, the oversight arrangements and the governance framework were not fit for purpose. He also said that a fundamental challenge for any Government of any colour is finding ways to keep pace with what is going on out there and

make sure that the checks and balances and protections and regulations that are put in place are fit for purpose, against a landscape that is changing all the time.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and for indicating that he was willing to give way. He is making some really important points. When the Biometrics Commissioner gave evidence to our Committee, he gave a clear view that many in the police want a clear statutory framework that they can operate within. They do not want to be uncertain as to whether the next step they take will be subject to legal challenge. Surely it is in everyone's interests to have a clear statutory framework and to do that now.

Mr Hurd: I understand that point. Although I technically do not lead on this area in the Home Office, in the context of another meeting with many of the chiefs directly involved, I have heard them talk a bit about it. They have not expressed that view directly to me, but that is not good enough. I will go back to them and get their direct view.

The hon. Member for Bristol North West spoke about his case and the legal framework for that. As that is about to be tested through a legal challenge in May, he will know there is a limit to what I can say. I am very up-front in saying that in reviewing the landscape, it is quite clear to me that some of the oversight and governance arrangements are not clear enough. A considerable amount of work is going on in the Home Office to try and improve that situation. That will become clearer over the summer, and I will talk on that.

The other context, if we come specifically to the work of the police—which is what we are basically talking about—is the use of biometrics and data to identify people, based on their personal characteristics. Those data are used by the private sector and the police and are very much part of our day-to-day life, as Members have said in relation to users of Facebook and Google and companies that basically make money out of their information about us. It is part of our day-to-day experience.

As the shadow Minister knows, biometrics have been an essential tool for the police for many years. If we consider that in one year alone, DNA linked more than 32,000 people to crimes, including 700 relating to murders and 700 to rapes, it sharpens the importance of this agenda for those trying to keep the peace and to protect us. For any Government of any colour who recognise that the security of the public will always be a priority, if not the priority, the question of our responsibility and how far we go to ensure that the police can continue to use biometrics and make use of the most up-to-date technologies will always be a priority.

Members have talked about the attitudes of the public, and I am sure they are right. The data I see, whether it comes from Lincolnshire's police and crime commissioner or the Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime, reinforces what Members have said. If members of the public are asked, "Should the police use these technologies to catch criminals?", the answer tends to be yes, particularly in the context of the most serious crimes. We understand that, but that needs to be offset by a much more open and clear debate on the checks, balances and transparency around the use of these technologies. I absolutely understand that, but the pace of change and the opportunity are genuinely exciting for the police services. What is

[Mr Hurd]

happening with new mobile fingerprint checkers, for example, is transformative in what they allow the police to do, including the pace with which they can work and the time that they can save by harnessing these technologies. Any Government would want to support their police system in making the best use of technology to protect the public and catch criminals, particularly those involved in the most difficult crimes.

Facial recognition is clearly a massively sensitive issue, and I welcome this debate. We have supported the principle of the pilots, and we can debate the degree to which the appropriate guidance and supervision have been in place for that. It is clear to the police and us that there are real opportunities to make use of facial matches. Generations of police officers have used photographs of people to identify suspects for a long time, and CCTV images have been a vital tool in investigation, but what is changing is our ability to match images with increasing confidence and speed. That is the major change in the technology. In a recent example, images taken by a member of the public in a Coventry nightclub where a murder took place were quickly matched on the police national database to a known individual who was arrested. They found the victim's blood on his clothing and he is currently serving life imprisonment. We need to be clear about where the opportunity is in terms of matching suspect images on the national police database to wanted known individuals, ensuring that they cannot evade justice when they cross force boundaries.

It is understandable that the use of live facial recognition technology, which is the heart of the debate, raises extremely legitimate privacy concerns. Speaking not only as a Minister or a Member of Parliament but as a member of the public, I absolutely understand and share those concerns. A fundamental part of our democratic process is that those concerns are expressed here in the House or in the courts. The hon. Member for Bristol North West alluded to that. He wants us to go much further on transparency, accountability, governance and oversight, and I will try to set out the progress we hope to make on that, but the fact is that in many countries, these debates just would not take place. It is a strength of our system that we are sitting here in this debating chamber and the Minister is forced to come here and respond, that the Select Committee is able to do the work it does, and that the Government of the day show the Committee the respect it is due. That is our process, and it is not bad.

Norman Lamb: On the retention of images, the Government and successive Governments have been clear that DNA and fingerprints are not retained where someone is not prosecuted and is, in effect, an innocent person; yet with facial recognition, the facial images are retained. There is a mechanism for someone to apply to have their image deleted, but the indication is that people are not routinely told about that. What can possibly be the justification for having a very clear rule applying to DNA and fingerprints and a different rule applying to facial recognition? When are we going to get to the point where there can be automatic deletion of the images of innocent people?

Mr Hurd: I will come to that point, because I know it was a particular focus of the Committee, but first I want to conclude my remarks on facial recognition.

The police have responsibilities and duties to prevent, detect and investigate crimes. The police have broad common law powers, as we are aware, that allow them to use relevant technologies, such as surveillance cameras in public places and live facial recognition, but it is clear that such use is not unfettered. The police have to exercise their powers in accordance with the law, including the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the Human Rights Act 1998 and data protection legislation.

As was alluded to, we also carry out data protection impact assessments before using a new biometric technology and before a new application of an existing technology. That includes inviting scrutiny from an independent ethics panel, regulators and commissioners. I was listening today to the chiefs of one of our largest police forces speaking exactly to that point, when he talked of the importance he attaches to the opinion of his local ethics panel. We will produce DPIAs for each element of the Home Office biometrics programme and the police will produce DPIAs for each use of live facial recognition.

When it comes to the use of surveillance cameras, the police are required to have regard to the surveillance camera code. To support them in using that technology, they can draw on the guidance of the Surveillance Camera Commissioner and the Information Commissioner. Recognising concerns around the use of the new biometrics, we have set up a new oversight board that includes the Biometrics Commissioner, the Information Commissioner and the Surveillance Camera Commissioner. It will oversee new pilots and is reviewing police operational guidance for live facial recognition. There is a recognition in the system of the issues raised by Members, and mechanisms are in place.

However, I have been clear that the current arrangements are complex for both users and the public. We are therefore keen to simplify and extend the governance and oversight arrangements for biometrics. As I have said, we will update Parliament in the summer on that work. There is a limit to what I can say at the moment, but I hope that Members can take comfort from the fact that we recognise that their concerns are valid, and that, as I said, there is an active stream of work to try to simplify and extend the governance and oversight arrangements for biometrics, against a background of rapid change in the landscape.

The policy on custody images was established in the 2017 review, and allows people who have been arrested but not convicted to ask the police to remove their custody images. There is a strong presumption in favour of removal. It is critical that people are aware of their rights, and debates such as today's, as well as the work of non-governmental organisations, help to increase that awareness.

The policy is public and set out on gov.uk, and is covered in the management of police information and authorised professional practice guidance. However, we cannot rely on that, and we need to go further. The police will tell all those who go into custody about the policy through information that they hand out. We will also review the policy, and use a current police audit of requests to inform our conclusions. I undertake that the views of the House will also be taken into account.

The hon. Member for Bristol North West and the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee spoke about automatic deletion of data for people who are not convicted. The Committee Chair will be aware that

Baroness Williams of Trafford, who leads on the issue in the Home Office, has written to the Committee to give a further explanation of, frankly, the complexity underlying the issue. There is no debate about where we want to get to: we want to move to a system that is automatic. Her letter to the Committee, which I will share with the shadow Minister out of courtesy, sets out some of the complexities in delivering the timeline for which Members are reasonably asking.

As I understand it, the fundamental issue is that, unlike the arrangements for DNA and fingerprints, there is no single national system for custody images, with a unique identifier for every record. Many records have the appropriate identifier, enabling them to be linked to arrest records. However, there are several million on the police national database that cannot be linked easily, or at all. They would have to be manually reviewed or deleted in bulk, entailing many thousands of hours of work.

There is therefore an issue surrounding the different ways in which police databases work, and a fragmented landscape of local police force systems and different practices. It is genuinely complicated work. There is no quick fix, but I am satisfied that there is a determination to get to the end objective that we all want. In the meantime, we will work with the police to improve their procedures to better comply with the agreed policies. I will press the system harder on that, because obviously the current system is not satisfactory, or acceptable to me.

I will leave a few minutes for the hon. Member for Bristol North West to wind up, but I stress that biometrics, as the shadow Minister knows, play a fundamental role in many aspects of modern life and a vital role in the work of police, and have done for an extremely long time. We have a duty, as a Government and a Parliament, to support the protectors of the peace by ensuring that they can make use of new technologies in the most appropriate way. However, we must do our duty by the public we serve by ensuring that there are the right checks and balances in the process.

Ultimately, the public we serve and protect have to trust the process and continue to trust the police. We know the importance of trust in the modern age. Strikingly, the public we serve and represent continue to have high levels of trust in the police, whereas it has plummeted for many other traditional institutions. Trust in the police remains high, and it is important to me, and to anyone who will do my role in the future, that we maintain it. The inappropriate use of technology, or a lack of trust concerning how technologies are used in the future, is therefore a core challenge that the Home Office, under any colour of Administration, needs to take extremely seriously.

As the Home Secretary has said, we are not a surveillance state and have no intention of becoming one. That means that we must use new technologies in ways that are sensitive to their impact on privacy, and ensure that their use is proportionate and maintains the public trust that is at the heart of our policing model.

3.55 pm

Darren Jones: I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), my hon. Friends the Members for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) and for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), and the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), for their contributions. I also welcome the interventions of the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), and the Minister's responses.

It is clear from today's debate that everyone, including the Minister and, by extension, the Home Office, agrees that we have some work to do, which is a good conclusion. I put it on the record that the Select Committee is interested in the actions being taken by the Scottish Government in the biometric data Bill that the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) mentioned. We will keep a close eye on the work being done in Scotland, and think about what lessons we might learn in Westminster.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston said, if we have 29 million facial scans for one hit, we clearly need to have a better debate about the balance between impact and invasion of privacy. As many colleagues mentioned, the demand for a stronger regulatory system comes from not just police forces, commissioners, politicians and the public, but from the technology companies providing such solutions. They wrote to me in advance of the debate to say that they want to do the right thing, and would rather that there were a framework in which they can operate so that—no doubt for their own brand purposes—they are not pushing the envelope by delivering solutions that police forces and others may take too far.

I welcome the Minister's commitment to privacy impact assessments. I am sure that we all welcome that confirmation. I understand that dealing with legacy IT systems is difficult; we have been talking about that on the Select Committee too. We encourage the Government not to put a sticking-plaster over old systems, but to invest in new ones, so that we are not just dealing with a legacy problem, but building something fit for the future. I look forward to reading the letter that the Minister referred to from Baroness Williams of Trafford.

The Minister said that it was good that in our system we can hold the Government to account and show our interest in such matters. It is clear from the debate, and from the Select Committee's ongoing work, that we will continue to do so. We therefore look forward with anticipation to the further announcements that the Minister has committed to in the season of "summer". Even though we do not quite know when that will start or end, we look forward to those announcements, and I thank him for his contribution.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered facial recognition and the biometrics strategy.

3.58 pm

Sitting suspended.

Jain Community: Contribution to the UK

[ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the contribution of the Jain community to the UK.

I have the privilege of chairing the all-party parliamentary group on Jainism, and of having a large Jain community in my constituency. Jainism is a major and ancient religion of Indian origin that is recognised in the UK and globally, including by the United Nations, yet the cultural, economic, social and religious contribution that Jains make to our country has received little or no attention from public policy makers. That needs to change.

The largest proportion of people of the Jain faith live in India. There are estimated to be some 7 million Jains worldwide, but global census figures are likely to be a significant underestimation because many Jains are identified as Hindu—of which more anon. There is also confusion about the true number of Jains in the UK, but the UK is certainly a significant centre for Jainism, and studies indicate that it has almost 65,000 Jains—a figure far in excess of the 20,000 identified in the 2011 census, about which I will also say a little more later.

One key figure in the UK's Jain community told me:

"We have always sought to integrate into the fabric of British society and wholeheartedly accept British values whilst retaining our distinct identity, religion and heritage."

The UK has five major Jain religious sites: Hayes, Kenton, Leicester, Manchester and, of course, Potters Bar. The Potters Bar Jain temple, the largest example of Jain architecture in Europe, hosted His Royal Highness Prince Charles as recently as 2015.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): I have shared many an Ahimsa Day—a glorious occasion—with my hon. Friend. He will be aware that even many people who do not know much about Jainism know a lot about Jain temples, which are the oldest religious buildings on Earth. Is he aware of the problem with getting visas for stonemasons to come to this country to assist with repairs and extensions to our Jain temples? Will he join me in giving the Minister a gentle nudge towards being a little more generous with such visas?

Gareth Thomas: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention and for his work on the all-party group. When I visited the Potters Bar temple last June, its trustees were at pains to point out the difficulty of getting visas for stonemasons to come and help with the extension. I hope to come back to that issue and, as my hon. Friend suggests, press the Minister for help with getting the Home Office to be a little more reasonable.

The Potters Bar temple is magnificent. It was built with ancient techniques and crafts. No steel was used; 1,300 tonnes of Indian marble from Makrana were shipped to London after being beautifully carved by more than 450 specialist craftsmen. Almost 6,000 carved pieces were used, including for the amazing intricate ceiling of Indian marble, which was assembled like a

giant jigsaw puzzle in just 15 months. That is why stonemasons need to be brought in from India, with the specialist expertise to which my hon. Friend rightly referred. I have also had the honour of visiting the Jain temple in Kenton, which is slightly nearer to my constituency and is attended by many Jains who live in Harrow West.

Jainism was founded in the 6th century BC. Jains trace their history through a succession of 24 Tirthankara, or enlightened teachers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman always brings topical and important subjects to this Chamber, and I am usually here to support him. Does he agree that the 65,000 Jains who live and work in the UK, including in Northern Ireland, are more than welcome, and that their religious view must be respected at every level by every person in all the regions of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

Gareth Thomas: The hon. Gentleman makes an important intervention about the need for respect for the Jain community. He is right that there are Jains in Northern Ireland too; I am sure that they will have appreciated his intervention.

The first Tirthankara was Rsabhanatha, who lived millions of years ago; the 24th was Lord Mahavira, who lived in about 500 BC in what is now Bihar in modern India and was a contemporary of the Buddha.

There are three major principles that most Jains recognise. The first is ahimsa, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) mentioned; it enshrines non-violence to all life in thought, word or deed. The second is aparigraha, which requires Jains to minimise their environmental impact through the non-acquisition of material goods; it discourages them from employment in sectors such as mining that can have a negative impact on the environment. The third principle, anekanta-vada, promotes tolerance through the acceptance of a multi-sided view of reality; it encourages the recognition that others have a right to their own point of view.

The principles of Jainism are believed to have inspired the idea of non-violent protest. Mahatma Gandhi was certainly aware of them; he spoke of his debt to Jainism. The principle of non-violence has led Jain culture to be vegetarian, and indeed often vegan, with fasting observed by many at key points in the year. In April and October, followers of Jainism mark Ayambil Oli, a biannual weekly festival of prayer and limited diet that celebrates discipline, austerity and self-control. In August and September, the Jain community celebrates Paryusan, an eight-day festival of fasting, prayer, repentance and forgiveness. Lord Mahavira's birth is celebrated in April, and his final liberation is celebrated during Diwali in October and November.

I pay tribute to the Institute of Jainology, which provides the infrastructure to support Jain communities throughout the UK.

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate to raise awareness of the Jain community, not only among parliamentarians but among the general public. Does he agree that Jains do not practise Jainism for themselves alone? They bring their message of vegetarianism, tolerance and equality to wider society, promoting unity among all communities and, above all, bringing their architecture

to Europe, particularly in the west London area. Their communities in this country make a very positive contribution.

Gareth Thomas: My hon. Friend sums up well the contribution made by Jainism. I celebrate the contribution of all Jains, but particularly those in north-west London.

The Institute of Jainology was established in 1983 and has been registered as a charity since 1986. It supports the more than 30 individual Jain communities that operate throughout the UK and brings them together as one movement. It is led by the excellent Nemubhai Chandaria OBE, and I pay tribute to all its trustees, including Mahesh Gosrani and Jaysukh Mehta, whom I believe may be watching this debate. From 2007 to 2012, the IOJ oversaw the successful JAINpedia project, which catalogued, digitised and displayed, albeit briefly, the Jain collections in major UK institutions such as the Victoria & Albert Museum and the British Library, attracting more than 30,000 visitors. Indeed, the UK's collection of Jain works of scholarship, arts and literature is the most important outside India. Overseen by Mehool Sanghrajka MBE, who continues on the board of the IOJ with his father, Dr Harshad Sanghrajka, the JAINpedia collection has already had 5 million website hits.

Broadly speaking, there are two major strands in Jainism. The Digambara sect, whose monks do not wear any clothes, is found mainly, but not exclusively, in southern India. The Shvetambara sect, whose monks wear white clothes, is found mainly in northern India. It is fair to say that most Jains in the UK adhere to the Shvetambara tradition. Each of the two sects is divided into sub-sects, largely on the basis of people who pray in temples—the Murtipujak, meaning “idol worshipper”—and those who do not idol worship, but use halls to celebrate their faith, who are known as the Sthanakavasi, which literally means “hall dweller”.

I have been honoured to chair the all-party parliamentary group on Jainism since its inception in 2016. With the purpose of gently raising the profile of Jainism in the UK, the APPG has had a number of successes. Last year the Jain community was finally given a place at the Cenotaph, alongside the other major world faiths and the royal family. Through the all-party parliamentary group, we have sought to celebrate the contribution of people from the Jain community who have dedicated their lives to community service in the UK, and of non-Jains who have personified the Jain principle of non-violence and compassion.

Stephen Pound: On the subject of community service, the Jains whom I know are exemplary in their contribution to the community. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is somewhat sad that we do not have a single Jain Member of Parliament? I appreciate that Jains might be doing a huge amount of work in the community, but does he agree that perhaps it is time for a Jain MP to bring some of those glorious principles, which he has so beautifully enunciated, to this place? Would we not be a better Parliament for having a Jain MP?

Gareth Thomas: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We would be a better and more representative Parliament if there were a Jain MP; equally, there are no peers in the other place who are from the Jain faith. He raises a point that I wish to address: the role of political parties in changing the situation.

Some Jains have received recognition for their work in the UK through the honours system. They include Dr Vinod Kapashi, who runs Kenton temple with the support of others, Mrs Vilas Dhanani and Mrs Kusum Shah. Jain businesses have made a huge contribution to the UK economy across every sector, with leading businesses in education, transport, finance, hospitality, real estate and pharmaceuticals, to name just a few, all run by members of the community. An important example is Sigma Pharmaceuticals, led by Bharat Shah. It is the largest independent pharmaceutical wholesaler in the UK and was a national champion in the European Business Awards back in 2017. It is a family-run company with Jain principles at its heart, and for almost 40 years it has served independent pharmacies, dispensing to doctors and hospitals across the UK.

Another Jain-led business is Comline, which was established in 1991 and is a leading independent British supplier of aftermarket replacement vehicle parts. It is headquartered in Luton and has rapidly expanded to ensure efficient logistics from four key European hubs, which are located not only in the UK, but in Greece, Spain and Ireland. It has an impressive record in international trade, which unsurprisingly led to its receiving, among many other prestigious business awards, a Queen's award for enterprise in international trade in 2016.

The Jain community has made huge contributions to charity in recent years by donating to a variety of causes in the UK and across the world, including tackling poverty, environmental issues, animal welfare and disaster relief. The community has also made donations—if the House will forgive my being parochial—to Earlsmead Primary School in my constituency, to help an excellent headteacher invest in the school's library and other facilities.

The Jain community has a number of asks of Government and Parliament, which I will set out, and I look to the Minister to help us make progress. As I have said, the 2011 census did not get close to recording accurately the number of Jains. They had to self-identify on the census and will have to do so again on the printed return for 2021, unless the Government change course. Some 20% are expected to fill out a paper census form, and how to identify their religion is likely to lead to confusion for many Jains who do not have access to a computer.

Although it is true that Jains who complete their 2021 census return online will be able to tick a “Jain” box when they get to the question on religion, the procedure is not as simple as one might hope. They will have to tick the “Other” box and then type the letter “J” to bring up a list of religions starting with “J”. I fear that the failure simply to offer a “Jain” box in the religion question on the main census form will once again lead to significant under-representation of the true number of Jains in our country.

In 2011, many Jains who did not note their specific religion ticked the “Hindu” box. They did so because many Jain families in the UK have links with India, which was known as Hindustan before the British came along. For many Jains, being a Hindu is a geographical description—they are very comfortable with it—of where their family are from. Confusion and misidentification of people's religion was therefore inevitable in 2011, and we risk the same mistake happening again. In my opinion, the 2021 census could easily offer a “Jain” box

[Gareth Thomas]

in the religion question. After all, Jainism is a major world religion and the seventh largest in the UK. As I have outlined, there is already evidence of significant under-reporting. Why will the Government not grant that simple request?

Using data from Jain temples, we know there are an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 Jains in the UK, but just 20,000 or so identified as such in the previous census. The Office for National Statistics has been lobbied by the all-party parliamentary group and representatives of the Jain community, but it is refusing to budge. I look to Ministers to give a stronger steer to the ONS to put that omission right.

There has been little recognition of Jainism by public broadcasters. It is a significant world faith, with significant places of worship in the UK, yet the BBC and other broadcasters do little to acknowledge that fact. I hope the Minister is willing to help facilitate a meeting between representatives of the BBC and the Institute of Jainology, to help put that omission right.

With inaccurate data, public services such as NHS trusts have more of an excuse for not planning appropriately for their local community. The need for a Jain crematorium is particularly urgent. The traditional custom in Jainism is to cremate the body within 48 minutes of death; after that, the body starts decomposing and breeds bacteria. The belief is that a delayed cremation would cause a great deal of violence and potentially spread disease. There are no Jain crematoriums in the UK, which means there is usually a one-week period between death and cremation while arrangements are made.

The Oshwal Association in Potters Bar has submitted a pre-plan to its local authority for a purpose-built crematorium at the Potters Bar temple, with a hall to accommodate large groups, adequate ritual and washing facilities, prayer rooms, a viewing room and adequate onsite parking. It has not yet received approval.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North pointed out in his first intervention, a particular challenge for Jain organisations is getting stonemasons to build, repair or extend their temples. It would be useful if the Minister could encourage the Home Office to be more sympathetic to requests from Jain communities for stonemasons who are expert in the traditions and practices of Jainism, usually from India, to be allowed into the UK temporarily to help with temple works. I took up the Oshwal Association's need to secure visas for five such stonemasons to help extend the Potters Bar temple in time for its 50th anniversary celebrations. Initially, all five visa requests were refused. Following appeal, three were allowed and two were not. Similarly, Jain religious leaders visiting the UK temporarily often have difficulties. Again, a little more sympathy from the Home Office would be helpful.

There is a challenge for political parties. As my hon. Friend has said, there are no Jain Members of Parliament. The most senior elected Jains are currently Navin Shah, the excellent London Labour Assembly Member for Brent and Harrow, and Councillor Sachin Shah, previously leader of Harrow Council. There should be Jains in both Houses of Parliament. I look forward to all our political parties doing better at recruiting and mentoring Jain politicians and ensuring that more are elected.

Jainism is a remarkable religion, and its adherents in the UK are great British citizens. They deserve more recognition, and I hope the Minister will help us to deliver that.

4.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) on securing and introducing this debate on the contribution of the Jain community to the United Kingdom, and I welcome the contributions of other hon. Members.

I hope Jains across the country had a wonderful Mahavir Janma Kalyanak recently, as they came together to commemorate the birth of Lord Mahavir. I was pleased that the Prime Minister provided a message to the Jain community and sent her very best wishes as it came together to celebrate Mahavir Jayanti.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), to whom I have spoken about this subject. Although he could not be with us today, I know that he and the hon. Member for Harrow West are fully committed to serving not just the Jain community in Harrow, but all communities irrespective of belief and background. I commend them for their public duty in doing so.

I thank the members of the all-party parliamentary group on Jainism, ably led by the hon. Gentleman, for its work in helping to raise the profile of the Jain community in Parliament. In particular, I thank the Institute of Jainology and its chairman, Mr Nemubhai Chandaria OBE. Nemu and his team do a wonderful job representing the Jain community, including through their engagement with the Government, and especially my Department, to create and foster better understanding of Jainism.

We must of course pay tribute to the Jain community for its incredible contribution to British life, some of which we have heard about today. Jains from India and east Africa have successfully settled and integrated here, and they have made Britain their home. The Jain community comprises hard-working individuals and families, and is entrepreneurial in spirit. It is economically successful and continues to make a positive difference in our local communities. I know very well how faith groups and people from ethnic minorities can make our communities better, safer and stronger. Britain is stronger for her diversity. The Jains' views of tolerance, respect and ahimsa help us to forge stronger and safer communities.

Lord Bourne, the Minister for Faith, recently attended the Mahavir Janma Kalyanak celebratory event last month in Portcullis House. He was honoured to have been asked to present community service awards to deserving members of the Jain community, including Dr Harshad Sanghrajka MBE, who received the ONEJain lifetime achievement award for his tireless work over 50 years supporting the Jain community; Mrs Shah for her charitable work in the UK and overseas; and Mrs Sheth for all that she has done over many years at the Navnat Vanik centre to manage the community catering as well as the weekly programmes for the elder members of the community. They have all gone above and beyond what is expected of them, all in the cause of helping their communities, voluntarily and without expectation or favour.

Charitable work and selfless service to the community are an important aspect of Jainism, whether in this country or anywhere else around the world. The Government are always delighted to receive nominations for honours from all faith communities to recognise their hard work. It was particularly satisfying to see the work of two Jains recognised in the most recent Queen's new year's honours list—Dr Vinod Kapashi, who received an OBE for services to Jainism, and Mr Ajay Gudka, who received an MBE for services to charity and to the community in Gujarat.

One topic I would particularly like to highlight is the work of the Jain community to promote organ donation and increase the number of donors across the Asian community. I applaud Jains and Hindus for bringing that important and often difficult subject to the fore. Their vital work will help to save countless lives.

On Jains' engagement with Government, I am pleased to say my Department has an excellent relationship with the community and is happy to support it where we can. For example, my Department was instrumental in securing a place for a representative from the Jain community to attend the annual national memorial service at the Cenotaph for the first time last year. This was very fitting in view of its being the 100th anniversary of the Armistice. Lord Bourne and everyone in the Department were determined to see Britain's diverse faith and belief groups appropriately represented, and it was a proud moment for us when that happened and Nemubhai took his rightful place.

One of Lord Bourne's first engagements as the Minister for Faith was to visit the magnificent Oshwal temple in Potters Bar to see how the Jain community has fully embraced unity with nature. He was invited to tour the facilities and engage with the community.

I want to touch on the specific requests made by the hon. Member for Harrow West. He will know and, I hope, understand that the census falls under the purview of the Cabinet Office, so it is difficult for me to make policy on it. He has made representations on that point to the Cabinet Office and the ONS, and I know that the ONS has been engaging extensively with the Jain community ahead of the next census. It published its proposals in a White Paper at the end of last year. Some 55 different ethnic groups, including the Jain community, were asked to make representations, and I understand that the ONS has evaluated them according to some predetermined criteria. Currently, the recommendation, as the hon. Gentleman outlined, is that there will not be a specific category for Jains, but there will be the ability

to use the online facility to search and enter oneself as a Jain. I appreciate that there is some concern about that. I ask the ONS and hon. Members to keep engaging with each other and the community to ensure that the records are good. It is no good undertaking that exercise if people are not aware that they can avail itself of that option and thereby enable us to collect the vital data that, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, is necessary to ensure the correct functioning of our services.

The second issue that the hon. Gentleman raised is the appropriate provision of crematoria. I am pleased to tell him that, just a few weeks ago, the Government announced that we will update the guidance on crematoria to ensure that the needs of different cultures and faiths in modern Britain are recognised and taken into account by local authorities. I will not go into all the details now, as the Government's consultation response has been published and is online. The Minister for Faith has written to all local authorities asking them to be mindful of their obligations. The Government will consult on new guidance on the siting and design of crematoria, and will offer support to community groups interested in operating their own crematoria. I hope that is welcome, not just to the hon. Gentleman and the Jain community, but to different groups across the United Kingdom.

The two other issues that the hon. Gentleman raised are visas and the BBC. I would be delighted to see what we can do to get the meeting with the BBC that he asked for. Again, it is not the responsibility of my Department, but I would be happy to try to facilitate that meeting with representatives of this faith community. The hon. Members for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) and for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) made the same point about temporary workers who do not fit neatly into any existing visa categories. If there are specific cases, my Department and I would be delighted to take note of them if they write to us. Typically, we raise visa applications with the Home Office.

I again thank the hon. Member for Harrow West for securing this debate. He is right to put the contribution of the Jain community on the agenda in this place. It should be incredibly proud of its record, and he should be proud of his work in supporting it in this place. The Government feel very strongly that we can support the community. Together, we can live in a cohesive society with a shared idea of what Britain means to all of us. We can come together to celebrate and embrace that, and ensure that this country remains stronger for our diversity.

Question put and agreed to.

Future International Trade Opportunities

4.30 pm

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered future international trade opportunities for the UK.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell.

Leaving the European Union will provide us with a unique set of opportunities to develop trade policy. As we leave influences and restrictions put on us by the EU, we will be offered an exciting opportunity to compete more freely in global markets. That is one reason why I voted to leave the EU, and I know that was first and foremost in the minds of the 67% of my constituents in North Warwickshire and Bedworth who voted the same.

I recognise not only the opportunities but the challenges—we will face stiff competition globally—but we have to take the opportunity to ensure that the benefits of leaving the EU are fully recognised and, importantly, felt throughout the whole UK, not just in small pockets of it. I have discussed that with many businesses in my constituency and more widely in meetings here in Parliament, and I genuinely feel that we are ready and that the UK will be well placed to fulfil our huge potential.

As the Government know, according to International Monetary Fund projections, 90% of world growth is likely to come from outside the EU, so in future a greater proportion of UK trade will be with non-EU countries. That will be the case whether we are inside or outside the EU.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): One initiative that preceded the referendum was the appointment of trade envoys. That had nothing to do with Brexit, but it illustrates the point about the enormous opportunity, in particular in developing markets. I happen to be trade envoy to Nigeria. Will my hon. Friend join me in saying what a wonderful job that that initiative does in helping to keep us in the forefront of international trade?

Craig Tracey: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the priorities of the Department for International Trade, in co-operation with the Department for International Development, is to look at how to replicate and increase the effects of the economic partnership agreements. There are with seven in place now, and we want to extend them to 31 other countries, including African and Caribbean ones. The opportunity is certainly out there, and I agree with him wholly.

We have made a good start. The Government's stance in the White Paper on trade was encouraging:

“When we leave the EU we will regain our independent seat at the WTO. As an independent member and one of the largest economies in the world, we will be in a position to intensify our support for robust, free and open international trade rules which work for all, and to help to rebuild global momentum for trade liberalisation.”

We are already seeing encouraging signs. According to the OECD, at the end of last year the UK's inward investment stock was an impressive \$1.89 trillion, more than double Germany's, which stood at \$920 billion. The Government have already established working groups and high-level dialogues with a range of key trade

partners, including the US, Australia, China, the Gulf Co-operation Council, India, Japan and New Zealand. I commend that approach, and I know that the Department plans and will work to extend that list, continuing to increase global trading relationships.

Analysis in a report by Minnesota's Minneapolis Fed suggests that were we to reduce trade and investment barriers with the rest of the world by 5%, we would raise UK income by between £25 billion and £30 billion per year, even taking into account possible future restrictions on trade and investment with EU. Dr Graham Gudgin, an economist at the University of Cambridge's Centre for Business Research, states:

“A smart WTO Brexit with well-designed trade, immigration, agricultural, fishing and regulatory policies would, far from being a ‘disaster’, have an excellent chance of delivering substantial long-term net benefits.”

Exciting opportunities across a wide range of sectors are open to Government as we move forward.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman must know that the most advanced example of trade liberalisation is actually the single market. Would it not therefore be better for Britain to remain a member of the single market?

Craig Tracey: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised that I disagree. One of the issues with the single market is freedom of movement, which was an issue in the referendum, and similarly the customs union ties our freedom of policy. Being able to develop our own wider trade policies offers far more exciting possibilities to my constituents and to businesses around the country.

Speaking of my part of the country, it is good to see that, primarily as a result of Brexit, a new strategy is forming. Traditionally, parts of the midlands have tended to work separately on their trade policies, but through initiatives such as the midlands engine they are working much more closely together, with a great sense of teamwork and unity, and more joined-up thinking to deliver a wider, more focused outlook, which is to the benefit of the midlands as a whole.

I raise my main topic today as one who was an insurance broker for more than 20 years and as chair of the all-party group for insurance and financial services. I will focus my comments on this sector, because insurance has to play a leading role in our future trade success. It is fundamental to economic improvement in every one of our constituencies, and is apparently one of the UK's most successful export industries.

I say that insurance is important in all our constituencies because overall it employs about 300,000 people and, contrary to popular belief, two thirds of those jobs are outside London. The specialist London market itself employs about 52,000 people, but again, 17,000 of those jobs are outside London. In terms of premium income, the UK market is bigger than all the markets of its major competitors—Bermuda, Singapore and Zurich—combined. This country attracts large commercial business from more than 200 territories around the world, bringing to the UK about £65 billion of premium annually. On top of that, we have a reputation for product innovation to cover new types of risk. That is important as technology grows. Some of the products recently developed in London include cyber and data-breach insurance, stand-alone terrorist cover and natural catastrophe cover.

We cannot afford to be complacent about the industry, though. Research by the London Market Group, highlighted that premium coming from emerging markets into the UK has declined and that we face significant and growing competition from overseas, especially from markets in Bermuda, Singapore and Zurich, whose Governments support regulators that actively promote their industries and insurance markets. Meanwhile, our share of mature insurance and reinsurance markets stagnates. Asia is the highest growth market globally, and the region in which the UK lost the most ground in commercial insurance between 2013 and 2015, mainly to growing regional insurance hubs such as, again, Singapore, which had an annual growth rate of 4%.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The UK is the third biggest by value importer of food. If the United States wants access to that market, with lower quality food and hormone-impregnated beef for instance, does the hon. Gentleman think that is a permissible exchange for greater penetration for insurance and other financial products into the United States?

Craig Tracey: Although the US is one of our biggest import markets, I do not necessarily think so, because the Government have committed to maintaining high food standards. I am primarily talking about the insurance industry; I am sure the Minister can give some reassurance, but I think there is plenty of scope for us to grow imports from a whole range of countries around the world. The scope of where our imports come from seems to be very narrow.

Gareth Thomas: Research published in December by the Centre for European Reform suggests that if Britain leaves the single market, even with an ambitious future trade agreement with the European Union, exports of insurance and pension services from the UK would be almost 20% lower per year. Does the hon. Gentleman think that, however difficult it would be to present it to his constituents, staying in the single market might be the best way to protect a considerable number of insurance jobs in his constituency and elsewhere?

Craig Tracey: I do not. I have spoken to a wide range of stakeholders, including the London Market Group, Lloyd's and the Association of British Insurers. I will make the point later that from their perspective, even free trade agreements are not necessarily the way forward.

Returning to the trend of the loss of global market share by UK commercial insurance, it is particularly important that the Government and industry consider the measures that can be introduced to reverse that trend, to encourage more trade and opportunities and, crucially, to promote the industry. It has long been argued in the insurance sector, and is something I have raised many times in this House, that our regulators should have a dual role—they should promote on the international stage. That would mirror what many of our competitors around the world already do, particularly in emerging areas.

We need domestic reform just to put us on a level footing with our competitors. UK regulators should have a regard for our international competitiveness. That means they would have to consider the impact of their decisions on the ability of UK-based financial services to compete on the international stage that we want to have access to. The sector has repeatedly made

the point that progress does not necessarily rely on agreeing formal free trade agreements—they are not the be-all and end-all. The Government can make substantial progress now using some of the existing tools available to them such as financial and economic dialogues, which offer real benefits in shorter time frames. There would be an opportunity to turn them into bilateral agreements in future—the ABI highlighted that in relation to China and India in particular.

To remain internationally competitive, a future regulatory framework needs to be outcome-based. There is a view that trade should not be prevented by technical divergence between the UK and third countries if the outcome of the regulation is the same. So that we are not overtaken, it is important that Government, in partnership with organisations such as the LMG or the ABI, promote the unique benefit of access to our commercial insurance markets, given the significant economic and social benefits of expanding insurance provision and the growing protection gap challenge that many countries face.

I would like to draw the Minister's attention to the London Makes it Possible campaign, run by the London Market Group. It is designed to promote London and the UK as the world's pre-eminent insurance hub. It reminds countries around the world of the business range of risks we cover and is something that Government could get behind, to promote us. It has a fantastic website, where it is interesting to see some of the world-leading risks that we cover, and how our market is so different.

The expertise in this country enables us to place highly complex risks. The question is: where should we consider targeting? There are opportunities to grow the insurance trade in a number of developed and emerging markets. The ABI has identified 11 priority markets for future international trade, including China, India, Japan, South Korea, Canada, Switzerland and the United States. In addition, the LMG has identified its own target markets: the US again and the markets of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which have huge cyber-insurance opportunities. Latin America has one of the lowest insurance penetrations in the world, largely due to measures to shield those countries from international insurance markets. Although it is understandable why they may want to do that, those measures limit the pooling of risk and make the insurance of large-scale natural disasters next to impossible. Importantly, that puts up costs for consumers and reduces take-up.

I visited the US last year with the British-American parliamentary group, to discuss financial services post-Brexit. We went to Washington and New York to see at first hand how important our insurance industry is there. The US continues to be the London Market Group's single biggest source of business. In 2017, Lloyd's underwriters wrote approximately £13.5 billion of US business, contributing to a total of approximately £20 billion of London Market Group premiums. The US spend on cyber-insurance alone is expected to reach \$6.2 billion by 2020. It also faces a growing need to strengthen resilience against natural disaster and to bolster federal and state insurance programmes. The three hurricanes in 2017 caused more than \$217 billion-worth of damage, of which only \$92 billion was covered by insurance.

The Government have already made important progress in negotiating and signing the UK-US covered agreement for reinsurance, which removes some collateral requirements and encourages regulatory dialogue between the UK

[Craig Tracey]

and US. That is a very welcome step to developing a new post-Brexit trading relationship between the two countries. The UK is ready to take advantages of those opportunities. World-leading insurance expertise is already based in this country so it will be a critical industry for us.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Leaving the European Union with the deal that the Prime Minister hopes to get would do 6% damage to GDP. Leaving with no deal would do 8% damage. An American trade agreement would boost GDP by about 0.2%, which is a thirtieth or a fortieth of that, depending on the scenario. That means we would need about 30 or 40 US-style agreements to make up for the economic damage that Brexit will do.

Craig Tracey: I believe it is not just about US agreements; I mentioned many other countries where there could be an opportunity for future agreements. It is interesting to hear that remark from a member of the SNP, which is looking to leave the UK, where 60% of Scotland's exports come from.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Craig Tracey: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be able to intervene later, as I want to wind up my remarks.

I began by saying that leaving the EU brings a unique opportunity to the UK. In order to make the most of leaving, we need to rethink our strategy. The creation of our own UK regulatory framework can play a big part in that. I want to make it clear that the insurance industry is not looking for standards to be reduced or diluted. It is committed to maintaining standards, but it needs to be able to compete on the global stage. We should be under no illusions: regulation is a key factor in businesses deciding to invest here and to send their people here. It is really important that the Minister has at the forefront of his mind the need to retain proportionate regulation so we are not put at a disadvantage.

In March, following his spring statement, the Chancellor announced that the Government would review the UK's future regulatory framework for financial services to "maintain world-leading financial services regulatory standards, remain open to international markets, and realise new trading opportunities."

An international competitiveness duty should be a priority for that review. As I said, I think there are exciting opportunities ahead. Those of us who believe in the potential for our trading future were heartened by the International Trade Secretary's comment that we will "break down the barriers to trade wherever we find them."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 2018; Vol. 645, c. 43.]

That needs to be our mantra as we move forward. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about how we can continue our progress.

4.51 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I shall be brief. It will be a massive challenge to recover the trade that we shall lose. We currently negotiate as Team EU; standing alone as Britain, negotiating with other countries—particularly large ones, such as the United

States and China—will be very difficult. There is a debate about climate change in the main Chamber at the moment. It seems to me that we shall have to trade further afield, which will harm our climate. I hope we see the introduction of carbon pricing to save the climate, but that will not be good for trade.

The hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey) mentioned the WTO. There are 160 countries in the WTO, many of which have dictators and so on, and they will jointly make rules that govern us. It is a massive organisation, with a panel of unelected judges that will impose rules on our courts. We will not, for instance, be able to bring the railways and water companies into public ownership, as some in the Labour party would like to.

There will also be a great threat to our standards from things such as hormone-impregnated meat, chlorinated chicken and the sale of asbestos, all of which we see in the United States. The United States is likely to put pressure on us to allow the lowering of standards in exchange for access to digital and financial markets, for example.

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): I just note that when the International Trade Committee went to Japan and South Korea, the thing that sparked most concern among Japanese investors was the nationalisation of industries under a potential future Labour Government. That caused greater alarm than any discussion about Brexit. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that nationalisation may cause wider worry among international investors?

Geraint Davies: Ironically, the architect of the single market was largely Margaret Thatcher. As has been pointed out, it is one of the most perfect marketplaces in the world. She enabled the Japanese to platform into the European marketplace. Of course, they are all leaving now, because we are Brexiting. There is an EU-Japan deal, which we will be cut out of, and the car manufacturers are moving for that reason, too. Historically, the Japanese brought together the Government and industry in a way that allowed platforming, and used active government to help industry. That is what a Labour Government would want. The Japanese are not very happy about Brexit, and they are basically pulling out, which is a complete disaster for Britain.

On how we move ahead with the Trade Bill, I want assurances from the Minister about the scrutiny, accountability and transparency of future trade deals. It seems to me that there will be enormous pressure on standards, human rights, the environment, workers' rights, consumer rights—everything. The Department is denying access even to the aims and objectives of trade negotiations, which are transparent in the United States and the EU. In fact, as I understand it, there is currently a freedom of information case in court because the Department is resisting providing access to that information. That is appalling. It bodes very badly, and I am very concerned.

I also want assurances from the Minister about investor-state dispute settlements, especially as fracking companies, for example, presumably will want to continue the appalling work that this Government have started. We are debating fracking to a certain extent today in the main Chamber. It is so destructive. The Minister may know that 5% of

the methane is leaked, and that methane is 85 times worse than carbon dioxide for global warming, making fracking worse than coal. Under investor-state dispute settlements, big fracking companies such as Lone Pine have fined the Canadian Government hundreds of millions of dollars for imposing a moratorium on fracking in Quebec. Will he therefore rule out investor-state dispute settlements?

Will the Minister ensure that Parliament can fully scrutinise and agree on the negotiating aims of future trade deals? Will he allow MPs to access some of the documentation, and to have debates and votes? We do not want, week after week, to be presented with a deal versus no deal choice in which the Government say, "Here's the deal with Chile. If we don't sign it, even though it's not as good as the one we've got already, we won't get anything. Come on," and force through appalling trade deals that are not in our interests and may undermine human rights abroad and environmental protections here and elsewhere.

4.56 pm

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I am sure that, given your passion about Brexit, you would like to speak in the debate yourself. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey) for securing the debate. What a refreshing change it is to talk about opportunity rather than threat—it is just a shame that we do not have longer to do so.

I do not wish to retread well-worn ground, but one of my abiding concerns about the withdrawal agreement is that it will, in effect, preclude us from drawing up an independent trading strategy, with the customs arrangements in the backstop effectively becoming the blueprint for the future relationship. That would cause us to enter a de facto customs union with the EU and be tethered to the EU's regulatory regime without a seat at the table, as was confirmed by the Prime Minister's admission about the commonalities between her customs position and that of Mr Corbyn. I do not see that loss of power as compatible with the public's decision to leave the EU.

It is a myth that the customs arrangements in the withdrawal agreement would deliver frictionless trade with the EU. One freight forwarder told the International Trade Committee that

"a softer Brexit would deliver a harder Brexit for us".

Indeed, with UK wet stamp certifications or similar for every consignment to or from the EU and Northern Ireland, and a customs arrangement tantamount to Turkey's, in which the EU's trading partners would benefit from access to the UK market without our deriving reciprocal access, the withdrawal agreement would preclude us from signing meaningful new FTAs and open up huge potential for tax leakage when it comes to tariff collection. I believe that would come very quickly to be understood as a substandard arrangement from which we would have no unilateral right of exit.

That is not to say that our future trading relationship with the EU should be deprioritised, or that to move away from the EU's regulatory orbit will be plain sailing, or necessarily desirable in every sector. However, our future relationship must be placed on a sustainable footing, and such an asymmetric arrangement would not allow for that.

My desire has always been for us to strike a comprehensive free trade agreement with the EU, accept and then manage any trading friction that would cause, and offset costs through a competitive tax and regulatory regime and a broader range of new trading agreements that would—over time, admittedly—allow UK companies better to plug into growth markets or to enhance access to countries with which we already have strong trading relationships. Until that EU-UK relationship is determined, however, we have effectively put on ice the opportunities available with third countries, many of which are necessarily waiting to see the extent to which we are tied into EU structures to assess how deep a trading relationship they can have with us.

Looking to the future, it is important to underline that free trade agreements are not a panacea, but can none the less be used as a catalyst to deepen bilateral ties or simply to kick-start workstreams. We had a fascinating discussion at the International Trade Committee this morning about how Brexit has already had a positive impact simply through the creation of the Department for International Trade, which provides momentum and focus, and by sparking often overdue audits by UK companies of their agility, productivity and exposure to risk. The creation of a DIT database of trading opportunities for UK businesses has been enormously valuable, while the packaging of UK investment prospects in brands such as the northern powerhouse and the midlands engine has helped companies and trade bodies better articulate opportunities to prospective investors.

Companies have generally been impressed by the skills and energy of DIT teams in our embassies, but now they want those teams to enhance their regulatory knowledge, extend their networks to lobby more effectively and gear themselves to long-term relationships with key decision makers to act as experienced Sherpas to UK businesses. That will require lower churn of staff and a more extensive network of offices, particularly in different regions of China and states in America, where we can only achieve so much at federal level. The big prize would be in assisting mid-cap UK firms, where we currently fall short of the extensive assistance offered to the German Mittelstand by the powerful German chambers of commerce. We should also look to capitalise on and complement the existing networks of UK bodies such as the Corporation of London, which has developed city-to-city agreements with the likes of Tokyo and Shanghai on green finance, asset management and more.

With trade these days stifled much less by tariff than non-tariff barriers—admittedly the context is changing somewhat under the Trump Administration and the deteriorating relationship with China—future free trade area negotiations can be a focal point for, but need not hold up, wider country-to-country discussions on issues such as recognition between respective trade bodies of professional qualifications that would allow for the easier transfer of skilled staff; swifter, less costly visa regimes; research co-operation between universities; and working groups on regulatory harmonisation, such that close ties with countries like the United States, Australia and Singapore could create momentum for a move towards global standards in key industries of interest to us such as financial services, tech and the digital economy. Those are especially important issues for a services economy such as ours, and the coming together of

[Julia Lopez]

powerhouses in financial services and life sciences such as the US and the UK could have a tremendous impact on the setting of those standards.

Should we ever get to the point where we can negotiate new FTAs, we ought to have completed an analysis of the errors made in the Brexit and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations. I recommend, and I know the Minister agrees, that we ensure that Parliament has scoped out and agreed to a broad mandate for any new FTA and is able to access information about ongoing negotiations via a new, confidential parliamentary committee that could access relevant paperwork, trade expertise and legal advice.

Meanwhile, we should seek immediately to knock on the head unhelpful canards about chlorinated chicken or US healthcare companies being able to sue the NHS. Modern bilateral agreements are flexible and can permit carve-outs for sensitive areas of trade. The FTA between China and Australia, for instance, does not allow access to certain aspects of Australia's pharmaceutical and healthcare system, while investor dispute settlement mechanisms are absent from large parts of the Canadian and American trading relationship. Ultimately, however, in being able to determine our own trade policy, we can be compelled neither to enter nor remain in any FTA or investment treaty that we do not believe to be in our interests, subject to notice.

There is so much more to say on this subject, but other Members wish to speak. Finally, I hope that this realignment of UK trading prospects is not hindered by the signing of a substandard withdrawal agreement that places us either implicitly or explicitly in a customs union, and that this debate marks the start of a more positive, creative discussion about the new trajectory on which we can place our nation in the years ahead. Ours is the world's fifth-largest economy, strong in so many expanding areas such as services, science and digital technology, and able to attract huge amounts of investment despite the uncertainty that Parliament has created over Brexit. With skill, verve and leadership, the UK can eventually emerge a nimbler, more dynamic economy, not only better positioned to plug into growth markets but better able to deliver tangible benefits to the people and businesses we represent.

5.3 pm

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey) on what so far has been an interesting debate. I gently remind the House of the promise that the International Trade Secretary made to have signed some 43 trade deals by the end of March 2019. Not surprisingly, that has not been achieved, and we are some way from seeing those 40 so-called roll-over EU trade agreements signed. That is an indication of the complexity of trade. While, as the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) alluded to, many things can affect future trading opportunities for British businesses, the instability of not having sorted out proper trade agreements with both the European Union and other key markets is likely to inhibit the international trading opportunities for British businesses.

I raise in particular concerns about trade in services, because the vast majority of the jobs done by my constituents that directly involve international trade are

related to services. The few bits of detailed thinking from independent trade experts about the impact of Brexit on trade in services highlight the huge significance of such trade between the UK and the EU, and therefore what is at risk, in terms of scale, for the UK economy from any inhibitions of trade in services.

In 2017, according to the Centre for European Reform, services accounted for some 45% of total UK exports, or almost £300 billion. The EU received 40% of those exports, the highest proportion of any UK trading partner. Research by the Centre for European Reform suggests that if Britain leaves the single market and trades services under the provisions of an ambitious free trade agreement, on an annual basis UK exports to the EU of financial services will none the less be 60% lower, UK exports of insurance and pension services will be almost 20% lower, and exports of other business services, including law, accountancy and professional services, will be 10% lower. Those are all sectors in which Britain has a significant comparative advantage, so jobs, investment and tax revenues are all at risk in the case of withdrawal from the single market.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way on that point, which leads me to the point raised by the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey). The stats he just gave lead to the 6% damage there would be to GDP. When I pointed out that we would need 30 or 40 America-style agreements, he said we can find more countries and more deals. The only problem is that the USA is a quarter of the world's GDP, so we would need seven to 10 planets to make up for the damage the UK is inflicting on itself with Brexit.

Gareth Thomas: I agree; the hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Without dwelling on that point, the CER report helpfully points out that it is significantly more difficult to open services markets than goods markets to trade, because many barriers to trade are regulatory in nature. The quality and safety of a service is difficult to decide at the border.

As I pointed out in my intervention on the hon. Member for North Warwickshire, no group of countries has gone further than the European Union in making it easier to sell services produced in one country in another in a bloc, yet still barriers remain. Therefore, pulling out of the single market and negotiating a free trade agreement, however ambitious it ultimately is, would inevitably throw up new barriers to trade, particularly if we withdraw from the EU's collective rulebook, shared institutions and cross-border enforcement regimes, as it appears the Prime Minister wants. Some of the impact of withdrawal from the single market for services could be offset with, for example, significant mutual recognition of qualifications and—more controversially—the temporary movement of people.

It is not fashionable to worry about the future of financial services—the case for further regulatory reform of the industry can easily be made—but it remains one of the few world-class industries we have in the UK, and it is clearly set to be damaged significantly, putting jobs in my constituency at risk. For that reason, I urge the House to vote for us to stay in the single market as part of a soft Brexit deal, put back to the British people in a public vote with the option, nevertheless, to remain in the EU.

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): I call Faisal Rashid. However, I ask the hon. Gentleman to keep his remarks fairly short as we are running out of time for the winding-up speeches.

5.9 pm

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Rosindell. It is great to serve under your chairmanship. I thank the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey) for securing this important debate. I will try to be as brief as possible.

International trade could not be more integral to both the history and the future of this country. Britain's prosperity has always been tied to how we do business with the rest of the world. Our trading relationships determine our living standards, jobs and access to resources. It is high time that Members paused to reflect on the great trading potential this country could have under the right political leadership. Trade is not only a critical source of wealth creation; when tied to an open, rule-based system trade can also be a great driver of human rights and social justice. Now, in an era when unilateralism and protectionism is on the rise, it is more important than ever that we reflect, reject self-imposed isolation and explore fresh opportunities for UK businesses overseas.

Britain's international trading practices can reflect our core values of mutual respect and shared prosperity, because not all trade is good trade. In international trade deals profit-making has too often taken precedence over workers' rights and public services. The Government must provide more assurances in future trade deals with the US that our NHS is not put up for sale to large American pharmaceutical companies. If managed by the Tory right, trade deals, particularly those with the US, could severely undermine UK food, health and animal welfare standards. That could have a damaging impact on rural communities and undermine faith in the great potential prosperity that international trade can unlock. Parliament has no guaranteed role in scrutinising trade deals, despite their broad implications, because it currently follows an outdated convention from the 1920s. I believe that MPs must have a meaningful vote, as a minimum, before and after trade negotiations to prevent those damaging outcomes.

Yesterday, I chaired a two-hour panel discussion on Britain, Brexit and the belt and road initiative. As we prepare to leave the world's largest single trading bloc, I asked, "How should post-Brexit Britain respond to the world's biggest ongoing infrastructural project—China's belt and road initiative?" It is not a question that the Government appear to be asking of themselves. This country is practically directionless on questions about long-term geopolitical significance; we are being left behind on the global stage. I am sure many Members have had—as I have had—countless conversations with dynamic businesses and talented, enterprising workers. I see great, untapped trading potential in my constituency, but we need to do more to maximise the opportunities afforded to those businesses overseas.

One in four British SMEs is currently involved either directly or indirectly in exporting overseas; supporting the growth of these industries is central to my work as an MP. I call on the Government to re-energise our approach to trade. We should reject the failed doctrines of free-trade orthodoxy and Trump's tariff wars, to promote a just trade agenda, with an active state that

is committed to upholding social and environmental standards. We must align our international trade policy with a comprehensive industrial strategy, creating opportunities at home and abroad that provide access to a range of skilled and well-paid jobs. A better future is possible and rethinking our approach to trade is the key to unlocking it.

5.13 pm

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I shall be brief; I love these one-hour debates, but we are now seeing the limitations of them.

I agree with the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey) in one or two regards: we will most certainly face stiff competition, there will be substantial growth outwith the EU, and there is a range of opportunities. Where I disagree with him is that I do not believe we are ready. In terms of the opportunities that exist—as I will explain later, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), who is Chair of the Select Committee, said—I do not believe that they will fill the gap we are about to create.

Along with many Members, including the hon. Member for North Warwickshire, I am keen to talk about services in this regard; they have been ignored so far in the debate over customs, tariffs and checks at the border. They are the largest part of our economy and they are a substantial minority of our total exports, but the starting point about services does not fill me with confidence. If one looks at the Swiss deal, the House of Lords report said:

"Most trade in services, which make up 52 per cent of all UK-Swiss trade, is not covered by the deal."

Lord Boswell went on to say that the deal with Switzerland "in many aspects differs significantly from the EU-Swiss agreements it replaces."

Likewise, after the deal with Norway was announced it was confirmed that it did not cover service trade or technical regulations for food, animals or plants. If we cannot replicate in the continuity agreements what we already have with friendly trading partners, it does not augur well for cutting new and innovative deals. I hope the Minister will say a word or two about how he intends to get around that obstacle when we start negotiating in earnest.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: My hon. Friend was very kind, when he started his speech, in agreeing with the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey). I am sure there is much to agree with, but I would like to pull the hon. Member for North Warwickshire up on the point he made about Scottish independence and the SNP. Scotland is not talking about walking out of trade blocs or ripping up trade agreements; it is talking about completing the process of political devolution, which would be independence. A country that has done that already and devolved from the UK—namely Ireland—is now in a trading bloc that represents about 22% of global GDP and it has an equal voice, while Scotland is stuck as a hostage in a little place that represents only 4% of global GDP.

Stewart Hosie: My hon. Friend makes his point himself; I will not spend time agreeing with him, although I do entirely.

[Stewart Hosie]

The Swiss and Norway continuity agreements demonstrate what happens when negotiations take place from a position of weakness. In the EU-US negotiations we have seen the US adamant that agriculture would be included in any deal, but the EU trade commissioner Cecilia Malmström told the US trade representative that they could not negotiate on agriculture. She has been quoted as saying:

“We have made very clear agriculture will not be included.”

She can do that from a position of strength. My great concern is that the UK is negotiating from a position of profound weakness, as evidenced by the failure of the continuity agreements, meaning that we may well face all the downsides of the US and others seeking an agricultural deal that will weaken food, hygiene and environmental standards. How does the Minister respond to that? It would be useful to know.

I finish by making a key point that was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar when he talked about export figures. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research suggested that any Brexit would see a loss of around 20% in total UK trade. Cutting a deal with the main English-speaking economies would see an increase of 2% to 3% and cutting a deal with the BRIC countries would see an increase of 2% to 3%. If we lose 20% of our total trade, the best we can do with the biggest economies in the world is to claw back maybe 5% or 6%. It is a pretty bad starting point. How does the Minister intend to ensure that there is a real focus on filling the gap and making sure that no part of the country, no part of the economy and no workforce is sacrificed on the altar of Brexit ideology?

5.18 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): In congratulating the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey) on securing the debate, I call on the Minister to deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie). What the hon. Member for North Warwickshire failed to address was not so much the need for seven or eight new planets, but the gaping black hole that cannot be filled by the figures he gave for how we will replace trade with the EU.

It is fitting that we are debating the future of international trade at the same time as Members in the main Chamber are discussing Labour's call to declare a climate emergency. The opportunities in the low-carbon economy for trade in goods and services as part of—as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said—the global economic benefits of \$26 trillion, need to be at the heart of our industrial and trade strategy. However, before concentrating on the export potential of renewable technology, I will spend a few minutes on other topics.

Trade in services is vital to our economy. The hon. Member for North Warwickshire mentioned the importance of insurance, and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) mentioned the other service parts of the economy that are crucial to his constituents. Trade in services represents the majority of the economy, driving jobs and prosperity to Britain, and it will be significantly impacted by the nature of our future relationship with the EU. Having a strong relationship with the internal market of the EU is therefore essential.

Turning to the Government's failure to make progress in negotiating replacements for the 43 agreements with 70 or so countries to which we are party through our membership of the EU, at the last count we were told that four deals were off track, 19 were significantly off track, four were impossible to complete and two were not even being negotiated. Perhaps the Minister can update us. It is no good the Government's saying we should have voted for the Prime Minister's deal. The fact that the details of the future relationship with the EU will be negotiated only after we have left means that what is on offer is blind Brexit. That is why the Opposition cannot support the current deal.

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): Is it the view of the Labour party that we should have disregarded the EU's statement that, under its laws, it did not think it was possible to negotiate the future partnership until after we had left?

Bill Esterson: That is another debate. I will stick to the topic of international trade and future arrangements.

As any business person knows, you look after existing relationships first and maximise them—something I learned through running a business for 15 years. The same principle applies to countries, which is why a close relationship with our biggest trading partner is essential. Meanwhile, there is no sign of the Trade Bill returning from the Lords, and Government plans to implement zero tariffs unilaterally really would create a disincentive for countries to negotiate a trade deal with us, because we would be giving away the shop before negotiations started and would have nothing to offer in return for a trade deal.

I want to give the Minister plenty of time to respond, so in the time remaining I will speak about the low-carbon economy and the need to address the climate emergency. This Government's record in international trade is a cause for concern in relation to the low-carbon economy: £2.362 billion of UK export finance over the past five years has been spent on exports to low and middle-income countries in the energy sector relating to fossil fuels, with just £1 million invested in the renewables sector. If we are serious about tackling climate change, those figures need to be completely reversed, so it is disappointing that after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report last autumn, this Government announced that they were considering support for a Bahrain oil refinery.

We have many success stories in renewable energy; we are often world leaders in technology—Windhoist, for example, sells wind turbines to Taiwan and Australia—but for other companies there is only frustration. Award-winning exporter Nova Innovation exports tidal energy equipment. Its chief executive officer, Simon Forrest, says:

“At the moment, we hold the trump cards in marine power—the resource is abundant, it's completely predictable, we have a global lead and we have got the supply chain. What we don't have is revenue support to take us to market. That's what Denmark did with wind, and we didn't. Having built up this lead, we will lose it to Canada or Japan.”

We cannot afford to let that happen in sectors such as tidal energy. We can be leaders in the low-carbon economy. Meeting the challenge of the climate emergency can deliver future prosperity through a proper industrial and international trade strategy in renewables, not fossil fuels. It is time to develop the future, not the past.

5.23 pm

The Minister for Trade Policy (George Hollingbery): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey) for introducing this important debate, and thank hon. Members from across the House for the many informed contributions, which I will return to before I have finished.

This debate is important because trade really matters to the UK. At £634 billion last year—equivalent to 30% of GDP—exports are not some separate add-on to our economy; they are integral to it. That is before we even get to our record £1.3 trillion of foreign direct investment, which last year alone created 76,000 new jobs, or the benefit of imports in giving us a wider choice of more affordable goods.

That is not the high-water mark, however: there are more opportunities to come. The patterns of world trade are shifting. We are entering a Pacific century after four Atlantic ones. The latest World Bank figures show China adding an economy the size of Portugal's to its GDP ever four months—a pretty astonishing statistic. The UK will be one of the few developed countries to stay in the top 10. We can take advantage of that shift if we act now. That is why the Government have consulted on new trade agreements with the USA, Australia and New Zealand, and on potential accession to the catchily named Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, a cross-Pacific agreement that covers 11 nations and already 13% of the world's GDP, including many of the growing markets to which my hon. Friend referred in his speech.

The nature of trade is also shifting. McKinsey estimates that digital trade flows contribute more to the world economy than the entire trade in goods. Services are becoming ever more international. The UK is well placed to take advantage of those trends, too. We have a flourishing digital sector, with Europe's largest e-commerce market. We are the second largest service exporter and, as my hon. Friend mentioned, we have particular strengths in areas such as insurance, where Lloyd's is the world leader in maritime risk and specialist insurance and reinsurance.

That is why, in December, we submitted our WTO service schedules, to give continuity for our service exporters, and why, once we represent ourselves at the World Trade Organisation, we will be pushing for further liberalisation and further reform within the rules-based, consent-based, multilateral framework it provides. That also means looking beyond traditional trade agreements, which is why my Department has secured market access for everything from energy trading in China, to beef and lamb in Japan.

My hon. Friend mentioned a report by the London Market Group. As a specific response to that report, we have set up a new workstream with LMG to promote insurers in Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries. I saw that at first hand when I visited Singapore not long ago and met Prudential, which is working with Babylon. Amazingly, Prudential has a subsidiary in Malaysia that is nearly 100 years old and another in Singapore that is 85 years old. It has subsidiaries in Vietnam and in Indonesia and business throughout the ASEAN region, and I was very impressed by its attitude. It understood the power of data and of digital to allow it to insure more properly.

Colleagues have raised a number of issues, and I would like to deal with one or two of those. We have published a Command Paper on scrutiny and have made it absolutely clear that we wish to be transparent in how trade deals are dealt with in the House of Commons. The House of Commons, and indeed the House of Lords, should have full and proper scrutiny and we are pursuing those models. We are coming to a conclusion about the way in which we wish to do that and no doubt we will in due course negotiate with various parties in the House.

The hon. Members for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) and for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) both noted that services are at the centre of the UK's agenda. Barriers to trade in services are generally behind the border, and with free trade agreements we deal with those issues through joint economic forums and multilateral interactions.

An independent trade policy is an opportunity for the UK. I understand the issue of the weight of 600 million people, but that also means that our trade policy is compromised. It is compromised in a good way—do not get me wrong—but it is designed to fit 28 nations. With a UK-based trade policy, we, with the sixth largest economy—or the fifth largest, depending on how it is measured—will have a tailored free-trade policy, which will be for the UK alone, and there will plainly be advantages in that.

The hon. Members for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), for Harrow West and for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) made plain that what they want is no Brexit at all. We all have starting points on that question. I would describe myself as a democrat first and a remainer second, and the British people, while they did not speak with an absolutely unified voice on this issue, have told us that we should leave the EU. The hon. Members' proposition simply does not deliver Brexit.

On continuity agreements, most Members will agree that there are all sorts of different motivations among our partners.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Will the Minister give way?

George Hollingbery: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the clock, he will see that I cannot give way. Actually, rather than finishing my speech, I ought to give my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire space to sum up. I thank all hon. Members.

5.29 pm

Craig Tracey: I thank all hon. Members for taking part. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) that we need a lot more time to debate the issue. I thank everybody for their contributions and the Minister for his encouraging response. It is probably no surprise that I do not share the Opposition's negativity about our ability to succeed outside the EU; I look forward to our soon getting the opportunity to put that into action.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered future international trade opportunities for the UK.

5.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 1 May 2019

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Health and Social Care Providers

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dineneage): Yesterday, 30 April 2019, Four Seasons healthcare group announced that they have appointed Richard Fleming, Mark Firmin and Richard Beard (Alvarez and Marsal) as administrators to Elli Investments Limited (EIL Guernsey) and Elli Finance (UK) Plc (EFUK). These two companies between them hold £625 million of the company's debt. It has also announced the launch of an independent sales process of the operational parts of the group, Four Seasons healthcare, Brighterkind and the Huntercombe group, which will continue to deliver care as normal.

The group has been going through financial restructuring negotiations with its main creditor H/2 Capital Partners since December 2017 with a standstill agreement on its interest payments in place. This agreement has been extended several times, with the latest of these having expired at 23:59 on 29 April. The planned sale of the operating businesses, through an independent, court appointed administrator, will now bring greater certainty to those in care, their families and the 22,000 people employed by the company.

I would like to update the House on the steps being taken to assure people with care and support needs currently being met by the Four Seasons healthcare group that they should not see a gap in their care service—no matter how their care is funded.

I have met with the company and the administrator to seek assurance that they are putting the continuity of care at the forefront of this process and that there will be no sudden care home closures. I am pleased to confirm that they have provided both me and the Care Quality Commission with this reassurance.

In the event that a buyer is not found for any of the care homes, the company has undertaken to manage any future plans around the transition of care with great sensitivity, taking time to ensure that residents are supported to find a new home.

In 2014, the law was changed giving the CQC a new responsibility to monitor the financial sustainability of the largest and most-difficult-to-replace care providers across the country. That means the CQC has a legal duty to notify local authorities if it considers there to be a credible risk of service disruption (stage 6 notification) as a result of business failure so that they have more time to prepare their plans to protect individuals. The CQC is clear that there is no current risk of service disruption and is not issuing a stage 6 notification to local authorities at this time.

The Care Act 2014 also places duties on local authorities to intervene to protect individuals where their care provider is no longer able to carry on because of business failure. There should never be a gap in the care that an individual receives. Local authorities have a statutory

duty under section 48(2) of the Care Act to meet the needs of individuals temporarily if their care provider is no longer able to carry on. Business failure is a normal part of a functioning market and local authorities have appropriate plans in place to minimise disruption of services

The CQC and my Department are closely monitoring the situation. They are also working closely with the Local Government Association, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, NHS England and Four Seasons healthcare group to ensure that individuals' care and support needs continue to be met.

[HCWS1532]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Building Safety: Combustible Materials

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): The Government's building safety programme has focused primarily on immediate interim mitigation actions and permanent replacement of unsafe aluminium composite material (ACM) panels on high-rise buildings because of the acute risks posed by such panels.

In addition, we have banned the use of combustible materials in the exterior walls of all new residential buildings over 18 metres in height and certain other new high-rise buildings. We have acted on the advice of the Government's independent expert advisory panel (IEAP) and issued advice to building owners about the steps they should take to ensure the safety of their existing buildings with other external wall systems that do not incorporate ACM, reiterating that the clearest way to ensure safety is to remove any unsafe materials. This advice was first issued in December 2017 and updated in December 2018 in the Department's advice note 14:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-building-safety-programme#advice-notes>

The IEAP also advised the Department to establish a research project to test and improve the evidence available on the behaviour of a range of non-ACM materials used in cladding systems when subjected to fire. The Building Research Establishment (BRE), has been commissioned to undertake this project.

The materials to be tested are: copper and zinc composite materials; aluminium honeycomb panels; high-pressure laminate panels; brick slips; and reconstituted stone. Tests will be carried out over the coming weeks and are expected to conclude in early summer.

A number of parameters characterising the behaviours of materials in a fire will be considered. The aim of the tests is to provide comparative data to enable an assessment of relative risks. There is no simple pass or fail criterion for each test. A copy of the methodology has been put in the Library of the House.

A full picture of the outcomes of the tests can only be provided following a detailed analysis of all the test data. We expect this analysis to be completed in the summer and we will publish the conclusions of the programme thereafter.

If any tests suggest an immediate public safety concern, the Government will consult the IEAP urgently, consider appropriate action, and inform the House and public accordingly.

In the meantime, building owners should follow the advice set out in advice note 14.

[HCWS1533]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Executive

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): This statement is issued in accordance with section 4 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act 2018 (EFEF Act). Section 4 of the Act requires that I, as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, report on a quarterly basis on guidance issued under that section of the Act. It also required me to report on how I plan to address the impact of the absence of Northern Ireland Ministers on human rights obligations within three months of the day the Act was passed.

The Act received Royal Assent on 1 November 2018. Following careful consideration of the sensitive issues section 4 deals with, and in consultation with the Northern Ireland civil service, guidance under section 4 was published on 17 December 2018.

The first report required under section 4 was published as a written ministerial statement on 30 January 2019. It is again worth reiterating that abortion and same sex-marriage are devolved matters in Northern Ireland, and neither the EFEF Act nor the section 4 guidance change Northern Ireland's law in relation to these issues or enable the law to be changed by way of guidance issued in my capacity as Secretary of State.

I appeared before the Women and Equalities Committee on 27 February 2019 to provide evidence as part of its enquiry into abortion law in Northern Ireland. I welcome the Committee's work on this important issue and the report it published on 25 April 2019. The Government will carefully consider the Committee's report and recommendations and respond in due course.

As before, I have consulted the head of the Northern Ireland civil service in the preparation of this report. He has advised that the Northern Ireland Departments continue to note the guidance and comply with their legal obligations when exercising any relevant functions in relation to abortion and same sex-marriage. He has also confirmed that relevant Departments are also considering the Women and Equalities Committee's report.

I continue to believe that the current absence of devolved government in Northern Ireland should not dislodge the principle that it is for the devolved administration to both legislate on, and ensure compliance with, human rights obligations in relation to such devolved matters. I would encourage a restored Executive to progress legislation on these issues as a matter of priority.

Restoring the Executive remains my absolute priority. As I announced on Friday 26 April 2019, the Government have agreed, together with the Irish Government, to

establish a new process of political talks, involving all the main political parties in Northern Ireland, in accordance with the three-stranded approach. The aim of these talks, commencing on 7 May 2019, is to quickly re-establish the democratic institutions of the Belfast agreement so that they can effectively serve all of the people for the future. I am firmly of the view that the people of Northern Ireland need their elected representatives back in government to take important decisions on the issues that matter most to them.

As I have previously stated, I will keep the Government's position on abortion and same-sex marriage under review in the light of the UK Government's legal obligations, and in the light of any relevant emerging legal judgments, as appropriate.

[HCWS1530]

TRANSPORT

Heathrow Expansion

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): The Government welcome today's judgments from the High Court in the judicial review of the airports national policy statement. Of 26 grounds, all were dismissed with 21 of the 26 not even held to be arguable. The positive outcome confirms my belief that Government undertook a robust process in coming to their decision to support a new northwest runway at Heathrow airport by 2030. This was one of the largest public law challenges of all time and I am pleased that the hard work of the independent Airports Commission and the Department has been shown in good light. In designating the airports national policy statement, this Government demonstrated their willingness to take difficult decisions, resolving an issue with which successive administrations had grappled for decades.

Heathrow expansion is more important than ever as we plan to exit the EU. Connectivity to our only aviation hub airport is vital to productivity, and expansion is critical if global Britain is to attract inward investment and increase trade with new and fast growing overseas markets. It would better connect the UK to the rest of world with an extra 16 million long-haul seats available by 2040. Heathrow expansion is a decision that benefits communities up and down the country—as well as the tens of thousands of local jobs it would create, expansion is expected to increase the number of domestic routes from our hub airport to 14; we have already seen the arrival of direct flights to Newquay, allowing easy access to the UK's only hub airport from the southwest.

In addition to new international and domestic routes, we would expect there to be increased competition on existing routes, giving greater choice to passengers. Heathrow Airport Limited has also made good progress on its logistics hub proposals—these aim to leave a lasting skills legacy across the UK. Today's decisions by the Court are another step towards realising these benefits.

This Government recognise that airport expansion cannot be at any cost. Expansion at Heathrow would only take place in compliance with air quality legal limits. For those communities impacted by the scheme, a world class package of mitigations would be provided

and, despite the third runway, a future Heathrow would be quieter than it was in 2013 as new, quieter, planes come online and robust noise mitigations are rolled out. To get people to and from the expanded airport, Heathrow must ensure more people travel by public transport—supported by the expected development of western and southern rail links.

I want to address climate change where the UK continues to lead internationally. While international aviation emissions currently represent less than 2% of total global emissions, we recognise the challenge that decarbonisation of aviation represents. International aviation emissions are currently excluded from UK carbon budgets—this is consistent with the Paris agreement, which looks to the International Civil Aviation Organisation to provide leadership. The UK supports this approach and is continuing to lead negotiations on this issue. In coming to our decision to support expansion at Heathrow, the Airports Commission and the Department concluded that expansion is possible within the UK's current climate change obligations and the Committee on Climate Change's recommended limit for aviation emissions. We are clear that expansion would only take place if it would not materially impact the ability of Government to meet their carbon reduction targets now and in the future.

The Government are currently consulting on their aviation strategy Green Paper, which creates a plan for sustainable growth that benefits the whole of the UK to 2050 and beyond. In developing the strategy, we will carefully consider the Committee on Climate Change's forthcoming advice on the implications of the Paris agreement for the UK's long-term emissions reduction targets.

Next steps

Scarce taxpayers' resources—on all sides—would be better spent elsewhere. If the Court grants permission for any appeals, we will seek to have them dealt with as quickly as possible. However, I urge all parties, particularly local authorities and community groups affected by the proposals, to move forward and engage closely with the planning process. As part of this, Heathrow Airport Limited has said it will undertake a consultation on its scheme masterplan in June. This will provide an opportunity for interested parties to give their views on the emerging scheme design. Heathrow would then apply for development consent which would be considered by the planning inspectorate, before a recommendation is made to Government.

Outside of the planning process, the Civil Aviation Authority will continue to work with industry and Heathrow to ensure expansion can be delivered in a timely, financeable and affordable manner that is in the best interests of the consumer.

This Government have taken the right decision, endorsed by a large majority of MPs, which had been ducked by other Governments for decades. The expansion of Heathrow is vital to our international connectivity and shows confidence in the future prosperity of global Britain. The Court's decision confirms that the right process was followed throughout. We could not be more pleased with the outcome which will benefit people and businesses the length and breadth of the UK for decades to come.

[HCWS1531]

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 1 May 2019

EDUCATION

School Funding

The following is an extract from the Back-Bench debate on School Funding on Thursday 25 April 2019.

Nick Gibb: I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton); as a neighbouring MP, I find I always do. He will be aware that funding in his constituency has risen by 5.5% per pupil compared with 2017. That is one of the highest increases and reflects the historical underfunding of West Sussex schools—something the national funding formula was introduced to address. He referred to teachers’

pay, which is due to rise by 3.5% for teachers on the main pay scale and by 2% for those on the upper pay scale.

[Official Report, 25 April 2019, Vol. 658, c. 971.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for School Standards:

An error has been identified in my response to the debate.

The correct information should have been:

Nick Gibb: I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton); as a neighbouring MP, I find I always do. He will be aware that funding in his constituency has risen by 5.5% per pupil compared with 2017. That is one of the highest increases and reflects the historical underfunding of West Sussex schools—something the national funding formula was introduced to address. He referred to teachers’ pay, which **has risen** by 3.5% for teachers on the main pay scale and by 2% for those on the upper pay scale.

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MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

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