

**Monday
24 June 2019**

**Volume 662
No. 318**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 24 June 2019

House of Commons

Monday 24 June 2019

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: I must advise the House that last Friday I received notification from the petition officer for the constituency of Brecon and Radnorshire, in respect of the recall petition for Chris Davies. The recall petition process for the constituency of Brecon and Radnorshire, established under the Recall of MPs Act 2015, closed on Thursday last at 5 pm. In total, 10,005 people signed the petition for the removal of Chris Davies as Member of Parliament for Brecon and Radnorshire. As this number was greater than 10% of those eligible to sign the petition, the petition was successful. Chris Davies has therefore ceased to be the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire, and the seat is accordingly vacant. He can 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.]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

The Secretary of State was asked—

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

1. **David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure his Department's policies are compliant with the UN convention on the rights of the child.

[911504]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): I am sure colleagues have enjoyed the bevy of sport over the weekend, especially the tennis, but I think we would all want to congratulate the Lionesses on winning 3-0 against the Cameroon and, of course, on reaching the quarter-finals, where I hope they will quickly dispose of the Norway option to get to the semi-finals.

The use of children's rights impact assessments is widely promoted across the Department and wider Government, and our assessment template is designed to help staff to give due consideration to the UNCRC when making new policy and legislation.

David Hanson: May I first take a moment to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on serving 10 years in the Chair? That is worthy of recognition.

Will the Minister give some indication of when the results of the consultation on the restraint of children will be published? The consultation closed in January 2018, having commenced in 2017. When is it going to happen?

Mr Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman very warmly for what he has said.

Nadhim Zahawi: May I add my congratulations, Mr Speaker, on your 10 years in the Chair?

The consultation will be published very, very shortly.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): When do the Government expect to announce a national free school dinner scheme for poorer children during the holidays, based on the successful pilots the Department has been running over the past two years?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who helped to make sure those pilots happened. We are investing £9 million in holiday activities and food programmes. This summer, children in 11 local authorities will receive healthy meals, learn about the importance of healthy eating and enjoy enriching physical activities during the summer holiday. Decisions on the programme beyond March 2020 will be taken as part of the spending review, but I certainly think it has been a great success.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I also congratulate you on 10 years, Mr Speaker. What is quite scary is that we have been here for four of them now.

On Friday I had the pleasure of meeting Hillhead High School S3. They are taking part in the "Send my Friend to School" campaign, which talks about the right of children all over the world to access education under the convention. What steps is the Department taking to work with the Department for International Development on ensuring that the right to education we enjoy in this country is accessed all around the world?

Nadhim Zahawi: We work closely with other Departments. In fact, the permanent secretary of the Department for Education has written to all other permanent secretaries to make sure that we deliver on our promise. Of course, we are making that commitment across Government.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): All I can say on your 10th anniversary, Mr Speaker, is that you do not look old enough.

Article 23 of the convention guarantees the right to education for children with disabilities, yet just this weekend we heard how that basic right has become a privilege, with parents forced to go to the courts to get support for their children. Years since the Prime Minister promised to tackle the burning injustices, and just weeks before she is due to leave office, they burn brighter than ever before. Can the Minister tell us when the Prime Minister and the Chancellor will stop haggling over our children's future in the press and come back to this House with a statement announcing the funding they so desperately need?

Nadhim Zahawi: As the hon. Lady knows, we have increased funding for children with special educational needs and disabilities by £250 million, taking it to £6.3 billion. We have also introduced a system that covers the ages from zero all the way up to 25, through the 2014 reforms, and so many more children and young people are eligible for education, health and care plans, with rights of appeal. Inevitably, this leads to an increase in the number of appeals, but the vast majority of cases are handled without going to appeal—only 1.6% of them go to an appeal decision. As she will know, many local authorities have almost no appeals whatsoever and we are attempting to learn from best practice and spread it throughout the system.

Free Childcare

2. Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effect of the provision of 30 hours' free childcare on the financial viability of childcare settings. [911505]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): The 30 hours' entitlement has been a real success story for this Government, with an estimated 600,000 children benefiting in the first two years of the programme.

Christian Matheson: Nursery schools in Chester are closing and parents are being charged for extras just so that the nursery schools can make ends meet. Will the Minister not accept that there are real problems with the funding of this programme, and will he agree to review it?

Nadhim Zahawi: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his supplementary. We do keep a close eye in monitoring the provider, the market and of course the cost base. Under the early years national funding formula, our average rates to local authorities are higher than the average hourly costs of providing childcare to three and four-year-olds, but he makes an important contribution, in the sense that we have to keep an eye on the costs. Ofsted has essentially done the work; the number of childcare places has remained broadly stable since the introduction of the 30 hours' programme.

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): The cost of childcare is prohibitive for many families and can dissuade women from returning to the workplace, but those financial pressures are doubled and sometimes tripled for parents of multiples. What work is the Minister doing to assist those families to deal with the especial financial challenges of childcare provision for twins and triplets, particularly those families on middle incomes, who may not qualify for the child allowance or other benefits?

Nadhim Zahawi: Clearly, the programme aims to make sure that parents who are working are able to receive the entitlements. Of course, we deliver entitlements for two-year-olds for the most disadvantaged families in this country, but I will happily look at the question of parents with twins or triplets as well.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) sports an admirable tie, about which my only reservation is that it is a tad understated.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Mr Speaker, this is the limited edition Beatles "Magical Mystery Tour" tie, which is very appropriate at this stage in our parliamentary life.

May I say to the Minister that I do not want statistics? The National Day Nurseries Association is based in my constituency and a Prime Minister many years ago prioritised "Education. Education. Education." What he knows, and I know, is that early years stimulation is the most important priority of any Government, so why is early years care so expensive for young couples and young women in this country, and why has the Minister not done something about it?

Nadhim Zahawi: The numbers are important in this case and the 600,000 children benefiting from the 30 hours in the first two years means 600,000 families who have been able to go out to work. Of course, 700,000 of the most disadvantaged families with two-year-olds have also benefited. We are spending £3.5 billion on entitlements, which is a record to be proud of. I should also mention the hon. Gentleman's tie, which is very beautiful.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that this Government's reforms, such as the 30 hours' free childcare for three and four-year-olds, are helping more children to grow up to develop their full potential, regardless of their background?

Nadhim Zahawi: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. The parents whom I have met and with whom I meet regularly tell me that it has made an enormous difference. Parents who hardly saw each other are able to work and to see each other and their child. One lady said movingly that her child came out of his shell because he was able to spend more time with children his age, too.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): On many occasions, the Minister has told us that what he really cares about is quality and sustainability. Will he explain how he is improving quality when the National Day Nurseries Association's most recent data shows that 55% of childcare settings plan to spend less on training; that one in five settings are lowering the quality of food served to children to make ends meet; and that more than 40% of settings have cut back on learning resources? On sustainability, 17% of nurseries in deprived areas anticipate closure in the next year. How is that sustainable? Given that the Minister's priorities are not being met, will he at least acknowledge that some nurseries are struggling and take action to ensure that deprived areas are not disproportionately affected?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am sure the hon. Lady will agree with me and the whole House that the organisation that should be responsible for quality should be independent from Government, and that organisation is Ofsted, which states clearly that the overall quality in the sector remains high. Ofsted says that 95% of the providers in the early years register that have been inspected were judged to be good or outstanding. That is a good track record. We can always do better and the hon. Lady is right to say that we have to keep a close eye on funding, because some providers are challenged, but that does not mean that we do down the whole sector. It is wrong to talk down the sector in that way.

School Budgets

3. Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the financial sustainability of school budgets. [911506]

8. Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of funding for schools. [911513]

20. Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the financial sustainability of school budgets. [911526]

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): Congratulations on your 10 years in office, Mr Speaker.

We are spending £43.5 billion on schools this year, but we recognise the budgeting challenges that schools face and will continue to listen to teachers, to help us to inform decisions about future funding. As we prepare for the spending review, the Government are determined to ensure that schools have the resources they need to deliver high-quality education and that our reforms continue to drive up education standards.

Bambos Charalambous: I thank the Minister for meeting me and local headteachers from my Enfield, Southgate constituency last week. I know that he gets the problems with school funding, but I do not believe that the Chancellor does. Will the Minister join me in demanding more funding for schools from the Chancellor?

Nick Gibb: It was a real pleasure to meet all the headteachers to whom the hon. Gentleman introduced me on Wednesday, including Kate Baptiste, the headteacher at St Monica's Primary School, where 78% of pupils achieve at least the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. That is way above the national average of 64%. In fact, all the headteachers were from schools with high standards. We had a constructive discussion about the challenges that those heads face in respect of school funding, and we will take all those challenges on board, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, as we prepare for the spending review and our discussions with the Treasury.

Wera Hobhouse: The funding crisis for schools in Bath is getting worse and worse. For example, one school has not employed a new teaching assistant in three years and another has only one teaching assistant for every 102 pupils. Only two weeks ago, teachers and parents went on a huge march in Bath to express their alarm about the threat to their children's education. What can the Minister say to them?

Nick Gibb: The hon. Lady will be aware that schools in her Bath constituency have attracted 6.3% more funding per pupil this year, compared with 2017-18. There are now 10,000 more teachers in our system and 40,000 more teaching assistants are employed today, compared with 2010. As I said to the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous), we will make the strongest possible case to secure the right deal for education in the spending review.

Lilian Greenwood: In March, I surveyed Nottingham South schools about the effects of funding cuts, and their responses were frankly disturbing. They revealed concerns not only about their inability to buy books and equipment but about pupils being unable to attend school full time because a lack of special educational needs provision. One headteacher even told me that their school may have to close the hall and dining room because it cannot afford to undertake the urgent repairs that are needed. Will the Minister tell parents in my constituency what he is doing to secure extra funding for Nottingham schools in the forthcoming spending review?

Nick Gibb: The hon. Lady will be aware that, since 2017, every local authority has been given more money for every five to 16-year-old pupil in every school, with the biggest increases being allocated to schools that have been most underfunded. As for special educational needs funding, that has increased from £5 billion a year in 2013 to £6.3 billion this year, but as I have said to other hon. Members we will be making a strong case to the Treasury as part of the spending review process.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the report by the Children's Commissioner and the Institute for Fiscal Studies stating that education spending per pupil at primary schools is up 80% under this Government? Across my constituency, schools are receiving a very welcome above national average uplift in funding, including schools in my most deprived areas, which will go to support pupils of all abilities to perform better and close the gap between them and their peers?

Nick Gibb: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I pay tribute to her for her interest and passion for educational standards in her constituency. She will be aware that, compared with 2017-18, per pupil funding in Medway is going up by 3.4% and in Kent by 6%. On top of the national funding formula, Medway will receive £12 million and Kent £57.7 million in pupil premium funding.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I add my congratulations to you, Mr Speaker. I hope that you get your testimonial.

Broad Oak School in my constituency is under threat of closure. It is heavily dependent on its pupil ratio, but the number of pupils it has is down by about 60%. The wider area is down by 20%. What more can the Department do to encourage local authorities to make sure that we build the homes in the areas where we have falling rolls at schools?

Nick Gibb: Of course, we have a presumption against the closure of small rural schools. Closing a school is a very difficult decision to take, but my hon. Friend is right. This is a Government who are committed to ensuring that young people can get on to the housing ladder and, because we have a strong economy and a determination to build those houses, we hope that young people will have the homes that they need.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The Minister knows very well that, while I broadly welcome the increase in funding in Wiltshire, schools that are funded under the

private finance initiative have particular difficulties. Abbeyfield in my constituency has historic debt and therefore cannot become an academy. Royal Wootton Bassett has had a very big cut in its budget overall, and Malmesbury has some detailed problems with regard to IT under the PFI contract. If I were to convene such a thing, would the Minister agree to meet with the three heads from the three secondary schools I have mentioned, either here or, even better, in Wiltshire?

Nick Gibb: I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and the headteachers of the schools concerned. We do specifically, in most cases, fund PFI costs that relate to schools through the national funding formula, but I do understand the pressures and problems that PFI can cause during the process of academy conversion. Our officials are becoming increasingly experienced at handling those challenges, but I will meet my hon. Friend with those headteachers.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): The Minister talks about the funding going into schools, but the fact that he admits that those schools have increased costs shows that there are real-terms cuts to those schools. Members across the House have told him that many times, and he would be advised to take that on board. Let me see whether he will be more open about another report, which suggests that the national funding formula will be delayed by the Treasury in order to reserve money for a no-deal contingency fund. Can he give us any guarantee today on the timetable for that much-needed formula?

Nick Gibb: We are having discussions across Government on these issues of school funding and as we lead up to the spending review. We understand the need for schools to have clarity about their level of school funding and we are committed to the national funding formula, which is a much fairer way of distributing funding to our schools.

Angela Rayner: I am not sure we are any wiser about the outgoing Prime Minister's plans, so let me turn to the future. The leading candidate—the blond one, not the bland one—promises minimum funding of £5,000 per pupil, but can the Minister confirm that this is under £50 million a year, an increase of just 0.1% in the total schools budget? Does he accept that this amount is less than the increase promised in his party's manifesto, less than the amount that the outgoing Prime Minister apparently accepts is needed and, I hope, less than the amount that he will ask for at the spending review?

Nick Gibb: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the specific proposals of the contenders, although I am very pleased that all the contenders in the leadership contest have made education a focus of their platforms. We are committed to ensuring that schools are properly funded, and that work is happening now as we prepare for the spending review.

Early Literacy: Phonics

4. **Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What recent assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of teaching early literacy through phonics. [911507]

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): There is significant evidence that systematic phonics is a highly effective method for teaching early reading. In 2018, 82% of six-year-olds met the expected standard in the phonics check, compared with just 58% when we introduced the check in 2012. Furthermore, 88% of pupils meeting the phonics standard in 2013 went on to meet the year 6 reading test standard in 2018.

Dr Johnson: I agree with the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), who said earlier that early intervention is very important. I am pleased to see that, as a result of these phonics changes, England has risen to joint eighth place in the progress in international reading literacy study—up from joint 10th in 2011, and well up from the low of 19th position under a Labour Government.

My son Wilfred has just started learning his phonics—something he enjoys and that I know he will do well at, given the good base that the Government are offering. Will my right hon. Friend agree with me that boosting pupil literacy is key to getting our children the best possible start in life?

Nick Gibb: My hon. Friend is, of course, absolutely right. Reading is a fundamental building block for a successful education, and the fact that more children are now reading more effectively will help them develop a habit and love of reading and prepare them for the higher demands on their reading ability when they start secondary school.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The literacy rates of primary school children dramatically improve when they are read to in class on a daily basis. What is the Minister for School Standards doing to encourage that?

Nick Gibb: As my hon. Friend will know, we had this discussion when, with other Northamptonshire MPs, we met the local authority and the regional schools commissioner. It is important that children, at primary school in particular, are read to every day to improve their vocabulary. The better their vocabulary, the more easily they can comprehend what they are reading, and the more they can comprehend what they are reading, the more likely they are to read. That, in turn, will improve their vocabulary and knowledge.

School Places

5. **David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase the number of good school places in England. [911508]

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): I join colleagues from across the House in congratulating you on your decade, Mr Speaker. On the subject of nice round numbers, we are on track to create 1 million new places in schools this decade, primarily through building free schools and encouraging existing high-performing schools to expand.

David Morris: Does my right hon. Friend agree that continual investment in schools in Morecambe and Lunesdale has directly resulted in improvements in education standards?

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend has been a strong and consistent champion for his constituents and their education. Lancashire has been allocated £140 million over 2011 to 2021. In his constituency of Morecambe and Lunesdale, the proportion of schools rated good or outstanding has increased from 64% to 86%.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Lots of things make a school good. A headteacher who I met yesterday in my constituency had written to the Department for Education for a specific answer to a question. He did not feel that he had had that answer, so I am going to ask it today; I would appreciate a specific answer. What is a teacher to say to a child who asks, "Is it okay to be gay?"

Damian Hinds: They should say yes.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): It is very welcome that significantly more children are taught in good and outstanding schools in Northamptonshire now than in 2010. The enormous housing growth in Corby and East Northamptonshire is creating real demand for those places. Will my right hon. Friend keep banging the drum for more funding from the Treasury for school places?

Damian Hinds: Yes, indeed. We work with local authorities to make sure that we have up-to-date assessments and projections of the need for school places, and we fund to those projections to make sure that there is the right number of places. We are absolutely focused on making sure that we are doing that by expanding existing good and outstanding schools and putting in good new provision, which also improves diversity and choice.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating Johanne Clifton, the executive principal of Billesley Primary School, and its staff and pupils on achieving an outstanding rating in all Ofsted categories? This was previously a school that was in difficulty, and it is in a very disadvantaged part of my constituency. Does he realise, however, that schools like this need adequate resources in order to maintain commitment and achievement? Even a school like this is struggling financially at the moment.

Damian Hinds: I do recognise, of course, that that school and all schools need the right resources. I am also very happy to join the hon. Gentleman in his congratulation and commendation of Ms Clifton and all the staff, pupils and parents at the school.

OECD Programme for International Student Assessment

6. **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What comparative assessment his Department has made of the performance of the constituent parts of the UK in the OECD programme for international student assessment tables. [911510]

11. **Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): What comparative assessment his Department has made of the performance of the constituent parts of the UK in the OECD programme for international student assessment tables. [911516]

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): Performance in the PISA ranking system has remained stable in England and Northern Ireland since 2006.

John Lamont: Under the SNP, Scotland's education system has gone from being the best in the United Kingdom, with standards well above the OECD average, to third out of the home nations. Standards in reading, science and maths in Scotland have fallen to their lowest levels and are now no more than average. Average might be good enough for the SNP, but does the Secretary of State agree that the UK needs to be aiming higher and that the falls in standards in Scotland are shameful, particularly when the SNP Government claim to have education at the top of their priorities? [Interruption.]

Damian Hinds: I am not sure what the dismissive guttural noises from our friends in the SNP were all about. I share my hon. Friend's regret about the decline in maths and science, and I am pleased that he and colleagues both here and in the Scottish Parliament are holding the Scottish Government to account.

Luke Graham: What positive action can my right hon. Friend, and this Government, take to support the devolved Administrations to improve these results and give more transparency to my constituents?

Damian Hinds: Of course, we have regular contact with the different devolved Administrations on a range of matters, not only because there are always things that we can learn from each other, but because we have many shared interests and interdependencies, and education is yet another area where we can work better together as one United Kingdom.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): May I, Mr Speaker, join colleagues in wishing you congratulations on your 10 years in your position? You have done some marathon sessions recently, and it might be worth the House of Commons Library finding out what your total hourage in the Chair would be.

This week, Scottish schools break up for the summer holidays. I am sure the House will join me in wishing the pupils and the staff a very well-earned rest. May I give my very best wishes to Mr Andrew McSorley, the headteacher at St Thomas Aquinas Secondary School, who is retiring this week? In Scotland, we ensure that all young people remain in full-time education until the age of 16. In contrast, in England we see the increased use of permanent exclusions and off-rolling, meaning that results, including PISA results, are skewed by the removal of challenging pupils. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that all students in England remain in education and are included in results such as OECD and school league tables?

Damian Hinds: May I start on the happy note of joining the hon. Lady in congratulating Mr McSorley on his upcoming retirement and wishing the best to the pupils and staff at schools across Scotland as they move towards their holidays?

There are more years of compulsory education in England than there are in Scotland. As for permanent exclusions, of course I regret it when children have to be expelled, but sometimes it is necessary, and necessary

sometimes because of the other 27 children in the class. In fact, the rate of permanent exclusions that we see in schools today is lower than it was a decade ago when the Labour party was in government.

Sixth-Form Students: Funding

7. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): If he will implement the recommendation in the April 2019 Social Mobility Commission's state of the nation 2018 to 2019 report to increase significantly the national funding rate for sixth-form students. [911511]

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): Mr Speaker, may I add my congratulations to you on your 10 years in the Chair? I remember fondly sitting on the Opposition Benches by your side when I was first elected and being guided by your wise advice.

I fully recognise the critical role that sixth forms play in social mobility. When I visit colleges and sixth forms, I see living examples of that. We have protected the 16-to-19 base rate until the end of the current spending review period, but I am very aware of the cost pressures on providers and of the fact that funding has not kept up with costs. We are looking closely at 16-to-19 funding in preparation for the spending review.

Diana Johnson: I welcome what the Minister said about the value of sixth-form colleges such as Wyke in Hull North, which does an enormous amount of vital work to promote social mobility and develop the skills we need for a modern economy. There were 17.5% austerity cuts under the coalition Government. If we want to put that money back into the system, why do we not scrap tax relief for the charitable status of private schools?

Anne Milton: As I said, I am very aware of the cost pressures. Decisions such as the one the hon. Lady suggests are a matter for Her Majesty's Treasury. There is more money available, particularly to colleges, through apprenticeships. The money spent on apprenticeships will have doubled by 2020, and T-levels will attract an additional £500 million per year when fully rolled out, but as I say, we will consider this ahead of the spending review, because I am aware that funding has not kept up with the costs.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Schools in my constituency have been arguing for more funding at every level, but they particularly want a funding settlement for 16 to 19-year-olds that represents the pressures on them. What more can be done to ensure that there is a long-term settlement, not a year-on-year settlement? Planning long term is something that schools find enormously important.

Anne Milton: My hon. Friend raises an important point. The difficulty with managing budgets on an annual basis is that, in order to make provision and plans that are sustainable, colleges and schools often need a longer-term settlement. I am sure the Minister for School Standards and I will be raising exactly the point that she has made.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): The Government's own review of tertiary education said that there was no justification for funding 18-year-olds in sixth forms or

colleges at a lower rate than 17-year-olds and recommended that the baseline be raised. Does the Minister accept that the cuts in 2013 were a big mistake?

Anne Milton: We will be looking at all the Augar report's recommendations very carefully. The hon. Lady raises an important point, which will be part of our considerations when we formally respond to the report.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call the illustrious Chair of the Select Committee, Mr Robert Halfon.

Robert Halfon: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and congratulations.

I know that my right hon. Friend is a doughty campaigner for more further education funding, but the main estimates memorandum for 2019-20 shows that resource expenditure on further education on a like-for-like basis is falling by 3.3% in cash terms and more in real terms, and the Department for Education's capital budget for FE is also set to decrease by 40% from £186 million to £112 million. Can she explain the reason for the reduction and its impact?

Anne Milton: I had a delightful visit to a college in my right hon. Friend's constituency of Harlow that does an excellent job. Many further education colleges are doing an excellent job in difficult circumstances. As I have made clear, we are aware that funding has not kept up with costs.

Apprenticeship Levy

9. **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): What recent assessment his Department has made of the effect of the apprenticeship levy on the number of apprenticeships. [911514]

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): I am very aware of the number of apprenticeships, but comparing numbers before and after the reforms we have made is a bit like comparing apples and pears, because we have put quality at the heart of apprenticeships. The number of people starting on the new employer-designed standards in the first half of 2018-19 has increased by 79%, which is an indication of the quality. An apprenticeship must now last for a year, and there must be 20% off-the-job training. There has been an increase of 10% in apprenticeship starts in the first half of 2018-19, compared with the same period in 2017-18.

Richard Graham: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer, but chambers of commerce such as Business West do not think that the two-tier system is working as well as it could. Specialist Gloucestershire Engineering Training believes that more funding for small and medium-sized enterprises would enable them to train more engineering apprentices. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is something the Treasury should look at closely in the autumn spending review?

Anne Milton: We are determined to make the apprenticeship system work for small and medium-sized enterprises, and smaller businesses get 95% of their training costs paid. We will move smaller businesses on

to the apprenticeship system: we want to do that well and smoothly to make sure that we make it work for them.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Can the Minister explain why very good companies with generous apprenticeships and training schemes are making a net contribution to the Treasury through the levy scheme rather than being rewarded through tax relief or in other ways?

Anne Milton: Those decisions were made some time ago. They have enabled us to make sure that by 2020 spending on apprenticeships will have more than doubled since 2010.

Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): My felicitations on your first decade in office, Mr Speaker. Onwards and upwards!

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Ten more years!

Gordon Marsden: Indeed. We are hearing about the ups and downs of funding for apprenticeships, but the National Audit Office told the FE Ministers in March in no uncertain terms that there was a clear risk that the apprenticeship programme would now be financially unsustainable. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has said that it could be overspent by £0.5 billion this year. The Minister told *FE Week* in January that she thought that the apprenticeship budget would be “alright until July”. July is next week. Does she still think that?

Anne Milton: Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman has said, previously the apprenticeship system is working well, and levy payers in particular—and also small businesses—are grabbing at the opportunities that apprenticeships offer. I am aware of the budgetary pressures on the system and we will make representations ahead of the spending review on that point.

SATs: Pressure on Students

10. **Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the pressures on key stage 2 students undergoing SATs. [911515]

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): Assessment means that we can ensure that pupils everywhere are getting the standard of education that they should. Of course we want pupils to do their best but that should never be at the expense of their wellbeing.

Andrea Jenkyns: Congratulations, Mr Speaker.

I recently visited a primary school in my constituency rated good by Ofsted since 2005. The headteacher brought to my attention the level of difficulty and stress that key stage 2 children face when undergoing SATs. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how we can minimise exam stress for young children and would he like to complete one of the old tests with me?

Damian Hinds: I am not just saying this, but as it happens I last did one of the SATs papers—SPAG, or spelling, punctuation and grammar—on Thursday or

Friday last week. As I said in an earlier answer, the point of the assessments is to assess schools and make sure that wherever children grow up they get the standard of education that they deserve. The SATs are not about testing children, and they are not public exams that will stay with children into their adult life. They are not like GCSEs: nobody in a job interview will ever ask, “What did you get in your SATs?” We trust schools and teachers to administer SATs in an appropriate way so that stress is not put on to children. I meet many teachers who do exactly that.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I also offer my congratulations on your decade in the Chair, Mr Speaker. Interestingly, it is children born since you started sitting in the Chair who are coming up to taking SATs. I have heard countless stories from teachers up and down the country that they have kept children in during break times or sacrificed time that they would have otherwise spent on other subjects to prepare for SATs. Does the Secretary of State take no responsibility for that stress put on teachers, which inevitably filters down to children? Frankly, is it not just time to scrap SATs?

Damian Hinds: No, it is not. Notwithstanding the hon. Lady’s clever linking of your decade in the Chair with the age of children doing SATs, Mr Speaker, it is common practice around the world to have standardised assessment of one sort or another in primary schools. That was not always the case, but more and more countries—including most of the high-performing ones—recognise that they need a standardised way to assess children’s progress in different parts of the country. It was Government policy when the Liberal Democrats were in coalition with the Conservatives and, of course, it was policy when Labour was in government.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Ah, young Sir Patrick, looking as cheerful as ever.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): Is there any way to see whether pupils are being let down by their schools, other than seeing that they are not getting up to certain standards?

Damian Hinds: No, not in the same way. Standardised assessment is part of a suite of methods that we use, and Ofsted inspection is, of course, another very important part. The fact is that before we had standardised assessment, there were individual schools and, indeed, substantial parts of the country where children could have been let down not for one or a few years but for many years, and nothing was done about it, starting with the problem that nobody knew about it. SATs are a very important part of our architecture to raise attainment and, critically, to narrow the gap in performance between the rich and the poor.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I congratulate you on your 10 years, Mr Speaker. Sir Thomas More, who held your fine office, went on to become both a martyr and a saint. [*Laughter.*] I clearly hope it is the latter for you, Sir. And after this, maybe we could have a discussion about which moisturiser you use.

England's schoolchildren are among the most tested in the world. Headteachers are telling us that high-stakes examinations are associated with increased stress, anxiety and health issues, but the Secretary of State has let the cat out of the bag: we are staying stable in the programme for international student assessment rankings. That was the gold standard that this Government were going to be tested by, but that is sophistry, for standards have gone nowhere under this Government. The pressure and workload of the existing school assessment regime have also led to teachers leaving the profession in droves. Labour's pledge to scrap key stage 1 and 2 tests has been universally welcomed by teachers and parents alike. Given that the Minister for School Standards was already consulting on scrapping key stage 1 tests, is it not now time for the Secretary of State to make the same commitment?

Damian Hinds: It is not. May I in passing acknowledge that Robert Bolt, the author of "A Man for All Seasons", was, I think, a constituent in the hon. Gentleman's constituency? It is not and never will be the time to get rid of standardised assessment at primary school. As I said earlier, more countries around the world are seeing the value and importance of it. We do not know what the Labour party's alleged replacement for standardised assessment tests would be, but we do know two things about it: first, it would be less reliable; and secondly, it would require a lot more work for teachers.

School Standards

12. **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): What steps his Department has taken to raise standards in schools. [911517]

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): We have reformed the national curriculum and qualifications, raising expectations and providing rigorous GCSEs and A-levels, in which universities, employers and young people themselves can have greater confidence. As of March 2019, 85% of children were in good or outstanding schools, which is in part due to our reforms.

Alex Chalk: Formal partnerships between schools in different sectors, such as that between All Saints' Academy and Cheltenham College in my constituency, are an excellent way of sharing best teaching practice, enriching extracurricular provision and boosting the professional development of staff. Does the Minister recognise the scope of such partnerships for driving up standards in all our schools?

Nick Gibb: My hon. Friend is right: such partnerships are excellent. They raise standards, not just in state schools; they bring benefits to the independent schools that take part in them. The Government have just announced a new grant fund, which could be used either as seed funding for new partnerships or to expand and deepen existing ones.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): In response to questions about school standards and, indeed, school cuts, the Government often try to persuade us that nothing is wrong by citing the number of children in outstanding schools. Yet over the past year, 80% of the 305 schools rated outstanding by Ofsted saw their ratings fall. Will the Minister therefore now be honest about the impact that austerity is having on our schools?

Nick Gibb: We would expect the outstanding schools that are re-inspected to have a higher propensity to be either good or lower, because Ofsted inspects outstanding schools only when a risk factor, such as a drop in standards or complaints from parents, has been triggered.

Post-18 Education and Funding Review

13. **Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the merits of the recommendations of the Post-18 education and funding review. [911518]

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): Congratulations, Mr Speaker, on your 10th anniversary. If you view it as a marriage to this place, then this is your tin anniversary. May I say, however, that you have certainly not had a tin ear when it comes to representing all voices around this House? [HON. MEMBERS: "Groan!"]

Turning to the question, the independent panel's report, chaired by Philip Augar, reports to the Government. It is an important interim step in the review of post-18 education and funding. The Government will consider the panel's recommendations carefully and conclude the overall review at the spending review. The Government have not taken decisions with regard to the recommendations put forward.

Wes Streeting: I associate myself with the many fawning tributes to your period in office, Mr Speaker. [Laughter.]

I am not sure what was more embarrassing about the launch of the Augar review, the former Minister describing it as a report that will

"destabilise university finances, imperil many courses and reverse progress in widening access",

or the current Prime Minister acknowledging that, after nine years of Tory cuts, further education has been "overlooked, undervalued and underfunded". Will the Minister give us an assurance that the Government's approach will be one of levelling up funding and not of robbing Peter to pay Paul?

Chris Skidmore: It was an excellent launch of the report at the Policy Exchange; I do not remember the hon. Gentleman being there. I thank Philip Augar for an excellent piece of work, which has 53 recommendations, and I encourage all Members to read it. One disappointing factor was that there was not a single question from the media about further education until right at the end; it was all about higher education. That is a great shame. The report is a post-18 review looking at creating unity of purpose, following students across all parts of their life course. That is what the Government will consider when it comes to looking at the 53 recommendations as part of the spending review. We must ensure that the report is taken as a whole and that HE is not just plucked out.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): There are many positive recommendations in the Augar review, including the proposed lifelong learning loans which will be very welcome, but the proposed tuition fee cut could have a negative effect, reducing the money available for widening access. Can my hon. Friend assure me that we can ensure fair access and good outcomes for students, and not just seek a headline? Can we make sure that funding for universities is not reduced?

Chris Skidmore: Certainly. Unlike the Labour party, I am proud of the fact that the HE system has put an additional £6 billion of resource into universities since 2012 as a result of the fee level rise. On ensuring quality in our system, we want to look at the recommendations. One of the panel members was Edward Peck, vice-chancellor of Nottingham Trent University, of which I think my hon. Friend is an alumnus. It is right that we now work with all vice-chancellors. As Universities Minister, I will be hosting a series of roundtables to consult the sector to ensure that its voice is clearly heard.

National Funding Formula

15. **Neil O'Brien** (Harborough) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the effect of the national funding formula on (a) small primary schools and (b) schools in rural areas. [911520]

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): The national funding formula provides additional support for small primary schools and rural schools. For example, the sparsity factor allocates £25 million specifically to schools that are both small and remote. Coupled with the lump sum, a small rural primary school could attract up to £135,000 through those factors alone.

Neil O'Brien: Village schools are incredibly important institutions in rural life, but their numbers absolutely collapsed over the past 40 years. Will my right hon. Friend look very closely, in the run-up to the spending review, at increasing further that lump sum and the sparsity premium, so that we can protect these institutions?

Nick Gibb: We will keep the formula design under consideration and we will consider feedback on specific factors when developing the formula in the future. For this coming financial year, the formula is already fixed. However, as I said earlier we are in discussion and preparing for the spending review. We want the best possible settlement for small rural schools and the education sector as a whole.

Mr Speaker: We are running late, but I do not want the subject of special educational needs and disabilities to miss out, so we will take the next question. However, I appeal to the questioners to be particularly brief.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

17. **Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. [911522]

21. **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. [911527]

22. **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support children with special educational needs and disabilities in their education. [911528]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): The 2014 special educational needs and disabilities reforms were the biggest in a generation. Care Quality Commission SEND inspectors provide evidence of progress at a local level. High needs funding has increased to £6.3 billion in 2019-20.

Sarah Jones: A survey of headteachers in Croydon showed that 85% had been forced to cut special educational needs provision. We know that 50% of excluded kids have a special educational need, that a third of councils have no space left in their pupil referral units, and that not being in school is a particular risk factor for getting involved in criminal gangs. When will the Government wake up to this emergency and act? Actions have consequences.

Nadhim Zahawi: The hon. Lady would have been fair if she had also acknowledged that we launched a review of school exclusions, led by Edward Timpson. The Children and Families Act 2014 secures the presumption in law that children and young people with SEND should receive mainstream education—of course, 98.7% of them are educated in the mainstream. We have put £4 million into innovation funding to improve alternative provision as well.

Liz McInnes: The Local Government Association has said that councils are facing a national special needs emergency and require more funding to meet colossal demand. Does the Minister agree?

Nadhim Zahawi: There are clearly funding pressures on the system, which is why we have announced £250 million in additional funding to take the funding to £6.3 billion. We are in the middle of a spending review and I will be putting my best foot forward to make sure that we get the funding in place.

Debbie Abrahams: The £1.2 billion shortfall in SEND funding means that children with an education, health and care plan may be refused a local place because schools cannot afford to provide the support that these children need. Does the Minister agree that all children, regardless of their disability, should have the support that they need to reach their potential?

Nadhim Zahawi: I do; all children should have the ability to reach their potential, which is why we introduced the reforms in the first place in 2014. We are beginning to see really good practice in places such as Wiltshire and elsewhere, and we learn from best practice and try to scale it to other parts of the country.

Child Health: Healthy and Active Living

18. **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What guidance the Government issue to schools to encourage healthy and active living among children and young people. [911523]

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): The school food standards define how schools should provide healthy food and drink throughout the school day. Guidance is available for primary schools on how to use the £320 million PE and sport premium. We are also making health education compulsory, which will focus on healthy active living and mental wellbeing.

Theresa Villiers: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is crucial that we set achievable targets? In that regard, will he praise the golden kilometre initiative from the Mayor of Barnet to get children and young people running or walking for at least a kilometre a day?

Nick Gibb: I congratulate the mayor on the golden kilometre challenge, which is a very welcome initiative. I believe that every primary school should adopt either the golden kilometre challenge or the non-metric and slightly longer daily mile. Regular exercise is clearly linked to long-term health, which is why the new health curriculum guidance emphasises its importance.

Topical Questions

T1. [911529] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): This month, we approved 22 new free schools in underperforming areas that need the most. That brings us one step closer to delivering 1 million new school places by 2020, which will be the fastest growth for at least two generations. We announced a second wave of further education providers to teach T-level courses from 2021, bringing that total to over 100, and last week, I announced changes to in-year admissions, so that the most vulnerable children, such as those fleeing domestic abuse, can access a school place as quickly as possible.

Paul Blomfield: Although demand for special needs support across the north has risen by 39%, funding has risen by only 8%. In the next school year, Sheffield will receive £3.7 million less in the high needs block than even the Government say that we need. Unable to cope, mainstream schools are excluding increasing numbers of children with special needs. Local parents say that they are at breaking point. The children's Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi)—has admitted that more needs to be done, so when will the Government deliver what is needed for our most vulnerable children?

Damian Hinds: I acknowledge what the hon. Gentleman says about the increased strains on high needs budgets. As the Minister for School Standards, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Nick Gibb), said earlier, high needs spending has gone up, from £5 billion to £6.3 billion, and at the end of last year we put in place a package to ease the immediate strains on local authority high needs budgets. I recognise, however, that more needs to be done. For example, we need to look at how the reforms are working and at the role of educational psychologists and to make sure that where it is right for children they can be educated in a mainstream school.

T2. [911531] **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Last Thursday, I had the pleasure of attending the Peak awards at Derby College. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating all the winners, especially my constituent Ethan Lee, who was the overall winner for the academic studies award, and recognise the important role that further education colleges play in bridging the gap between schools and universities?

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating all the award winners, particularly Ethan, who won the academic studies award. Derby College does excellent work and FE colleges play an important role not only in vocational and technical education but in academic education. Some 160,000 young people study A-levels at colleges.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Although EU students arriving this year and next will continue to pay home fee rates, there is still ambiguity over their immigration status. Since they have only three years under European temporary leave to remain, students on longer courses, including all undergraduates in Scotland, have no guarantee of being able to complete their course. What are the Government doing to review this policy to ensure it works for students at Scottish universities?

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): I reassure the hon. Lady that those students will be able to apply for a tier 4 visa to complete their studies and that we will continue to review this matter, working closely with universities in the Russell Group, which has raised this issue with me.

T4. [911533] **David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for allocating £3 million for the essential repairs at Morecambe Bay Academy. What steps are being taken to ensure that building maintenance does not delay school transfers from academies when the school is rated inadequate by Ofsted?

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): As my hon. Friend will know, the Department has a statutory duty to convert local authority maintained schools judged inadequate by Ofsted into sponsored academies, whereby a strong sponsor works with the school to secure improvements in education. We take a case-by-case approach to the conversion of these schools and to addressing failure in academies, which includes consideration of all the different means by which the Government can support the future success of a school, including capital investment where appropriate.

T3. [911532] **Mr Gavin Shuker** (Luton South) (Ind): My constituent Geno Brown rightly points out that education plays a vital role in teaching young people about our country's colonial past and its implications for generations of black and minority ethnic children. What is the Minister doing to make sure that this history—not just our successes, but our failures—is taught properly in our schools?

Nick Gibb: We have had a debate on the content of the history curriculum and the role that migration and other issues play in it. We give a lot of discretion to schools and teachers over what they teach and how they teach it within that curriculum, and there are many elements in it where those issues can be taught effectively.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Last week, I welcomed some excellent students from Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College to Westminster. The Minister will know that that college, like others, is facing significant financial challenges. What assurances can the Department give

me that it will continue to work with the college to ensure that this valued local provision receives the support that students in my constituency need?

Anne Milton: I thank my hon. Friend for having already raised this issue with me. I hope she has managed to speak to the Further Education Commissioner. Students will be at the heart of all our plans, but we are keen to find a solution as soon as we can.

T5. [911534] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Some weeks ago, thousands of children marched across the country voicing concerns about climate change. What is the Secretary of State doing to equip teachers to teach the subject so that students are well equipped?

Damian Hinds: I totally acknowledge and celebrate the fact that school children are among those showing leadership on this issue. We cover climate change in the national curriculum, and rightly so.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, as a proportion of our economy, our spending on primary and secondary education is higher than that of any of the other world-leading G7 nations?

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend is exactly right. According to the most recent OECD “Education at a Glance” report, published in 2015, the UK’s spending as a proportion of national income was the highest in the G7.

T6. [911535] **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Hounslow schools and families welcomed the reforms for children with special educational needs and disabilities in the Children and Families Act 2014, but as a result of those reforms, as well as the increase in the number of children in our schools, the number of children in the borough with education, health and care plans has doubled. The funding to ensure that children get the most from our excellent education services is not adequate, and there will be a £6 million shortfall in the high needs block next year. Will the Minister meet me, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) and Hounslow headteachers, to discuss the implications of the funding gap?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): I will happily meet the hon. Lady and, of course, her colleague, but I remind her that SEND funding has risen to £6.3 billion. We recognised the pressures on the system, which is why we announced £250 million of additional funding.

Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con): Hook-with-Warsash primary school has 60 pupils in reception, but they have only one toilet between them. I think that you would consider that unacceptable, Mr Speaker, as do I. Will the Secretary of State look again at the school’s application—which has been rejected four times—and work with me to see how we can find some resources to provide what is a necessity, not a luxury?

Damian Hinds: Of course I will look at the application again, and I should be happy to meet my hon. Friend.

T8. [911537] **David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): When representatives of the National Education Union met Welsh MPs last week, they told us that £59 million of education spending had been lost to the Welsh Assembly Government since 2015 owing to central Government cuts. The Prime Minister recognises that there is a shortfall. What hope can the Secretary of State give of funds to alleviate its consequences?

Damian Hinds: Education is, of course, a devolved matter, but it is also true that funding per pupil is slightly higher in England than it is in Wales.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): On behalf of the deaf and hard of hearing, Daniel Jillings, from Lowestoft, and his mother Ann have been campaigning for a GCSE in British Sign Language. I am aware that the preparatory work has been done, but can the Minister assure Daniel and Ann that the Government are doing all that they can to get that exam into the curriculum as soon as possible?

Nick Gibb: I enjoyed meeting Daniel. As my hon. Friend knows, the exam board Signature has submitted content to our Department, and we are working with that. Ultimately, this is a matter for Ofqual. We have to maintain the standards of the GCSE, but we are working with both Ofqual and Signature.

T9. [911538] **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): Will the Government continue to fund the national school breakfast programme after April?

Nadhim Zahawi: We are investing up to £26 million in the introduction and improvement of stable breakfast clubs in more than 1,700 schools. The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that the contract with Family Action will run out by March 2020. Funding beyond that date—and the Chancellor is present—will be provided for in the upcoming spending review.

Alex Cunningham: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman were to conduct himself in that manner in a breakfast club, he would be in danger of permanent exclusion. It would be a very unseemly state of affairs, and I would not wish it on him or, indeed, on his fellow attendees.

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating the headteacher of Dronfield Henry Fanshawe school on the two lifetime achievement awards that she received last week, which demonstrate the esteem in which the school and Miss Roche are held in the Dronfield community?

Damian Hinds: I am disappointed, Mr Speaker, that you missed the opportunity to refer to the original 1984 breakfast club in relation to the behaviour of the hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham). Members of a certain age will know what I am talking about.

Of course I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Miss Roche on her long service, and on being commended and recognised in this way.

Mr Speaker: My experience is that whenever I listen to the Secretary of State, I feel not only entertained but improved. I am deeply grateful to him.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): A shrinking curriculum, larger class sizes, less student contact time and less student support are some of the effects of shrinking student funding for 16 to 18-year-olds. It is time to raise the rate. What order of priority is being given to speaking to the Treasury to ensure that that is done?

Anne Milton: The hon. Gentleman is a doughty campaigner on this issue and we have spoken many times across the Chamber both here and in Westminster Hall. I will always make the case for 16-to-19 funding. I will never cease to do so; it is absolutely critical that we get the base rate up higher for schools and colleges.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Final inquiries must not exceed a sentence each.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): I hope the Minister will agree that Catholic education providers make a great contribution to education in this country. With that in mind will the Minister provide an update on the uptake of the voluntary-aided capital scheme?

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend is entirely correct: the Catholic Education Service is a very important provider of education in our country, alongside the Church of England and other denominational groups. I am pleased to be able to confirm that we have approved in principle a new voluntary-aided school in the last couple of weeks; it is the first for some time.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Primary schools in my constituency are facing reorganisation due to the financial pressures placed on them by this Government, even though the Government claim that funding for schools has never been higher. Due to this I am aware of several schools making cuts to their classroom teaching assistants. What has the Minister to say to parents, children and teachers in my constituency who know that that will have a detrimental effect on learning in the classroom?

Damian Hinds: As I have acknowledged on a number of occasions, I know the strains on school budgets and how difficult it can be to manage them. The hon. Lady specifically raised the question of teaching assistants: there has been an increase of over 40,000 teaching assistants since 2010.

Mr Speaker: I would not want the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George) to feel socially excluded: I call Ruth George.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker,

Since 2016, more than 10% of childcare settings in High Peak have closed and a large number of others have contacted me to say that they feel they are no longer financially sustainable. What will the Secretary of State be doing to speak to the Chancellor and make sure those childcare settings can see a way forward?

Nadhim Zahawi: We are monitoring the whole of the system. It is important to recall that, as mentioned earlier, Ofsted has looked at this and the number of places remain pretty constant throughout, but we continue to monitor the whole of the marketplace.

European Council

3.41 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): Before I turn to the European Council, I am sure the whole House will join me in sending our very best wishes to the former Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott. All our thoughts are with him and his family at this time, and we wish him a full and speedy recovery.

Last week's European Council focused on climate change, disinformation and hybrid threats, external relations and what are known as the EU's top jobs. The UK has always been clear that we will participate fully and constructively in all EU discussions for as long as we are a member state, and that we will seek to continue our co-operation on issues of mutual interest through our future relationship after we have left. That was the spirit in which I approached this Council.

Earlier this month the UK became the first major economy in the world to commit to ending its contribution to global warming by 2050, and I am pleased that the regulations to amend the Climate Change Act 2008, which are being debated in this Chamber later today, have received widespread support from across this House. Ultimately, we will protect our planet only if we are able to forge the widest possible global agreements: that means other countries need to follow our lead and increase their ambitions as well.

At this Council the UK helped to lead the way in advocating for our European partners to follow suit in committing to a net zero target by 2050. While a full EU-wide consensus was not reached, "a large majority" of member states did agree that "climate neutrality must be achieved by 2050", and I hope we can build on this in the months ahead.

In the margins of the Council I met Prime Minister Conte and discussed the UK's bid to host next year's UN climate summit, COP 26, in partnership with Italy. This will continue to put the UK at the heart of driving global efforts to tackle the climate emergency and leave a better world for our children.

Turning to disinformation and hybrid threats, we agreed to continue working together to raise awareness, increase our preparedness, and strengthen the resilience of our democracies. I welcome the development of a new framework for targeted sanctions to respond to hybrid threats. This sends a clear message that the UK and its EU partners are willing and able to impose a cost for irresponsible behaviour in cyber-space.

We must make more progress in helping to ensure that the internet is a safe place for all our citizens. That is why we are legislating in the UK to create a legal duty of care on internet companies to keep users safe from harm, and this will be backed up by an independent regulator with the power to enforce its decisions. We are the first country to put forward such a comprehensive approach, but it is not enough to act alone, so, building on the Christchurch Call to Action summit, the UK will continue to help to drive the broadest possible global action against online harms, including at the G20 in Japan later this week.

In the discussion on external relations, the Council expressed its concern over Russia's issuing of passports in Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and reiterated its call for Russia to release the Ukrainian sailors and vessels captured in the Kerch strait in November last year.

Russia has consistently failed to deliver its commitments under the Minsk agreements and continues its destabilising activity, so with the UK's full support the Council agreed a six-month roll-over of tier 3 sanctions, which include restrictions on Russia's access to EU capital markets, an arms embargo and restricting co-operation with Russia's energy sector.

In marking the fifth anniversary of the downing of flight MH17, we welcomed the announcement from the Netherlands that criminal charges were being brought against four individuals, and offered our continued support in bringing those responsible to justice.

The Council expressed serious concerns over Turkey's drilling activities in the eastern Mediterranean, and the UK has made it clear to Turkey that drilling in that area must stop. Our priority must be to see the situation de-escalated.

In the margins of the Council, I raised the issue of Iran. We call on Iran urgently to de-escalate tensions, and our priority remains finding a diplomatic solution to the current situation in the region.

A substantial part of the Council focused on what are known as the EU's top jobs—the appointments of the next presidents of the EU's institutions and of the EU's High Representative. This is of course primarily a matter for the 27 remaining EU member states, and I have been clear that the UK will engage constructively and will not stand in the way of a consensus among the other member states, but it is also in our national interests that those appointed are constructive partners for the UK as well as successful leaders of the EU's institutions.

The UK supports President Tusk's approach to create a package of candidates across the top jobs that reflects the diversity of the European Union. As there was no consensus on candidates at the meeting, the Council agreed to meet again after the G20 this coming Sunday, as well as holding further discussions with the European Parliament. I had originally anticipated that this would be my final European Council as Prime Minister, but I will in fact have one more.

Finally, President Tusk and President Juncker updated the remaining 27 member states on Brexit. This scheduled update was part of the agreement I reached in April to extend the article 50 deadline for our departure from the EU to 31 October. The Council repeated its desire to avoid a disorderly Brexit and committed to work constructively with my successor as Prime Minister. I commend this statement to the House.

3.47 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Mr Speaker, I understand that it is 10 years this week since you assumed the Chair of the House. May I just say congratulations on the first 10 years and thank you for being such a popular Speaker and for taking the role of Parliament out to the public in a meaningful way, particularly to schools and colleges all over the country? That has made a big difference.

I thank the Prime Minister for her kind words about John Prescott. We all obviously wish John all the very best. I cannot wait to see him return to full activity and to hear that voice booming out of loudspeakers all over the country exciting people in the cause of Labour, which is what John does so well.

I thank the Prime Minister for giving me an advance copy of her statement.

[Jeremy Corbyn]

Last week, we came within minutes of the USA launching a military attack on Iran. Britain and other European nations must play a role in defusing, not raising, tensions, and that needs to start with the restoration of support for the Iran nuclear deal.

We note that there will be continuing EU-Morocco trade discussions. I hope that the United Kingdom Government will recognise that there is an ongoing territorial dispute over the Western Sahara and that those issues will be borne in mind during the negotiations.

I echo the European Union's call on Turkey to cease its illegal drilling in the eastern Mediterranean; I welcome what the EU Council said on that.

I also welcome the EU Council's discussion of climate change, which emphasises how important it is to continue to work with progressive forces to tackle the climate emergency, which this House declared on 1 May. I welcome the EU's continued commitment to the Paris climate agreement and to deliver a practical plan of action to meet its obligations, and I also welcome the fact that COP 26 will be jointly hosted by Britain and Italy, with some events being held in London.

Yesterday marked three years since the EU referendum—three wasted years in which the Government's deal has been rejected three times. We have endured three separate Brexit Secretaries, and we will soon have our third post-Brexit Prime Minister. It has been three years of chaos, in-fighting and incompetence. For too long, the Prime Minister allowed herself to be held to ransom by the wilder extremes in her party, instead of trying to find a sensible majority across this House—[*Interruption.*] Some of the wilder extremes have absented themselves today, but they are no doubt making their views known elsewhere. By the time the Prime Minister finally did reach out, it was a bit too late, and she was unable to deliver meaningful compromise or change.

Does the Prime Minister now regret that she continued to legitimise the idea of no deal instead of warning of its disastrous implications? The two Tory leadership candidates still say that if they cannot renegotiate the backstop, which EU leaders last week said was not possible, they would pursue a no-deal exit. Will the Prime Minister tell us whether she believes that no deal should be on the table as a viable option? What would be worse: crashing out with no deal in October, or putting this issue back to the people for a final say? Given the—[*Interruption.*] Mr Speaker, it is normal for the Leader of the Opposition to ask questions of the Prime Minister, and that is exactly what I am doing.

Given the shambolic no-deal preparations so far, which were paused in the spring, will the Prime Minister confirm that the Government will not be ready to crash out in October? Neither of the Tory leadership candidates has a credible plan. One even claims that we can crash out on WTO terms and still trade without tariffs, which is interesting. The Governor of the Bank of England was clear when he said:

“Not having an agreement with the EU means that there are tariffs automatically because the Europeans have to apply the same rules to us as they apply to everyone else”.

Will the Prime Minister confirm whether the Bank of England Governor is correct on no deal? The former Foreign Secretary also told us that under his no deal plan he could

“solve the problem of free movement of goods in the context of the Free Trade Agreement... that we'll negotiate in the implementation period.”

Will the Prime Minister confirm that there will be no implementation period if there is no deal?

It is deeply worrying that those who seek to lead this country have no grip on reality. The Prime Minister said that the Council reiterated its wish to avoid a “disorderly Brexit”, but I am unsure whether it will have been reassured by the statements of her potential successors.

Labour put forward a plan that could bring this country back together, but the Prime Minister refused to compromise. Whoever the next Prime Minister is, they will barely hold the support of this House, so they will certainly have no mandate to force a disastrous hard-right Brexit on this country. I want to make it clear that Labour will work across the House to block no deal. Whatever plan the new Tory leader comes up with, after three long years of failure they should have the confidence to go back to the people to let them decide the future of this country.

The Prime Minister: It is absolutely right that we recognise the 10th anniversary of your election to the Chair, Mr Speaker. It does not seem like 10 years at all.

May I correct the Leader of the Opposition? [*Interruption.*] Yes, surely. The Leader of the Opposition says he thinks that reality and facts are important. He said that COP 26 is coming to the UK, jointly with Italy. In fact, we are making a joint bid with Italy. Others are bidding for COP 26, so we are still working hard and I encouraged those around the European Council table to support our bid.

Jeremy Corbyn: And we support it.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for saying that the Labour party and the Opposition support the bid, which I think is supported on both sides of the House.

The European Council meeting I attended did not discuss Brexit, no deal or the views of the candidates in the Conservative party's leadership election, on which the Leader of the Opposition focused the majority of his comments and questions. I am supposed to be talking about what happened at the European Council. Nevertheless I am in a generous mood, so I will respond to a small number of his points.

The Leader of the Opposition talked about the talks on trying to find a compromise and a majority across the House, and we did, indeed, enter those talks. I think both sides entered the talks in a constructive spirit, and I remind him that it was he who actually terminated the talks.

The Leader of the Opposition talked about the position in relation to a no deal, which is, legally, the default option that remains on the table for 31 October if a deal is not agreed. The Government are rightly continuing their preparations for a no deal. He asked about my view on a no deal. I wanted to leave the European Union on 29 March with a deal. If he and his colleagues had voted with the Government, we would already be out.

I remind the Leader of the Opposition that I have done everything to avoid a no-deal Brexit by voting for a deal three times in the past year. He has done everything to increase the chance of a no deal by voting against a deal every time.

“Rejecting any Brexit...deal risks the worst outcome—a No Deal Brexit.”

Those are not my words but the words of his own Labour Members of Parliament.

Finally, the Leader of the Opposition talked about Conservative Members being divorced from reality. I have to say that the person in this House who is divorced from reality is the Leader of the Opposition, who thinks the economic model that we should be following is Venezuela.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware there is an accelerated regulation relating to the question of payments into the EU budget. The Government have the power to veto the proposals. I received a letter from the Chancellor today, in reply to my urgent letter to him last week. Will this matter, in fact, be decided on 25 June, as originally proposed? Will the Government exercise their veto, and not merely abstain?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I understand the matter will be considered on 25 June. It is the Government's intention to abstain. This does not bind us, and I remind my hon. Friend that the measure could be taken by the European Union at any stage in the future.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I add my congratulations on the 10th anniversary in the Chair, Mr Speaker? I gather that many are asking for 10 more years. Whatever it is, let us hope that you are with us for a considerable period to come.

I thank the Prime Minister for advance sight of her statement and for her update. Of course we support the efforts to bring COP 26 to the UK. It is important that the EU summit extensively discussed climate change—the biggest challenge we all face.

The Prime Minister mentioned that she raised the issue of Iran in the margins of the Council meeting. I am somewhat surprised it was not a major issue for debate at the Council meeting. We know that the situation in Iran is challenging to say the least. Diplomacy must prevail. I have just come from meeting with Richard Ratcliffe, who has spent over a week outside the Iranian embassy, now on hunger strike in protest against the wrongful imprisonment of his wife, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, in Iran, where she is serving a five-year sentence for espionage. Mr Ratcliffe has welcomed the fact that Iran and the UK are talking and has called for a swift solution, stating:

“We are obviously looking for a quick resolution and that's why she went on hunger strike. It was to say enough's enough.”

Surely enough is enough. So may I ask the Prime Minister to consider the plight of our citizens and to move to make representations, in the time that she has left, to assist the Ratcliffes in their campaign for freedom and justice?

The Prime Minister will also have seen the Foreign Secretary's comments this morning on the possibility of military action. We must reduce tensions in the middle east. We will work constructively with her Government in supporting diplomatic efforts, but does she agree with Opposition Members that talk of military action at this stage in the diplomatic efforts is simply reckless?

It is also important to recognise that the statement from the Prime Minister was notably light on the details of the UK's exit from the European Union. One would have

thought that, at least in the margins, that would have been the topic of some debate. Let us remind ourselves of what President Tusk said, which was that we were to use the time wisely. The Prime Minister and both candidates to be her successor have all long promised that the withdrawal agreement can be renegotiated, yet just last week President Juncker said that the EU has repeated unambiguously that there will be no renegotiation of the withdrawal agreement. Donald Tusk said the withdrawal agreement is “not open for renegotiation.” Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity today to clarify, for the benefit of her Back Bencher the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) that the implementation period is indeed part of the withdrawal agreement? Does the Prime Minister agree with the comments of EU leaders that the withdrawal deal is not up for renegotiation? Will she confirm today that she will not vote for a Tory leadership candidate supporting a no-deal exit on 31 October? Will the Government not finally accept the reality and support a people's vote? Prime Minister, this is your legacy, your last few days in power: use them to stop the hard Brexiteers in your party who have pushed you out and who want to push us out of the European Union at any cost.

The Prime Minister: First, on the detention of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, obviously, our thoughts remain with her and her family, and she has faced unacceptable treatment during her three years in jail. Our position is very clear: she was on holiday, visiting her relations. The right hon. Gentleman asks me to raise the issue, and I have raised it on a number of occasions directly with President Rouhani. The Foreign Secretary has continued to raise it with Iranian Ministers as well, and of course it was raised when my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East was in Tehran over the weekend. It was possible to engage on this issue of those of our citizens who are detained. As I am sure the right hon. Gentleman knows, one of the issues here is the fact that the Iranian Government do not recognise dual nationality, and that is one of the issues behind this question of the detention of British citizens.

As regards the wider issues, at a time of increased regional tension and a crucial period for the future of the nuclear deal, it was right that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East was able to further engage with the Government of Iran about the UK's long-held concerns over Iran's destabilising activity and the danger it poses to the region. He was able to reiterate our assessment that Iran almost certainly bears responsibility for recent attacks on tankers in the Gulf of Oman and that such activity needs to stop, to allow the immediate de-escalation of these rising tensions. He was also clear that the UK will continue to play its full part, alongside international partners, to find diplomatic solutions to reduce the current tensions.

The right hon. Gentleman then went on to discuss the issue of no deal and these various points. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster pointed out yesterday that the implementation period is set out in part 4 of the withdrawal agreement. If we leave without a deal, there is no withdrawal agreement and therefore no implementation period. But the right hon. Gentleman again invited me to take no deal off the table and to do things to stop no deal. I am afraid that I will repeat to him what I have said to him on many occasions standing

[*The Prime Minister*]

at this Dispatch Box, which is simply that he had three opportunities to take no deal off the table and he rejected every single one of them.

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): Given the welcome, strong statements by the European Council about Russia's behaviour, does the Prime Minister share my concern about Russia's possible readmission to full voting membership of the Council of Europe? Does she agree that it sends entirely the wrong message, coming just days after the filing of charges against Russian military officers for the downing of MH17, and when Russia remains in illegal occupation of Crimea?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend has spoken up on the illegal annexation of Crimea on a number of occasions. We do not and will never recognise Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. As my right hon. Friend will be aware, there has been this difference in Russia's position in the Council of Europe. Russia has not been paying its contributions to the Council of Europe, but its membership of that body is one of the few ways available to the international community to hold Russia to account for its human rights violations.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): With one of the Prime Minister's potential successors having likened the European Union to the Soviet Union and the other having likened it to Nazi Germany, did she pick up any sense among European leaders that they will reciprocate the warmth and good will emanating from her party by making any modification to the Brexit terms that she negotiated over such a long period?

The Prime Minister: I found from those sitting around the table that they look forward to working with my successor to ensure that we can find a resolution and that we in the United Kingdom are able to deliver on the vote of the British people.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): As we approach the 10th anniversary of the Anglo-French Lancaster House agreements, does the Prime Minister agree that the warmth and closeness of the military relationship between France and the United Kingdom is exemplified by the six-monthly meetings held between the Defence Committees of both Houses in both countries and by the joint inquiries carried out by the Defence Committees of this House and of the National Assembly, which signify a closeness that is as great as it has been at any time in the post-war period?

The Prime Minister: I commend my right hon. Friend for the Defence Committee's work with its counterpart in the National Assembly. We do indeed have good relations with France. Last year, I was pleased to host a summit with President Macron in which a number of further agreements were entered into, particularly in respect of continuing that close relationship on defence matters.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): On the Council conclusions on climate change, does the Prime Minister agree that all EU member states need to show leadership and sign up to net zero carbon emissions by 2050, as we all hope the House will do later when we vote on the motion? If she does agree, what assessment has she

made from the discussions she had at the European Council of the chances of persuading the four member states that currently refuse to do so to change their minds before COP 26 next year?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is right, and I want all EU member states to sign up to net zero by 2050. There was indeed a small number of member states that did not feel able to sign up to it at this stage; some of them want to look further into the implications and work through it before they sign up to the 2050 target. I will continue to encourage all member states to sign up to the 2050 target. It is absolutely right that we have led the way, but we need everybody to play their part.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): The Prime Minister will know that last week the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union wrote to Michel Barnier asking that the EU accede to Britain's request to deal with citizens' rights outside the yet-to-be-agreed withdrawal agreement—something the EU has so far refused to do. In the margins of the summit, did Michel Barnier give the Prime Minister a nice last-but-one going away present from the Council in the form of a positive response to that request?

The Prime Minister: Michel Barnier was not present at the meeting of the EU Council at 28. On citizens' rights, there is a question about the legal situation. If the EU is to act collectively, it is my understanding that that has to be done on an article 50 legal basis. If it is not done on an article 50 basis—in other words, if there is no withdrawal agreement and no deal—then it is up to individual member states. We have been encouraging individual member states to reciprocate the generous offer that has been made by the United Kingdom.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Further to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), may I press the Prime Minister a bit further on the discussions about climate change? What discussions did she have, or can she report back to us, about the need to move to a consumer principle, whereby we do not simply reach net zero by exporting all our carbon emissions—just by importing more manufactured goods and agricultural goods? What discussions did she have on that principle?

The Prime Minister: I hope that I can reassure the hon. Lady that that issue was indeed one that was touched on in the discussions that were held around the EU Council table. There was a recognition that this issue has to be addressed across the world. Yes, it is right that the UK has led and that we want Europe to lead, but we want this to be something that is adopted widely across the globe, because that is the only way to ensure that we deal with these greenhouse gas emissions.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What are the prospects of Mr Barnier getting one of the top jobs?

The Prime Minister: I am not going to comment on individual potential candidates. A number of names are being mentioned around the European Union at the moment. As I have said, there was no consensus on candidates for the top jobs at the meeting last week. A further meeting will be held at the end of this week.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Both as Home Secretary and as Prime Minister, the right hon. Lady has been extremely assiduous about coming to address this House. In fact, she has probably spent more hours here than she has wanted to or than any other Prime Minister has in many years. She addressed the House within a week of becoming Prime Minister. Will she ensure that her successor addresses this House within a week of becoming Prime Minister, because it would surely be a disgrace for 41 days to pass before they did so?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the comments that he made about me. The question that he has asked is actually not a matter for me; it will be a matter for the incoming Prime Minister and for this House.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Prime Minister, will you miss going to the European Council meetings?

The Prime Minister: Let us just say that I thought that I would have more time available than is proving to be the case because of the extra Council meetings that I am having to attend.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): When article 50 was extended by the EU until 31 October, President Donald Tusk urged the UK not to waste this time. Did the Prime Minister or anybody on the EU Council offer any view on whether this advice was being heeded? Can she tell us what obstacles she faced as she tried to secure a Brexit that her successor will not?

The Prime Minister: First, as I have indicated in response to a number of questions, Brexit was not the subject of the meeting of the EU Council at 28. We discussed various other issues that are of importance for the future not only of individual member states and of Europe, but, in terms of climate change, of the whole world. As I have always said, the issue remains the same. It is still in the best interests of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union with a deal. A deal has been negotiated, but that has been rejected by this House.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): When it comes to protecting the environment, the UK has long used its relationship with its European neighbours to help leverage and magnify our call for action on the wider stage, so may I congratulate my right hon. Friend on making sure that we are the first country to legislate—or the first major economy to legislate—for net zero and that the vast majority of EU countries will follow suit? Would she care to name and shame those who are not quite there yet?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is tempting me to do that. There is a reason why the EU Council conclusions did not identify those member states who do not feel able to sign up to net zero for 2050 at this stage. I fully expect, as I indicated in response to the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), that those member states, in doing further work on this issue, will be able to accept the 2050 date and that we will be able to have a collective European Union approach on this matter.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Colleagues on the Labour Benches voted against the Prime Minister's initial attempts to get a deal through because it was

essentially a blind Brexit, with very little detail on the future relationship. However, the withdrawal agreement Bill tabled just prior to the European elections was actually full of major concessions to Labour's positions and of compromises—workers' rights, environmental issues, customs and even a commitment to a referendum vote in Committee. Does she agree that her successor should re-table that withdrawal agreement Bill? Does she share my hope that, if he does, colleagues on the Labour Benches will vote for it?

The Prime Minister: I had hoped that colleagues across the Benches in this House would be able to vote for the deal and that it would have been possible to put that withdrawal agreement Bill to a positive vote. But I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have seen from the details that I and this Government stand by our word. When we said that we would adopt certain compromises that had been put to us by the Opposition, we actually stood by that.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): I turn to the issue of internet security, which was brought up at the Council. Does the Prime Minister agree that, yes, we want the UK to be the best place in the world to run an internet-based business—there is a high number of successful such businesses in North Devon—but also that it needs to be the safest place for people, especially young people, to go online?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree. It is important that we make this the safest place for people to go online, and as my hon. Friend said, it is particularly of significance that young people should be able to feel safe online. We also want to continue to be one of the best places in the world to set up an internet business. A couple of weeks ago, during London Tech Week, I was pleased to sit around the table with a number of companies that have been set up here in the UK, doing extremely well in this area. They all accept, too, the importance of safety for those using the internet.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Aid to the Church in Need raised more than €100 million in 2018 to help support persecuted Christians. Can the Prime Minister outline what support the EU Council is giving, and doing, to support persecuted Christians, especially those in Syria? Will the Prime Minister be prepared to ask for more help, support and focus for this needy group of people?

The Prime Minister: Of course, for persecuted Christians and others who are persecuted in countries such as Syria, it is important that there is a proper political solution to what is happening that enables people to carry on practising their faith without the threat of persecution. I am very pleased that my noble Friend Lord Ahmad, the Minister for freedom of religion and belief, is doing excellent work around the world in ensuring that we are putting the message about the importance of people being able to practise their faith without fear of persecution.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The Prime Minister is absolutely right to point out the continued malign influence that is Russia. Did she manage to impress on her EU counterparts the need to reduce their dependence on Russian oil and gas?

The Prime Minister: This issue has been raised on a number of occasions in debates in the European Union. I assure my hon. Friend that member states sitting around the table are fully apprised of the matter and considering their position.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Prime Minister believe that, to engage constructively with the European Union, our new Prime Minister must set out before the summer recess, here in Parliament, his approach to Brexit, so that we and the European Union can establish whether it commands the confidence of the House?

The Prime Minister: That will be a matter for the incoming Prime Minister.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), in the context of the discussions about Russian behaviour and the security of Europe, did my right hon. Friend specifically bring up the subject of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which would inevitably make Germany and Europe dependent on cheap Russian gas and susceptible to Russian influence? That would be a terrible strategic mistake.

The Prime Minister: Nord Stream 2 was not raised at this Council meeting, but it has been raised at previous Council meetings. The aspect that my hon. Friend refers to has obviously been raised, but there is also the impact that Nord Stream 2 would have on income for Ukraine as a result of diverting oil and gas from going through Ukraine. This is a matter that all those sitting around the table are fully apprised of and considering.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister knows that we live in an uncertain and dangerous world at the moment, with China and Russia, and threats from Iran. She has reported on the attitude of the European Commission on both those issues. How does she see British influence continuing in working with our European partners in future?

The Prime Minister: I think that what we see from some of the ways that we are already working with our European partners will be the future ways. For example, on Iran, we work very much, as an E3, with France and Germany. There are other issues on which we are also working with France and Germany, and obviously others across the world. We do not just work with the European Union on these matters. We work with individual member states when it is in the interests of the UK and those member states for us to do so, and that is what we will continue to do.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for all the work that she does on the European Council, and will continue to do. I notice that there was a lot of discussion on a few very well-paid top jobs. Was there discussion on the millions of people who are without work throughout the European Union—and, indeed, further afield in the near neighbourhood in north Africa and sub-Saharan Africa—and what can be done to tackle this rather more urgent and important problem than a few jobs in Brussels?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an issue on which he has long been a campaigner. It is the case that one of the conclusions from the European Council meeting was that we underline the crucial importance of the strategic partnership with Africa and the need for us to work together. We recognise the importance of working particularly in Africa—as we, the UK, have indicated that we will do as an individual country—to ensure that we are providing the support that enables the economies of Africa to provide jobs for the many millions of young people coming on to that jobs market.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Ind): Anybody listening to the Prime Minister's statement will be struck by the importance of the issues raised at the Council, and also by the loss that we will have as a nation by not having a seat around the table in future. In her reply to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), she said that it is a matter for her successor whether he takes up to seven weeks before he comes to this House. Is it not the case that the Government could reset the recess dates that are on today's Order Paper to make sure this House has an opportunity to question her successor on his policies, which have a huge bearing on the issues in her statement?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady will have an opportunity to consider this matter in the debate on the motion on the recess dates that is coming before the House later today.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister's comments about the positive reception at the European Council for Britain's leadership on vital issues such as online harms, internet regulation and, of course, climate change. What mechanisms and institutions can be leveraged by the UK to continue to show this international leadership once we leave the European Union?

The Prime Minister: There are a number of mechanisms that we can use on the two specific issues my hon. Friend has raised—and on climate change, of course. Hopefully, if we are able to win the bid to host COP 26, that will be an important signal. We want to address this issue globally, not just with the European Union. On internet harms, the UK led the way in, for example, setting up the global forum against terrorist and extremist material on the internet. The UK will continue to play its role in encouraging our European partners, but others around the world as well, on those and other important issues.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I wish you a very happy first decade, Mr Speaker.

The Prime Minister confirmed to the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) that in the event of no deal, the UK will not oppose a further £2 billion contribution in November/December as we approach a further payment for the divorce bill. Will she further confirm that convergence funding for Wales will immediately stop in the event of no deal? At a time when we are seeing Ford leaving Bridgend, Airbus leaving Wales and Tata in the balance, is it not time we recognised that the workers in these plants who voted to leave, in good faith for more prosperity, did not vote to leave their jobs and should be given the final say on whether we go ahead with the madness of Brexit or are given the opportunity to remain in the EU?

The Prime Minister: In my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Stone, I pointed out that in a specific vote that is taking place on an EU response to these budgetary matters, we will be abstaining. On the wider issue, if the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the impact that no deal would have on jobs in his constituency and more widely, I simply say to him that he had the opportunity to ensure that we left with a deal by voting for the deal. Parliament rejected that deal, and I believe he voted against it.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): It seems overwhelmingly likely that Russia will seek to obstruct the extradition of the Russian nationals suspected by the Dutch authorities of involvement with the downing of MH17, just as Russia obstructed the extradition of nationals suspected of involvement in the killing of Alexander Litvinenko and the Novichok poisonings. What more can be done, as a European community of nations, to ensure that Russia abides by its international obligations and brings suspects to justice?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend will know that, in terms of the activities of Russia across a range of issues, the European Union has used the tools at its disposal. I referred in my statement to the sanctions in relation to Russian activity, particularly in Ukraine, but it is the case—he is right—that Russia does not permit the extradition of Russian citizens who are suspected of crimes in other jurisdictions. We all across the world should recognise the importance of ensuring that those responsible for crimes can be brought to justice. I urge a change of opinion, but I suspect that Russia will continue to wish not to extradite its citizens, which means that those who have been the victims of crimes such as the use of Novichok on the streets of Salisbury, the murder of Alexander Litvinenko and the downing of MH17 do not find the justice that they deserve.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister has set an ambitious climate target for this country of net zero carbon emissions by 2050, but it will only be successful if there is strong co-operation across the European single market. To that end, did the Prime Minister have discussions with her counterparts in Europe at the European Council about the possibility of setting an external tariff to the common market area which reflects the carbon intensity of imports to the European Union?

The Prime Minister: There was no such discussion.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I thank the Prime Minister for prior sight of her statement. I think the whole House would welcome any progress on climate change. On Wednesday, I am hosting a Welsh lobby in Committee Room 10 as part of the wider “The Time is Now” lobby on that day. Will the Prime Minister welcome the young people from Wales who will be taking part on Wednesday, and in particular those who marched through the city of Bangor recently—young people who have so effectively put climate change at the heart of the political debate?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to welcome the young people who will be coming to the event the hon. Gentleman is holding here in the House on Wednesday. This is an important issue. It is one that young people have taken up and championed with vigour and energy, and it is right that we respond to their concerns.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Prime Minister mentioned raising Iran and the middle east “in the margins” of the Council. The Foreign Secretary will be partly distracted by other matters. Will she acquaint herself with the details of the case of my constituent, Luke Symons, who is currently being held captive by the Houthis in Sana’a in Yemen, to see whether she can use her influence in her remaining time in office to secure his release and allow him and his family to travel back to the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: I will ensure that I am able to look at the specific case that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): The European Parliament is investigating concerns that more than 1 million citizens of other EU countries who live in the UK may have been wrongly prevented from voting in the recent European parliamentary elections. What discussions has the Prime Minister had about those concerns, either at the Council or elsewhere?

The Prime Minister: This is not an issue that has been raised by other member states directly with me, and it was not raised at this EU Council meeting.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I appreciate that the Prime Minister will not want to wade into the battle for her succession, but given that she has spent more time talking to other EU leaders and, I suspect, Members of Parliament than anyone else, she knows what the challenges are in this place, and the boundaries and parameters around the negotiating table. What does she expect our country may reasonably be able to negotiate by 31 October that has not already been achieved by her and her negotiating team?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is trying to tempt me to step into an issue—

Wes Streeting indicated assent.

The Prime Minister: He confirms that. It will be for my successor to take forward, with the House and with the European Union, the approach to our leaving the European Union. As I have said before, if the hon. Gentleman and others had joined me in any one of the three votes that have taken place on the deal that was negotiated, we could have already left the European Union.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The Prime Minister may not have had the chance to speak to the European Council on the important issues of fashion, sustainability and climate change, but does she agree with the all-party parliamentary group on textiles and fashion, which I chair, that as parliamentarians we should walk the walk, and that a recycling bin for clothing should be available in Parliament alongside rubbish bins so that MPs’ garments do not clog up landfill?

The Prime Minister: At Prime Minister’s questions last week, I responded to a question about the report from the Committee on this issue. The Minister of State, Department for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin), tells me there is a recycling bin in one of the ladies in the House of Commons, but whether there should be more of those bins is a matter for the House authorities.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister share my concern, and that of a number of colleagues on both sides of the House, that one Conservative leadership candidate does not seem to appreciate that if there is no deal, there is no implementation period?

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave earlier on that issue.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): It has already been mentioned that the intransigence of just four countries held up an EU-wide commitment to binding net zero emissions targets by 2050. Can I press the Prime Minister to expand on what she thinks it would take to change the minds of those four recalcitrant states, and can she say a little about what she will do in advance of this weekend to ensure that a handful of intransigent states does not prevent bold new climate agreements being reached at the G20 summit?

The Prime Minister: For those states that have a concern about the impact on jobs and the employment of their citizens, I would argue that the UK has already seen 400,000 jobs created in the green economy and we look forward to seeing many more. It is not a choice between climate change and economic growth: we can have both and the UK has been a fine example of that.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Change UK): The Prime Minister made it clear that she was not present when Presidents Tusk and Juncker reported on the progress of Brexit to the 27. What does she think they will have said?

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the comments that I made in my statement. They updated the remaining 27, and the Council repeated its desire to avoid a disorderly Brexit and committed to work constructively with my successor as Prime Minister.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): We are wasting time. Despite what President Tusk says, the country is being forced to watch the world's worst reality TV programme. Perhaps in the time remaining—even at the summit that the Prime Minister is unexpectedly having to attend—something that would command support across the House is unilaterally protecting the rights of European Union citizens who live in this country and, for that matter, UK citizens who live in the EU. Will she take action in line with that support to protect EU citizens, come what may with Brexit?

The Prime Minister: We have already committed, as a Government, to protect the rights of EU citizens living here in the UK regardless of whether there is a deal on our leaving the European Union. We have been encouraging other member states to reciprocate for UK citizens living in those member states. As I indicated earlier, there is a legal issue about whether competence on this question rests with the European Union, which it would as part of a deal, or with individual member states as it would in no deal. We continue to encourage both to ensure that the rights of UK citizens in EU member states will be upheld and protected once we leave.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): There are about 5,000 Tory party members in the north-east, and only they will get a say in who succeeds the Prime Minister at European Council meetings. That means

that whoever he is and whatever magical realist renegotiation or hard-right, no-deal crash out he comes out with, it will have absolutely no mandate in the north-east. Do we not deserve a final say so that people can decide for themselves?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Lady is asking for a final say on the issue of Brexit, as I said earlier—

Chi Onwurah: On the deals.

The Prime Minister: The deal is the issue that is on the table at the moment: the question is how we leave the European Union, whether we do so with a deal, and whether we do so with the deal that was previously negotiated. Any of those options actually delivers on what people voted for in 2016, and we should be doing just that.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister confirm that a no-deal Brexit would mean that we would not be part of Europol or of the overarching institutions that manage internet safety, thereby negating the aspirations that she rightly made in her statement to the House? What steps is she taking, and what advice will she give to her successor, on ensuring that those matters are firmly fixed down before 31 October?

The Prime Minister: It is not the case that the only way in which we can ensure internet safety and work on it is through the institutions of the European Union. The global forum to which I referred earlier was largely set up as a result of an initiative by the United Kingdom. It does not come under a European Union banner; it has other EU member states in it, but it is something that we look to do worldwide and we will continue to work on internet safety worldwide.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I met many constituents over the weekend who are pretty unimpressed that we are debating things such as Kew Gardens as we wait for a new Prime Minister, and that, as soon as that new Prime Minister is in place, we will go into recess. The Prime Minister told the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) that she would have a chance to raise her concerns in tonight's debate, but there is not going to be a debate on the motion, which is subject to Standing Order No. 25. Will the Prime Minister therefore address, as a matter of urgency, the recess dates? We could go into recess now and the House could return as soon as the new Prime Minister is in place.

The Prime Minister: I apologise to the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). I said that there would be a debate this evening, but when I sat down the Leader of the House corrected me and made it clear that there will be no debate on tonight's motion. Of course, it will be for Members of this House to consider how they approach that motion. I think that members of the public know that had this House voted for the deal on any one of the opportunities, we could now have left the European Union and be dealing with a wide range of other issues.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): In her statement, the Prime Minister spoke of co-operation, mutual interest, working constructively and consensus, and said:

“That was the spirit in which I approached this Council.”

May I ask that that new-found spirit be extended to the UK Government's discussions with the devolved Parliaments?

The Prime Minister: We have always approached discussions with the devolved Administrations in the spirit of co-operation and of wanting to work together. There are issues on which we have disagreements, but we have always approached those discussions in the spirit of finding a way through and of co-operating and working with them.

Points of Order

4.39 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last June, the Government pledged to make payments to people in receipt of severe disability premium who had lost out in transferring to universal credit, but a year later those payments have still not been made. They were part of regulations to the managed migration pilot, which is due to start in July. It will be July next week and the Government have failed to tell this House what is going to happen with either the pilot or the payments. Have you, Mr Speaker, had any indication of whether the Government intend to make a statement to clarify the situation? If not, could you advise on how I might secure such a statement?

Mr Speaker: I have certainly received no indication of any intention on the part of a Government Minister to make an oral statement in this Chamber. However, the consequence of the hon. Lady raising this point of order is that the Treasury Bench has been alerted to her concern. I would very much hope, in the spirit of courtesy, that the Government would give her advance notice of their intention to make such a statement. I hope that that is helpful.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You may have been as surprised as I was to read in *The Times* today that the Government have paid £118,000 to a company called Big Ideas to get lots of apparent objections to the objections to the Victoria Tower Gardens being used for a national holocaust memorial and learning centre. Until the close of objections to Westminster City Council, the majority were against the proposal. Now that Big Ideas has been there, the numbers have gone up massively, apparently mostly in favour.

Will the Government please explain who made the decision to use public money to influence the apparent responses to a consultation on a planning application that the Government themselves have made? This is the first time I have ever heard of this happening. It deserves an explanation and perhaps the Minister can explain now.

Mr Speaker: The matter is certainly of compelling interest to the right hon. Gentleman—if he has been admitted to the Privy Council. If he has not, it can only be a matter of time. In that case, it is a matter not of compelling interest to the right hon. Gentleman, but of compelling interest to the hon. Gentleman. It is also of notable interest to a great many other people to boot. However, the attempted point of order—I use that term advisedly, as he will understand—does suffer from the notable disadvantage, which does not put it in a minority category, that it is many things but not a point of order. In other words, it is not a matter for the Chair; it is not for my adjudication.

In so far as the hon. Gentleman is referring to something that seems to resemble an organised campaign, I cannot say that that of itself is a great shock to me. However, his reference to the fact that there is public money involved is of course of great interest and does render the matter worthy of ministerial attention. It is quite open to a Minister now to respond and to seek to assuage the concerns of the hon. Gentleman, but I do not notice a Minister leaping to his feet with alacrity to do so.

[Mr Speaker]

Indeed, it would be fair to say that the Leader of the House is seated comfortably in his perch on the Treasury Bench. Ah—he evinces a display of interest. Does the Leader of the House wish to comment? He is not obliged to do so, but we are always happy to hear his mellifluous tones.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mel Stride): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. My hon. Friend's point is noted. I do not know the answers to his very specific questions with regard to the appointment of the Big Ideas group, but I will look into the matter and I will come back to him on it.

Mr Speaker: The matter had already been communicated to me earlier today by another means. If the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) is dissatisfied at the end of that exchange, he can always return to it.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wonder if you could give me some advice or perhaps commission, in your role as the Chair of the House, some training for Members on the issue of domestic violence. This weekend, I have been shocked and appalled at the rush of Members insisting on moving back the dial in this area to suggest that such matters are private family matters to be kept within the confines of walls. Now, I am certain that in almost any circumstance the people in this House do not believe that that is the case. However, I guess they had their priorities elsewhere when they went out to say it. That led to all the women's charities in this country having to reissue a statement to assert that of course people should call the police; of course people should gather evidence where they can; and of course people should try to intervene. The message that came from this House—perhaps you could send a different message today, Mr Speaker—was that people should not try to help. Please, Mr Speaker, will you assert that domestic abuse is never just a domestic? It is never a personal family matter?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order. I know she will understand that it would not be right—and I would not choose or presume—to comment on any particular case, and I do not do so. Anything I say should not be interpreted as an attempted commentary on particular circumstances—[*Interruption.*]—and nor should anything said by the hon. Lady. However, in so far as she asks me to confirm my understanding—and what I am sure will be the understanding of colleagues—that domestic violence or abuse is a matter of enormous and consuming public concern, and that it cannot be regarded as a purely private matter, I am very happy to confirm that from the Chair.

As the hon. Lady has raised an issue of concern and referenced training, I just say—I think this would probably be echoed by the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House if she were in her place, which she is not expected to be at this time—that under the independent complaints and grievance scheme, as colleagues will know, there is an opportunity for people who have complaints to make of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment to do so. She will also be aware that as part

of the House's response to the issue that has arisen over the last 18 months or so, a programme of training, not merely for staff of the House but, very importantly, for Members, has been made available. That training is now being taken up by Members. I know that the former Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), undertook such training, and the staff of my office and I have been on that training, which I absolutely commend to all colleagues. It is very much in all our interests that we open ourselves to that training, counsel and advice. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Lady.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The House heard your statement earlier on the recall petition from the constituency of Brecon and Radnorshire. This is still a fairly novel procedure, so I would be grateful if you gave us some guidance. Will you confirm that this vacancy stands to be treated in the same way as a vacancy created by any other means—that is, the death or resignation of a Member—and accordingly, whether you have received any indication from the Chief Whip of the Conservatives that he intends to move the by-election writ for this constituency soon? We are at a moment where the arithmetic of this House matters more than it has ever done, and where we hear Members in the governing party speaking openly about the possibility of proroguing Parliament to avoid it having its say in respect of a no-deal Brexit. It therefore seems that the people of Brecon and Radnorshire should have some protection to ensure that the current, rather well-tailored “Hunger Games” that we see going on in the Conservative party should not leave them unrepresented a second longer than they need to be.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me notice that he wished to raise this matter. The new edition of “Erskine May” states in paragraph 2.12:

“By convention, the motion”

—the motion to which reference is being made is that for the issuing of a warrant for a new writ—

“is moved by the whip of the party which last held the seat.”

I emphasise that that is the starting premise in these matters. I am confident that the right hon. Gentleman is aware both of that convention and of the recourse open to him if there is what he considers—indeed, others might agree—an unreasonable delay in the Government Chief Whip moving the motion. The timing of the by-election, after the House agrees to the relevant motion, is a matter for statute law and those empowered under the relevant statute. It is not something on which I can pronounce, but I hope that the two parts of the right hon. Gentleman's concern have been at least adequately addressed by my initial response.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Ind): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Prime Minister has just clarified that there will be no opportunity to debate the motion on the summer Adjournment dates. This is an extremely grave matter. About 0.25% of the population will be selecting the next Prime Minister at a crucial time in our history. Is there anything you can do to make sure that the House has an opportunity, when other Members are here, to properly debate this issue and make sure that the next Prime Minister can be held to account by this House without there being an extended period of summer recess in the way?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady and most certainly understand her concern. I want to offer her two responses. First, it is perfectly open to Members if they disapprove of the motion to vote against it. They are not obliged to accept it; they can oppose it. Secondly, although I do not myself know at this stage what is in the minds of Ministers today, or what was in their minds at the time of the tabling of the motion, since I am not psychic and it was not something they discussed with me or would ordinarily have been expected to discuss with me, I can tell her something that may be of interest to her.

I have been assured that there is no intention on the part of the Government to prevent the new Prime Minister from appearing before the House before it rises for the summer recess. The Leader of the House had his first outing relatively recently on a Thursday morning at business questions, and as he addressed the House the Government Chief Whip approached me, unsolicited but on the back of a number of queries about Prorogation and the timescale for the announcement of the new Prime Minister, specifically to tell me—as I say, unsolicited—that the Government had no intention of doing that.

The Government Chief Whip told me that he judged it most important that that not be the case. I am merely faithfully reporting what he told me on that occasion. If there has been some change in thinking, I am sure the Government would wish to communicate that to the House. I think it very important that there be some clarity about the Government's intentions beyond simply the motion, which is a procedural motion, sooner rather than later, not because that is a matter of procedural necessity but because it is a matter of parliamentary courtesy.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Change UK): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you so much for what you have said. The Leader of the House is here. Such is the concern across the House about the Government's plans and the very real concern that the next Prime Minister will not even come into this place before we rise for the summer, notwithstanding what you have been told, would it be in order for the Leader of the House to make a statement as soon as possible—literally in the next day or two—in order to satisfy the very real concerns that exist?

Mr Speaker: It would be perfectly orderly for the Leader of the House to do so. If he wanted to make a statement earlier than that, I am sure that we would

accommodate him, either now or before the close of business tonight. It is up to the right hon. Gentleman. However, I had no notice of these points of order. I have responded to them in a public-spirited way, and I know that that is always the instinct of the Leader of the House.

Mel Stride: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. First, I think I can confirm that it would certainly not be the Government's intention to allow a situation in which there was not an opportunity for the new Prime Minister to appear before the House.

Mr Speaker: Before the recess.

Mel Stride: Indeed; before the recess. Secondly, I think it will also be accepted that Parliament would express its will if there were any likelihood of that becoming an issue.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I regard that as most helpful.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Change UK): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am grateful for your statement, and also for that clarification, as far as it went. However, the Prime Minister said that she could not bind her successor. Presumably, the incoming Prime Minister may well reshape the Government, so any statements or commitments that are made now will not necessarily apply at the time when we have a new Prime Minister and, potentially, new Ministers in place. Can you clarify, Mr Speaker, what the position—as far as you understand it—would then be?

Mr Speaker: In a sense, the hon. Gentleman has stated a fact. That is true; of course a current Prime Minister cannot bind her successor, and a current Leader of the House cannot bind his successor, although we wish the right hon. Member for Central Devon well in his tenure. That is, in a sense—if the hon. Gentleman will forgive my saying so—blindingly obvious. What can I do about it? The honest answer is that I cannot do anything about it. However, I think that there was merit in the raising of these questions, because answers have been obtained, and some people will feel—I express myself cautiously—that considerable weight should be attached to what the incumbent says not just to one Member, but to the whole House. One would like to think that that would have a value that would endure for some time, and certainly for the material time between now and the summer recess.

I hope that that is clear; I think that we shall have to leave it there for now.

Kew Gardens (Leases) (No. 3) Bill [Lords]

Second Reading

Mr Speaker: I can inform the House that I have certified the whole Bill in accordance with Standing Order No. 83J, for Jemima, as being within devolved legislative competence and relating exclusively to England.

4.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

As the Minister in the House of Commons with responsibility for the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, I am delighted to present a Bill that will provide the ability to grant longer leases on Crown land there, opening new streams of revenue that will support the great British institution and enable it to flourish in the future.

Let me place on record, at the outset, my appreciation of the work of Members in this House—my hon. Friends the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) and for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith)—who have promoted similar private Members' Bills on Kew Gardens. I also note the keen interest of noble Lords in supporting Kew. A similar Bill was promoted by Lord True, and this Bill, before coming to this House, was amended by Lord Whitty so that he and others could be reassured in placing the duty to prevent inappropriate development at Kew unequivocally on the face of the Bill.

Indeed, I think it fair to say that the Bill has already received support from Members on both sides of the other place. Baroness Jones of Whitchurch considered the Bill, and Lord Whitty's amendment, supported by the Government, provides a double lock on future extended leases. Baroness Kramer and Lord Rooker were pleased that the Bill strengthened the protection of Kew and allowed us to look to a future as distinguished as its proud history.

Kew is a scientific institution of the utmost importance, not only for the United Kingdom but as a global resource—the global resource—for knowledge of plants and fungi. We are facing immense challenges when it comes to the preservation of the natural world, and it is clear that there is an essential role for plants and fungi in that regard.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman talks about Kew being a centre of scientific research. For those of us in west London not blessed with wide open spaces, Kew is a treasure house—an absolute treasure trove of delights. The recent exhibition of Dale Chihuly showed Kew Gardens at its absolute finest. I hope that I speak for everybody on the Opposition Benches when I say we entirely support the hon. Gentleman, but particularly those of us in west London who absolutely love this treasure so close to our hearts.

David Rutley: The hon. Gentleman speaks well for the west London posse. He speaks very assuredly and with great passion as always for Kew Gardens, and we are grateful for that. It is a wonderful institution. I assure him that people not just in west London but across the nation want to visit it, and I hope that that is a boost to the local economy.

We are facing immense challenges in preserving the natural world. Within the challenge it is clear that there is a central role for plants and fungi, and Kew can provide answers about how plants and fungi will help us and our planet not just thrive but survive. Kew is a custodian of world-renowned collections, including the Millennium Seed Bank at Wakehurst and the Herbarium at Kew itself. The restoration and digitisation of the Herbarium will need considerable investment and will make the collection accessible globally.

Kew scientific research leads the world. With more scientists than at any time, its research is crucial in solving the challenges facing humanity today. Kew plays an extraordinary global role, in partnership with scientists, educators and communities, promoting research, education and conservation.

Kew does so much to involve the public, as we have already heard. With over 2 million visits to Kew and Wakehurst each year and around 100,000 pupils on school visits, it is building a wider understanding of plants and fungi and why they matter to us. Across the spectrum of public engagement, Kew is fostering a wider understanding of plants and fungi and why they matter to us.

Kew is not only an extraordinary scientific institution; as visitors and scientists will know, the estate includes many special buildings and structures, more than 40 of which are listed. It is a huge challenge to ensure the maintenance of these structures, which due to their historical nature is undertaken at considerable expense. We have a duty to balance public spending against priorities, and Kew is no exception. In view of Kew's important role, DEFRA has been able to maintain funding to Kew in cash terms over this spending review period, but a key part of that was to support Kew to develop its other sources of income to deliver its ambitions.

Kew has made great strides in improving its financial sustainability. Kew's Government grant forms just over one third of its income—37% in the 2017-18 accounts—and its mixed funding model is proving hugely successful, for example by using Government funding to leverage significant philanthropic and grant funding for renovation of the Temperate House, which reopened in 2018. Nevertheless, parts of the Kew estate, including some listed residential buildings near Kew Green, badly need investment to maintain and enhance their condition and enable Kew to realise additional income.

Attracting capital investment to refurbish buildings within the boundaries of Kew is one of the big opportunities available, but the current 31-year limit on leases imposed by the Crown Lands Act 1702 has made this difficult to realise. The Bill will allow leases to be granted on land at Kew for a term of up to 150 years. Longer leases will enable Kew to realise additional income from land and property, and will reduce maintenance liabilities and running costs. The additional income generated will help Kew to achieve its core objectives, maintain its status as a UNESCO world heritage site, and prioritise maintaining and developing its collections as well as improving the quality of its estate.

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): We all support the work that Kew does and obviously want to support its estate strategy and the funding, but the point my hon. Friend has just made is important. Will he confirm that this is less about income and more about capital receipts? The significance of going to a

150-year lease is that the seven or so residential properties around Kew Green can be sold on a leasehold basis. Kew Gardens is also interested in developing the car park area alongside the Thames.

David Rutley: My hon. Friend speaks from experience; he knows this Bill very well. *[Interruption.]* Yes, very well. I agree: this is about not just income generation but cost reduction because of the maintenance costs of these properties. It is about getting capital in to help to renovate these important buildings and enable Kew to achieve its wider ambitions, so my hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course, any development will be restricted by local planning legislation and by Kew's provenance as a world heritage site. Many protections will be put in place, notwithstanding the need to take forward these renovation works.

The Bill has the full support of Kew's board of trustees and residents in the Kew area, in particular through the Kew Society. It might be helpful to set out the protections that have already been alluded to, particularly to confirm that the various safeguards that apply now would continue to apply to any lease granted under the Bill.

Kew's activities are overseen by Kew's board and by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is an Executive non-departmental public body and an exempt charity. It is governed by a board of trustees established under the National Heritage Act 1983. As an exempt charity, although the Charity Commission does not regulate it, it must abide by charity law with the Secretary of State as Kew's regulator for charity purposes. This regulation is co-ordinated between the Charity Commission and the Secretary of State.

To ensure that Kew's operational arrangements comply with the National Heritage Act and with public and charity law, a framework document exists between Kew and DEFRA to deal with business planning, resource allocation, the appointment of board members and, pertinently, the disposition of land. Thus, at all times in the governance process, the board of Kew, the Secretary of State and DEFRA play a key role in determining the operational management, and will continue to do so in the grant of any lease under this Bill.

The Bill goes further on that point in requiring that, before granting any lease, the Secretary of State must be satisfied that the lease—and anything that the leaseholder is permitted to do with the property under the terms of the lease—would not have any adverse impact on the functions of the board of trustees as set out under the National Heritage Act.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): I note from the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) that there might be some question of a car park facility. Will the Minister ensure that, so far as possible, a low-carbon transport policy is developed for Kew? It seems ironic that we would do anything else, and there should clearly be sufficient electric charging points, sufficient public transport and sufficient cycling and walking routes to ensure that this really is genuinely state of the art for the 21st century.

David Rutley: My right hon. and learned Friend makes a good point, and I am sure that these matters will be given due consideration. The car park that may

be envisaged in the future would need to comply with planning regulations locally, so these things would have to be considered.

Stephen Pound: Will the Minister read into the record a fact that is known to many of us, but perhaps not to every one of the vast number of people paying attention to the debate? Anyone who emerges from the main gate at Kew and strolls less than 100 yards up the road will find themselves at Kew Gardens station, where they can take the elegant District line to almost any place that their heart desires. There is also the London Overground. No one actually needs to drive there. There are three buses that stop there and two tube stations very close by. Would he care to note that for the record?

David Rutley: Noted. The hon. Gentleman is well informed, and I thank him. Of course it makes sense to use sustainable transport whenever possible, particularly when visiting Kew.

Another element of protection that will continue under the Bill is that of Kew's UNESCO world heritage site status, and other designations that offer protection under the planning system. These will apply to any lease granted under the provisions of the Bill. Once again, the Bill goes further, requiring that before granting any lease the Secretary of State must be satisfied that the lease and anything that the leaseholder is permitted to do with the property under its terms would not have any adverse impact on Kew's UNESCO world heritage site status.

George Eustice: My hon. Friend will be familiar with the fact that it is typical with leasehold properties, particularly flats, for a leaseholder to have an entitlement to extend the lease before it reaches an 80-year cut-off period. With the type of leasehold we are discussing, will it be possible for a leaseholder to continue to extend in the normal way, or will it be a fixed term of 150 years only?

David Rutley: It would be possible to extend the lease in the normal way, except for the fact that a lease would never go beyond 150 years. There are different protections in place because Kew is on Crown land.

It is important to note that the Bill goes further on the UNESCO world heritage site status. Kew was inscribed as a UNESCO world heritage site in 2003 owing to its outstanding universal value as a historic landscape garden and world-renowned scientific institution. As a result, the UK Government, through the Kew board and the Secretary of State, have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the protection, management, authenticity and integrity of the site. As part of its world heritage site status, Kew has a management plan to show how its outstanding universal value as a property can be served, and that includes protections and mechanisms in the planning system relating to conservation areas in the London boroughs of Richmond and Hounslow.

The Kew Gardens site is also listed as grade I on the Historic England register of park and gardens of special historical interest in England. Much of the Kew site is designated as metropolitan open land, which applies similar protection to that offered to green belt land. Forty-four of the buildings and structures within the site are listed, and Kew is part of an archaeological priority area.

[David Rutley]

All the protections mean that any building work or alterations to any leased property, including the interior declarations in some cases, would require local planning permission and compliance with the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the national planning policy framework, and the Government's policy for the historic environment.

Finally, of course, conditions would apply to the lease itself. In accordance with the duties that the Kew board and the Secretary of State must carry out, the lease itself, while seeking to be commercial, will include any restrictions that the Secretary of State decides are required—for example, to the extension or change of use to protect Kew, its UNESCO world heritage site status, or to ensure that the functions of the board of trustees under the National Heritage Act 1983 are not interfered with in any way.

As I set out earlier, the Bill disapplies the restriction in section 5 of the Crown Lands Act 1702 in relation to the maximum duration of leases of land at Kew. The Bill will remove the limit of 31 years on leases on land at Kew and apply a maximum of 150 years, bringing Kew into line with the provisions made for the Crown Estate by the Crown Estate Act 1961. The changes provide the ability to grant longer leases on the land. The Bill will not alter the many existing protections in place for Kew and its status as a world heritage site. In fact, the Bill strengthens the protections by formalising the duty of the Secretary of State to uphold them.

All proposals for granting leases are subject to scrutiny and must go through both Kew and DEFRA's governance and comply with the protections in the planning framework, and in every case the lease itself will contain any restrictions that may be necessary.

The Bill will ensure that Kew's historic properties are afforded the best protection. It is all about empowering Kew to manage its assets on a sound and sustainable commercial footing to enhance the estate and to pursue its core objectives. Kew's trustees need the Bill to do what is necessary for the future of this national institution, which is part of our shared global heritage.

The modest dimensions of this two-clause Bill belie its importance in helping to safeguard Kew and its invaluable work. This is an opportunity for us to support Kew's mission, because enabling Kew to maintain and enhance all parts of its estate will be crucial to its long-term success and to its global role in addressing today's challenges for plants, fungi and humankind.

5.13 pm

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am pleased to be able to speak on Second Reading. The Minister can relax because the Opposition have no intention of dividing the House. In fact, we hope that the Bill gets on its way speedily. I thank him for arranging for me to go to Kew last week. It was the third time that I have managed to get to Kew, which is a haven of peace and a wonderful facility. It is no wonder that it is a UNESCO world heritage site, and we must maintain that status and do everything we can do to improve it.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley) to the Opposition Front Bench. It is apposite that this debate comes before the debate on the

motion relating to climate change. The Labour party believes that climate change must be given greater emphasis both in this place and outside. I hope that my hon. Friend can take part in future debates, but perhaps not this one because it will be fairly short.

Stephen Pound: I will not interrupt again.

My hon. Friend just mentioned his visit to Kew, which I have visited many times. I was delighted to be shown around by Eric White last weekend, and the all-party parliamentary group on gardening and horticulture has also arranged such visits. Given that other things are happening in the world of politics and we are not blessed with a huge attendance, does my hon. Friend agree that it might be an idea to invite the director of Kew to set up an invitation to parliamentarians to visit Kew? Those who have not tasted the delights of this glorious oasis of peace do not know what they are missing.

Dr Drew: I thank my hon. Friend, and I am sure the director will have heard him—particularly if he can get £18 off us all individually as our contribution to keeping this wonderful facility in place. I did not pay my £18, so if the Minister wants to take it off me later, I willingly make that offer.

This long-awaited Bill has been around for some time, and it is urgently needed. The enthusiasm of the staff for their wonderful facility is only enhanced by their need for this Bill, because they need more money. We will talk a bit more about that.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) will no doubt say a few things about the Bill, because he, like Lord True and the hon. Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger), tabled a previous Bill. This Bill has been round the houses. It may not have been scrutinised before, but it has been known about, and it is a short Bill that should not take us much time.

In fact, we offered to get through the Bill much quicker, because it will come back again on Report and Third Reading. We were quite happy to consider the Bill in one sitting. We are not tabling any amendments, because the amendments moved by my noble Friends Baroness Jones and Lord Whitty have already been made. We have got what we wanted on giving greater protection to this heritage site, and we are happy the Government agreed to that.

It is important to recognise that the Bill dates back to the difficulties in which Kew Gardens found itself in 2014-15, when there was a potential funding crisis. The then director identified that Kew could lose up to 150 research staff, which would have been a tragedy given the facility's international importance not just in terms of public access but in being the world's most important research institution. I will say a bit more about that shortly.

Kew's particular grouse in 2014-15 was that, in 1983, it got 98% of its funding from the state through grant in aid, which the Minister says is now down to just over 40%. By comparison, the Natural History Museum still draws the vast majority of its funds through the state. There is a lack of parity, at the very least. When and if Kew gets this money, I want assurances about what happens to that money, and I will say something about that in a minute.

The Select Committee on Science and Technology called the Government to account in 2014-15, and one of the things the Committee was clear about is that the Government did not have a clear strategy with regard to Kew Gardens, so it would be interesting to know what progress has been made on the strategy. This Bill may be part of that progress, and there may be other things that the Minister wants to say about the progress that can be made, but progress there needs to be. Protecting and enhancing this wonderful facility will take money. The cost will partly be defrayed by what we are talking about today, but there is no substitute for the fact that the state has to put its hand in its pocket. It has done to some extent, but it needs to do more—again, I will say more about that in a moment.

In a sense, things are on a more even keel than they were, because the cost of going into Kew has risen and now stands at £18 per individual. There are discounts and family tickets, but for people in many walks of life £18 is quite a high contribution, despite the fact that it is a wonderful day out, given that they can go to museums for free. One problem in attracting people, particularly tourists, to Kew is that additional cost they face. Will there be any implication here in terms of additional rises in the entrance fee, even though this may give Kew some extra money? My worry always with this extra money is whether it will go to Kew directly and will not be intermediated by the Treasury, which may just see it as a little cash bonus and take some of it away. We are talking about £15 million, as a maximum. In terms of what Kew gets, that may be a considerable sum, but it will get that hit only on one major occasion. It would therefore be interesting to hear from the Minister that he has got assurances from the Treasury that the money will go to Kew, will be ring-fenced and will not be taken for anything else. I say that because I want to talk about what this wonderful institution will have to do.

We welcome the Bill, but I just want to establish that we are talking about 11 properties. When I walked around the estate, it was apparent that other houses were already in the private sector, so it would be interesting to know exactly what properties we are talking about. I know it is a mixture of houses and flats, but the Minister could certainly clarify that. Again, it would be interesting to know, following on from what the Select Committee said, some of the ways in which the charitable context, which the Minister has explained, is fully understood by all concerned. A slightly different arrangement does apply, because this is not subject to the Charity Commission. We have all received a briefing note from the Charity Commission, but it has very little say over how this charity operates. It is entirely dependent upon the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and therefore DEFRA has to be the agency that protects Kew more than anyone else.

I have a big ask of the Minister, and I hope he is listening. The one thing I did learn was about the need to digitise the herbarium records. They are the most important records of flora—there are some of fauna—in the world. I, for one, would be exceedingly worried if we did not digitise that record as a matter of urgency. There is a £40 million cost, but I hope the Government will look to make a big contribution towards it, because if that building was to catch fire and those thousands of exhibits were lost—I know that is a big if, but these

things could always happen—the world's greatest collection would be endangered. So I hope the Minister might have some say over the way in which the Government's future strategy takes us towards digitising those herbarium records, and there would be another big advantage, because many people from all over the world want access to those records but currently have to arrive in person at Kew. For people on the other side of that world that involves a big cost, and it is important to recognise that is our obligation to make those records more easily accessible.

I just want to share a few stakeholder views, which are important to put on the record. These largely came out of the inquiry of nearly five years ago, but they are still pertinent. One key thing was about Kew's status in the global strategy for plant conservation, where it has an important part to play, as it does in terms of the convention on international trade in endangered species, livelihoods, and UK and international biodiversity strategies. All that is tied up with where Kew is and what it does. I hope the Minister accepts that the Bill will contribute towards that, so we can be clear on where the Government's strategy is taking us.

I have some questions that the Minister needs to answer on the record, because Kew is such an important aspect of the heritage of not only London but the whole country. I have already mentioned the cost of entry, so I shall not labour that point. Another argument that the Select Committee put forward was that in a sense the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has become the sole funder of Kew, which is largely understandable. However, Kew draws no money from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, let alone from the Department for International Development, even though both Departments draw benefit from what Kew has to offer. It would be interesting to know what discussions the Minister has had with those other Departments to see whether they could contribute to the funding as we take Kew Gardens forward.

There is an issue with how we balance what Kew is in respect of its research work and public access. None of us will want to see it become more commercialised, let alone a theme park, which has been a prominent idea in some people's views on how to deal with the financial shortcoming at Kew. We want to keep it as it is, open for public access, but the back-office elements are important. Kew is crucial to our understanding of climate change. Much of the research that will have to be done on how we feed our future population will be undertaken by Kew scientists, so it would be interesting to know where it fits into the Government's climate change strategy. One hopes it will play in important part.

I have two more issues to raise quickly. In respect of the action on biodiversity, it is crucial that we do not in any way downgrade Kew's status because of lack of funding. I hope that the Government will make it clear that Kew has an important part to play in the biodiversity strategy that the Government wish to address.

Finally, the recent report by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, which was published in January 2019, showed that the UK is on track to miss 15 out of its 20 Aichi biodiversity targets. By which date does the Minister expect the UK to be on track to meet those biodiversity targets, given that the only way we can do so is through Kew's active participation?

[Dr Drew]

Overall, the Bill is good, short and pertinent, so we give it our support and hope that the Government can get it through as a matter of urgency.

5.28 pm

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): It is a rare opportunity for a Member to be able to speak on legislation that pertains almost exclusively to his or her constituency, but I have that honour today, because the magnificent Kew Gardens is in my constituency—

Stephen Pound: And really close to mine.

Zac Goldsmith: That is absolutely right.

I am delighted that the Government have taken up this small, uncontroversial but nevertheless important Bill. Members who have visited Kew Gardens will know what an extraordinary place it is. With 2 million visitors a year, including 100,000 schoolchildren, the gardens are one of the great wonders of the world. There are stunning landscapes, extraordinary plants and peaceful walks—except when they are punctuated by the noise of aeroplanes flying over, but that is a debate for another day.

Kew is a great deal more than a beautiful garden or a tourist attraction: in addition to hosting the world's largest collection of living plants, its herbarium contains a collection of more than 7 million plant species. It is an extraordinarily valuable international resource, which is in the process of being digitised, as we have just heard, and made freely available worldwide. Kew Gardens is at the forefront, the cutting edge, of international plant science, which is crucial in providing a response to the existential threats of climate change, antimicrobial resistance, and diseases such as cancer, diabetes and more. Kew is simply a priceless national asset, and we should be doing everything we can to support it.

That brings me to the Bill. Very briefly, let me say that I first brought it to this House as a ten-minute rule Bill in January of last year, following similar efforts by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) and by my friend Lord True in the other place. Unfortunately, it was blocked, I think, nine times by a friendly colleague on the Government Benches. I want to repeat my thanks to Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for their decision to bring the Bill forward in Government time, and I welcome the changes that have been made to the Bill in the Lords. Although the intention of the Bill was never to allow Kew to lease out core parts of its estate, it is welcome that that is now clear in the Bill, with explicit protections for its UNESCO status.

Having visited Kew many, many times, including this morning, I can assure hon. Members that the clear intention is to use the powers in this Bill to lease out the residential buildings on the periphery of Kew's estate. In fact, I saw a number of those buildings this morning, all of which are beautiful and all of which have been empty for more than a decade. The anomaly of Kew Gardens being Crown land means that it has several buildings that can be leased for a maximum of only 31 years, which is not commercially attractive compared with the 150 years that the Bill will now allow.

Like the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), I want to caution against the suggestion that passing this Bill into law will provide some kind of windfall for Kew. There is no doubt that the potential financial gains are significant, but they must not be seen as a substitute either for visitor income or for Government funding. I hope the Minister agrees that this Bill is an opportunity for Kew to do more. With the spending review on the horizon, I urge him to make sure that Kew continues to receive significant support from Government. I want to reiterate that this Bill must not be used as a pretext to reduce such funding sources.

I thank the Bill team for their support and their willingness to take this Bill off my hands, out of the risk of its being blocked by some on the Back Benches, and on to the statute book. I look forward to it passing its first Commons stage this afternoon.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): What a well balanced debate, as a result of which we go straight into the wind-ups and immediately back to Dr David Drew.

5.32 pm

Dr Drew: I haven't even written my notes yet.

With the leave of the House, I will say a few things. It is important to do so, because various people have made contributions to this whole process over quite a long period. I welcome what not only the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) but my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) and the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) said, because they have all played a part in making sure that we get this Bill into play as a matter of priority.

I have two very quick things to say. First, I hope the Minister will answer some of my questions. I welcome the Government's commitment to this Bill, because it is important. As I have said, the enthusiasm of the staff at Kew took me aback. It made me realise how much people care for this institution. Secondly, I hope that we will now be able to move forward with some of the other business that needs to come back to this place, such as the Agriculture Bill, the Fisheries Bill, and, dare I say it, the environment Bill, which should be an environment and climate change Bill.

5.33 pm

David Rutley: With the leave of the House, I will respond to the debate. Indeed, it is my pleasure and privilege to do so. I think there was one other Bill that the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) had in mind as well.

Dr Drew: The Bill on animal sentience—I could throw that in there as well.

David Rutley: There we go. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am a reasonable man, and I am trying my best to move forward with this legislation. With support from the Opposition, Government Members and those across the House, we are making progress. Hopefully we can make more.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it is appropriate to hold the Bill's Second Reading ahead of the climate change debate. I wish to join him in welcoming the hon. Member for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley) to her place.

It is also good to see my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth in his place for what will be another important speech.

I want to respond to many of the points made in the debate. With characteristic enthusiasm and passion, the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) has persuaded people at Kew in no time at all that it is entirely appropriate for a group of MPs to come along. They would indeed like to extend that invitation to Members here, so I hope that he can join us on that occasion. It is rare for our suggestions to be put into action so quickly, but the hon. Gentleman has managed it.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) mentioned low-carbon transport. Kew's transport policy is, of course, not within the scope of the Bill, but we will pass on his comments to people there. My hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) talked about extending the leases; I responded by saying that leaseholders could apply to replace the original lease with a new one of no more than 150 years. The hon. Member for Stroud also asked which properties would be included.

My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) made a very important speech; I say a huge thank you to him for his remarkable work and support for Kew over the years. He also does a huge amount on the wider debate about biodiversity and climate change, for which many Members—not least DEFRA Ministers—are extremely grateful.

Of the properties that we are talking about today, five are currently let on a one-year lease following renovation work, partly funded by a loan, and two are unoccupied and require substantial renovation to bring them up to a habitable condition or make them fit to become office accommodation. In the first instance, Kew would like to focus on that portfolio of properties, particularly the unoccupied properties. That portfolio can itself generate a capital sum or remove liability for renovation or maintenance works—a cost avoidance of about £15 million over a 10-year period.

The hon. Member for Stroud also asked about funding and what would be done with it. The Government's intention is for Kew to receive the income to support its mission, including investment in its infrastructure and the quality of the world heritage site itself. Although I cannot prejudge the outcome of the forthcoming spending review, the importance of Kew's mission and of securing the institution's future means that my Department will be working closely with Kew to put forward the strongest possible case. That includes significant investment in digitising Kew's herbarium collection, which the hon. Gentleman called for and which my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park said was so important, so that it can be conserved securely and be globally available.

Kew's work is vital for our biodiversity and in tackling climate change. The hon. Gentleman can be assured that we will push hard to get the right funding for these tasks. It is vital that we get behind that work and further support Kew, because it is a global centre of knowledge about plants and fungi, and that should never come under any question. Given my remarks, I hope that the hon. Gentleman and other Members will be assured that we are in this for the long term. We need Kew to thrive and survive, and the Bill will help it do just that.

I hope that Members are now fully aware of the necessity of the Bill and the benefit that it will bring to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and the wider role played by Kew generally. I also hope that hon. Members feel reassured that proposals under any new lease will be subject to scrutiny by trustees, the Secretary of State and through the planning process with the local planning authority, as well as being in line with Kew's world heritage site management plan.

It is an honour to have participated in this debate. We care passionately about Kew, and we are grateful to the team there for their important work—I think everybody would echo that—and for their sheer enthusiasm.

Stephen Pound: Long may they flourish!

David Rutley: Long may they flourish, grow and prosper—absolutely. Their enthusiasm is infectious, and we are grateful for it. We want them to continue to succeed in the work they do. I hope the Bill will continue to make positive progress through Parliament, so that we can take this work forward.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Thank you.

Stephen Pound: Thank Kew!

Madam Deputy Speaker: For the avoidance of doubt, and particularly for Mr Pound's information, I should say that that was entirely unintentional.

I thank the whole House for dealing so swiftly with this important matter after the many months that the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) spent trying to get the Bill through the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

KEW GARDENS (LEASES) (NO. 3) BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Kew Gardens (Leases) (No. 3) Bill [Lords]:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to the Legislative Grand Committee (England).

Proceedings in the Legislative Grand Committee (England), on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

(2) Proceedings in the Legislative Grand Committee (England) on the Bill, proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee on a consent motion shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after the commencement of proceedings in the Legislative Grand Committee (England) on the Bill.

(3) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings in the Legislative Grand Committee (England) on the Bill.

(4) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings in the Legislative Grand Committee (England) on the Bill or to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(5) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

Climate Change

5.43 pm

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Chris Skidmore): I beg to move,

That the draft Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 12 June, be approved.

It is an honour to be in the House debating this order less than two weeks after this seminal legislation was laid in Parliament. I should say that I stand here as the interim Minister for Energy and Clean Growth—as an understudy to my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry). It is a tribute to her efforts that we are debating this measure today. I am sure that she would have dearly loved to be at the Dispatch Box speaking to it herself. I pay tribute to her work, her industry, and, above all, her passion, which is testament to the legislation that is being taken through today.

The draft order would amend the 2050 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target in the Climate Change Act 2008 from at least 80% to at least 100%. That target, otherwise known as net zero, would constitute a legally binding commitment to end the United Kingdom's contribution to climate change.

Last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published a sobering report on the impact of global warming at 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. In that report, it made clear that a target set to limit global warming at 2°C above pre-industrial levels was no longer enough. It made clear that by limiting warming to 1.5°C, we may be able to mitigate some of the effects on health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security and economic growth. It made clear that countries across the world, including the United Kingdom, would need to do more. The House has heard of the great progress we have made in tackling climate change together, cross-party, and how we have cut emissions by 42% since 1990 while growing the economy by 72%.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): When Greta Thunberg was in Parliament a few weeks ago, she called on politicians to be honest at all times. Does the Minister agree that it is a bit misleading to suggest that we deserve great credit because we have reduced emissions by 42% since 1990, since we have done that primarily by outsourcing a huge amount of our manufacturing emissions to other countries? We do not account for our consumption emissions, and if we did, our success would look rather less rosy than he has just presented.

Chris Skidmore: The draft order builds on a framework of legislation set in 2008; I see the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) in his place, who introduced that legislation. We have always recognised as a country that we are on a journey towards reducing our carbon emissions. That journey includes ensuring that we show global leadership and demonstrate to other countries that are not cutting their carbon emissions the need to do so. Above all, we recognise the need to do so sustainably and to ensure that we can continue to grow our economy. The last thing we want to do is reduce our carbon emissions at the risk of increasing unemployment and shrinking the economy. We have taken the independent advice of the Committee on Climate Change, which has demonstrated how we can do so not only sustainably but, importantly, in a just transition. It is important for some of the poorest in society that we have a just transition towards net zero.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sure that SNP Members would be keen to take up the opportunity to visit Kew Gardens as well, and we certainly would not want to stand in the way of the progress of this Bill, given the support for it across the House. However, the programme motion that the House has just agreed to has the certainly very unusual, and possibly unprecedented, effect of committing the entire Bill directly to the Legislative Grand Committee (England). I assume that it will have to meet here in the House rather than anywhere else in the Palace of Westminster, because nowhere else has enough space to accommodate all the English MPs who will, I am sure, want to participate in the debate and, potentially, in Divisions. Could you clarify that, under the Standing Orders, while Members from Scotland and Wales would not be able to participate in any Divisions in the Grand Committee, they would be able to participate in the debate if they so chose?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to clarify the point that he raises. First, I can confirm that the procedure that the House has just agreed to is indeed unprecedented. It is my understanding that the matter will be dealt with here on the Floor of the House—if, I suppose, there is legislative time over the next little while for such a matter to be brought before the House. His guess about that is as good as mine.

The substantive point that the hon. Gentleman raises is important. It is indeed the case that the way in which this Bill has been certified by Mr Speaker, as he said before Second Reading a little while ago, means that only Members sitting for English seats may vote, but every other Member is of course entitled to be present in the Chamber and to speak. The only thing that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues who do not hold seats in England cannot do is to vote or move any motion, in accordance with Standing Order No. 83W(8). I hope that makes the matter clear for him.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that the Government, as the largest purchaser of goods and services in the country, should also be a net zero purchaser and provider of services? That means a root-and-branch change of the way that government—local, national and quangos—procure what they buy for taxpayers.

Chris Skidmore: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments and for the leadership she has shown on the Environmental Audit Committee. I will come on to how the independent Committee on Climate Change produced its response, but it set out clearly a range of scenarios involving a net zero transition and what action would be needed in industry, within society and among individuals to go from 80% to 100%.

We have set carbon budgets 1 to 5 to take us to 2032. Carbon budget 6, which will lead to 2037, will be set by June 2021 at the latest. It is important to recognise that we all have a role. Government especially have a role not only in legislating today, to ensure that we set the policy framework for achieving net zero, but in demonstrating each and every one of its Departments' commitment to net zero. Her Majesty's Treasury will conduct a review over the summer, as we move towards the spending review, of the impacts on business, society and across the public sector of the need to decarbonise swiftly and securely.

As part of that progress and the pathway towards net zero, we will be publishing an energy White Paper in the summer. A variety of different documents will be published, but I take the hon. Lady's point; when it comes to the public sector, we will need to show leadership. We will need to be able to explain or change and to set out how all different areas of society will meet future carbon budgets—whether that is carbon budget 6, 7 or 8—on the road towards net zero.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give way?

Chris Skidmore: I have given way a significant number of times, and this will be the last intervention for a while so that I can make progress with my speech.

Dr Drew: The Minister will know that the NFU has set a target for earlier than 2050. At the very least will he look at options for bringing forward the date by which we should be able to meet the target of net zero emissions?

Chris Skidmore: We have obviously taken advice on the 2050 target from the independent Committee on Climate Change, which has suggested that at the moment 2050 is the earliest possible date for reaching net zero. Obviously, we are the first G7 country to make that commitment to 2050. Other economies, such as Norway, have committed to 2038. As part of the Government's local industrial strategy, the Greater Manchester area committed, just last week, to a net zero target by 2038. I welcome the NFU's commitment, but what we are saying as a Government is that all agencies across society will need to take action.

We welcome the NFU's leadership on agricultural emissions and looking at how the agricultural sector can be decarbonised. However, when it comes to the framework of the Climate Change Act, as the right hon. Member for Doncaster North highlighted during the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary

of State, the review mechanism is built into the legislation to allow us the opportunity to review the target in five years. When it comes to the overall cost—and some hon. Members may wish to reflect on the costs of going from 80% to 100%—the review mechanism is important. The Committee on Climate Change has recommended that the overall cost envelope of reaching net zero be the same as the 80% envelope, because since the original 80% target was set out, the costs of renewables and other technology have come down.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a hugely important point. Earlier he talked about the need to balance the need to reduce emissions with concerns about jobs. Does he agree that we have already seen the creation of 400,000 low-carbon jobs in this country, and that by leading the transition to a clean economy—which will happen whether we like it or not—there will be even more opportunities for job creation in the future?

Chris Skidmore: I thank my hon. Friend for making that excellent point, and he is right. When we consider any impact on wider society of introducing this legislation over the next few decades, while we may see short-term costs from the transformation, we need to look at the investment opportunities that will be created by new green jobs, which are expected to rise from the 400,000 figure he mentions to 2 million by 2030, potentially creating an economy worth over £150 billion in the longer term. It is important that that investment is recognised, because we want the UK to lead the world in future technologies such as carbon capture and storage. The legislation today provides a catalytic moment for us to look at how we can achieve this target and to invest for the future. The Treasury review will lead into the spending review and we will wish to look at how we can continue to invest in clean growth as a technology.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the Government on bringing this proposal forward and assure him of my party's support. I want to put that on record today. This issue is a topic of conversation every day in my office: it has become that sort of issue. Will the Minister outline how he intends to bring businesses along on the climate change agenda and ensure that they are encouraged, rather than forced, to make small changes that could make lasting changes globally? It would be great to bring small businesses along, as it would be a step in the right direction.

Chris Skidmore: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his leadership on the issue. We have had several conversations in the past few weeks on the legislation, but he is right that we have to take a whole of the United Kingdom approach to this. I know that it is more difficult for certain industries to make the changes that are needed, but for small businesses and those groups that we know will have questions or difficulties in making the transition, we will want to be able to set that out clearly. The energy White Paper will be published shortly, as the first in a series of documents to demonstrate the changes and consultations that we need. I reassure the hon. Gentleman that those consultations will allow the voice of small business to be heard in this debate. It is possible to achieve the changes, and we want to make sure that small businesses feel reassured of that.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): Does my hon. Friend welcome the support of the CBI and the British Chambers of Commerce, the NFU, the Royal Academy of Engineering and many household-name companies, because the legislation will give them certainty about investment so that they can benefit from the growth in our economy? It really is not only achievable to reach net zero by 2050, but affordable.

Chris Skidmore: I thank my hon. Friend for putting on record the wide range of support from many companies that have written to the Prime Minister and set out their own ambitious targets. I feel a bit like the BBC when it comes to whether I should name certain companies rather than others, but I know that many food manufacturers and retail corporations—big names on the high street—have already made the commitment to 2050. We are following in their footsteps as a Government and Parliament to provide the legislation today. My hon. Friend is right: the legislative framework will provide long-term security for those companies to begin their transitions.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): Within the Government, there are many different estimates of the impact on jobs and the cost to the Treasury. Why do we not have an impact assessment for this statutory instrument? That would be good regulatory and legislative practice.

Chris Skidmore: The way that the legislation from the Climate Change Act 2008 has been framed means that impact assessments are not needed specifically for the SI. We did not have an impact assessment when we moved from 60% to 80%, because the risk is incumbent on Government in making the legislation. The impact assessments that are needed under the framework of the Act arise through the carbon budgets themselves. We have already legislated for carbon budgets 1 to 5, to 2032. The framework for carbon budget 6 will be recommended by the independent Committee on Climate Change ready for next year: it needs to be implemented by June 2020. There will be a full impact assessment on the next period, 2032 to 2037.

Following the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), it is the carbon budget process that needs the certainty in place for businesses and society to plan ahead. Any impact assessments that are made will reflect carbon budgets 6, 7 and 8. The Treasury is also taking forward its own independent impact assessment of the wider costs to business and society. That work is ongoing and will be presented at the time of the spending review.

Mrs Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con): Many of my constituents, especially schoolchildren, will be delighted by this announcement, but others are rightly sceptical about the costs. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that the plan will be achievable and affordable?

Chris Skidmore: My hon. Friend is right that the legislation today is not simply about warm words or passing a law. We need to be able to demonstrate the action that lies beneath it. Action will come relatively quickly with the publication of an energy White Paper in the summer that will look at the future of our energy

supply, at a household level and an industrial level, and the energy network itself. The White Paper will demonstrate the action that the Government are taking and it will lead to a series of future consultations.

In order to lead the debate on climate change and demonstrate the global leadership that the UK wishes to have, it is right that the process highlights the need for clean growth. That is not oxymoronic: we can grow the economy at the same time as removing greenhouse gases from our atmosphere and ensuring that new, greener technologies and more renewable forms of energy come on board. It is right that we lead that conversation, that we reassure those who may be concerned about the future, and that we take action to demonstrate to those businesses worried about any economic impact that this transition is both just and sustainable.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): This measure is not long overdue but it is welcome, and I believe it will be very popular right across the country. Has my hon. Friend looked at the interim report of the all-party parliamentary group on British bioethanol, which proposes that E10 petrol should be introduced as standard in the UK, as it is in most parts of Europe, America and Australia? That would reduce carbon emissions from standard petrol by the equivalent of 700,000 cars; it would save jobs in the north-east of England, where the two British bioethanol plants are based; and it would be cleaner in terms of pollution. It would, of course, be a temporary measure while we introduce more electric cars, but is it not overdue?

Chris Skidmore: My right hon. and learned Friend has also raised that point with me in private, and I am happy to raise the issue of bioethanol with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which has responsibility for agriculture. It is important to reflect that, as part of a grand challenge in our industrial strategy, we have set out a number of missions on the future of mobility and transport in our cities, including the reduction of congestion, the introduction of electric vehicles and the adaptation of battery technology. I was delighted to visit Warwick Manufacturing Group on Friday, to discuss the advances it has made with lithium batteries. We must do that because of the need to reduce not just carbon emissions but air pollution; we know that tens of thousands of people are literally dying as a result of air pollution in our streets and cities, so the impact we make today is not just for 2050 but for now.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): The Government have committed to phasing out new sales of the internal combustion engine by 2040. My Select Committee on Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has recommended that the date be brought forward by almost a decade, if there is to be any chance of meeting the commitment of net zero by 2050. Will the Minister look again at the phasing out of the internal combustion engine, so that we can get more electric vehicles on our roads and bring down carbon emissions?

Chris Skidmore: I could not agree more with the hon. Lady: we want to see the greatest possible transition, as fast as possible, to electric and hybrid vehicles for the future, but we have to be able to do it in a sustainable way. We have to ensure that electric vehicle technology, including batteries and other opportunities, moves with

us at the same time. Other countries have moved faster than us, and I recognise the points the hon. Lady makes, but what is important is that we begin this discussion about how we can achieve that. There are a number of policy measures by which we can do it. There is also a supply-side as well as a demand-side issue when it comes to electric vehicle technology, and we need to be able to work on both sides of that economic argument in order to increase the number of electric vehicles on our roads. There are issues about charging points, which I also recognise. We need to do it in a sustainable and affordable way that ensures that we can continue a transformation of the economy.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Ind): I would really welcome an earlier shift towards electric cars and electric bikes, but is it not the case that, where possible, we really need to be getting people out of their cars altogether and encouraging greater use of cycling and walking? Will the Minister assure me that there will be increased investment in cycling and walking?

Chris Skidmore: I will get back to my speech in a moment. It is important that the Government are able to set out a pathway for considering the range of responsibilities across society, and that will encourage a range of individual actions. The Committee on Climate Change is the lead independent committee whose advice the Government have taken in order to legislate today. It has set out a range of future possibilities to reach net zero, many of which include individual actions for reaching the final 4%, but this is about system change and decarbonising our energy and heating systems, both domestically and industrially. There are a large number of areas where we will need to take action across society, and we need to be able to take that action now.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD) *rose*—

Chris Skidmore: I have been generous in taking interventions—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. If I might help the Minister and, indeed, the House, the Minister has been very generous in giving way and a great many Members have intervened on him. Perhaps the House is not aware that this debate has been allocated 90 minutes. That means that we will stop at 13 minutes past 7, which is only just over an hour away. Every time somebody intervenes, they take away the time of Members who have been sitting patiently, waiting to make speeches. Please do not be angry with the Minister for not giving way. He has been very generous and I am going to encourage him not to extend his generosity much further.

Chris Skidmore: The Committee on Climate Change has told us quite clearly that ending the UK's contribution to global warming is now within reach. It has advised that a net zero emissions target is necessary, because climate change is the single most important issue facing us; that it is feasible, because we can get there using technologies and approaches that exist, enabling us to continue to grow our economy and to maintain and improve our quality of life; and that it is affordable, because it can be achieved at a cost equivalent of 1% to 2% of GDP in 2050. As I have said, owing to falling costs, that is the same cost envelope that this Parliament accepted for an 80% target. That is before taking into

account the many benefits for households and businesses—from improved air quality, to new green-collar jobs. I applaud the committee for the quality, breadth and analytical rigour of its advice.

Recent months and weeks have been a time of huge and growing interest in how we tackle the defining challenge of climate change. Calls for action have come from all generations and all parts of society—from Greta Thunberg to David Attenborough, from schoolchildren to women's institutes. My message today is, "As a Parliament we hear you, and we are taking action."

This country has long been a leader in tackling climate change. Thirty years ago, Mrs Thatcher was the first global leader to acknowledge at the United Nations "what may be early signs of man-induced climatic change."

Eleven years ago, this House passed the ground-breaking Climate Change Act, the first legislation in the world to set legally binding, long-term targets for reducing emissions. The Act, passed with strong cross-party support, created a vital precedent on climate: listen to the science, focus on the evidence, and pursue deliverable solutions.

Today we can make history again, as the first major economy in the world to commit to ending our contribution to global warming forever. I ask Members on both sides of the House to come together today in the same spirit and to support this draft legislation, which I commend to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): As I have indicated, there will be an immediate time limit of six minutes on Back-Bench speeches.

6.8 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I rise to emphasise just how strongly we support this order. As you have said, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have 90 minutes to debate it, but I for one think that that is miserably insufficient time for what we need to talk about. I hope that the parliamentary authorities will arrange a whole day's debate as soon as possible on the order and its implications. I of course accept that this is how orders work, but I know that hon. Members across the House are itching to talk about the consequences of this momentous change and to review what it means for how we go about tackling climate change, the measures we will have to take and, indeed, the commitments we will have to make over the next few years to make sure that the order does not fall dead from a legislative press but instead really works in our war on climate change.

The Labour party has long called for that change. My hon. Friend the Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) called in the House for net zero as long as a year ago, as indeed did the Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). The change has, of course, been widely called for by climate strikers and green activists across the country. This first step in the right direction is for them as much as for the Members debating it today. It is also a tribute to the sagacity and draftsmanship of the original Climate Change Act 2008.

The 2008 Act was taken through this House by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), who is in his place. The fact is that such a momentous and far reaching change in the UK's target horizon, on the removal of greenhouse

[*Dr Alan Whitehead*]

gases in the atmosphere and the move to a permanent net zero carbon economy, can be effected by an order consisting, effectively, of one article and the substitution of one figure in one subsection in the Act. It is possible to do that, because, as the Minister mentioned, section 2 of the Act states that the Secretary of State may, by order, amend the percentage specified in section 1(1)—the current 80% target—if it appears to the Secretary of State that there have been significant developments in scientific knowledge about climate change.

I am sure the Minister agrees that that is precisely what has happened since the passing of the Act. What we thought might be a sustainable emissions reduction target to keep the global temperature rise to below 2°C by 2050 already looks insufficiently robust. The UK's contribution to a global effort seeking to arrive at a 2°C outcome—a commitment to reduce the UK's emission load of carbon dioxide by 80% from a baseline of 1990 levels—is no longer sufficient. We need to aim for global temperature rises of no more than 1.5°C by 2050. The Minister mentioned the recent seminal Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, which shows us why the target is so important and why even limiting temperature change to 2° will not get us to a tolerable safe place as far as the effects of global warming on the planet are concerned. That does indeed count as the “developments in scientific knowledge” specified in the Act.

The UK's contribution to the global effort has to ensure that we can achieve net zero emissions by 2050—or, I would hope, before 2050. That has to be our new target and it has to be enshrined in our legislation. I say before 2050, because it may well be that further scientific advances indicate that we need to achieve the target before then. I think that that will be the case and the Act could be amended further, if necessary, to take that into account.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Does the 2017 manifesto commitment to a revolution in fracking and shale gas extraction not fly in the face of the grand ambitions we are discussing today?

Dr Whitehead: If one is trying to get a zero-emissions outcome, trying to get a lot more high carbon fuel out of the ground using some of the most difficult ways possible does not exactly seem to be in line with that target.

Wera Hobhouse: Can we encourage the Minister to acknowledge—I wish he would listen—that as the 80% target now needs to be 100% by 2050, now is the perfect time to say we no longer support fracking?

Dr Whitehead: That is one of many things we will have to do in the very near future as we address how properly to sort out the new target. As I will come on to say, there is a big list of challenging things we need to do, and that is just one of them. There are many, many new policy guidelines that we need to get into place to get us to that target.

The Committee on Climate Change, established under the Act as the guardian of science in our proceedings on climate change in the UK, reported strongly, as has been outlined, that we need to move to net zero and that we could do it by 2050, within the cost parameters

established in the original target, if we put in place the very challenging policies it outlined. We strongly support that small change that means so much.

As the Minister will know, however, that is not the end of the matter. In fact, it is barely the beginning. I therefore want to ask the Minister for some points of clarification and some further information when he comes to respond to this short debate. There are, essentially, four points to consider.

First, the Minister will know all about the carbon budgets, which were admirably and clearly established under the Climate Change Act. They are designed to keep us on track for a steady reduction in emissions and to put in place measures to keep emissions decline on track. It set out three budgets from the 2008 start date, established in total size by the Committee on Climate Change, and required a Government plan to be put into place on how to meet each budget. The Minister will know that while we have done well by international standards in reducing our emissions by 47%—it is much less in consumption emissions, if we look at it that way—that is not a sufficient trajectory for net zero carbon targets. Our current performance, and likely achievements on known policies right now, place us in a disadvantageous position as we seek to adhere to the budgets that will drive emissions down to net zero by 2050.

The carbon budgets are designed—all five of them, to date—to put us on a path for an 80% reduction and 2°, not net zero 1.5°. It is shocking that we are currently failing to get to grips with the later budgets, budgets four and five, even under the circumstances of 2°. We have exceeded our earlier budgets only partially because of policy and partially because of economic circumstances, meeting or exceeding the first two budgets and probably the third.

After that, however, it gets very sketchy. Indeed, the latest updated emissions projections from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy show us badly off target: over by 139 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent for the fourth carbon budget, or 7% over on central estimates; and 245 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, or 13% over the central estimate for the fifth carbon budget. This is at a time when we will need to introduce a radically reduced sixth carbon budget, and subsequent budgets, to meet our new challenges. We are failing even to get to grips with the old targets, which will make our work so much harder when the later budgets come upon us.

What urgent steps are the Minister and the Government taking to get us back on track for the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, on which we are currently failing so badly? I can make an offer to the Minister: if he wants to sit down and sort out a raft of new policies, extended commitments to policy programmes, and extensions of the urgency of existing programmes, we will happily jointly draft those with him, so that there is solid buy-in across the House for that vital initial effort.

Secondly, we received the alarming news recently that the Government seemingly intend to roll over historical surpluses—some 88 megatonnes of carbon dioxide saved from the second carbon budget—to ease the passage of the third carbon budget, thus creating a higher starting point for the fourth and fifth carbon budgets. That move is not completely illegitimate in terms of the construction of the Act, but the Committee on Climate Change has always recommended that that should not

be done, and that banking and borrowing on future budgets would gravely distort the safe progression downwards of carbon dioxide emissions. Similarly, we should not seek to offset our own account through international emissions allowances, as the Government seem intent on doing.

Will the Minister explain why the Government have moved to set aside emission surpluses from earlier budgets? Will he say now that he will unwind that intention and not use them to inflate future budgets? Will he confirm that international offsets will have no place in future budget setting? We note in the explanatory memorandum to the order that despite the committee's recommendation in the report that the UK legislate as soon as possible to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, with the target of a 100% reduction in greenhouse gases from 1990 covering all sectors of the economy including aviation and shipping, the Government have, for the time being, merely left headroom in the budgets for international aviation and shipping. Shipping and aviation currently make up 3.2% and 2.1% of global emissions, but this could rise to over 30% if action is not taken alongside other greenhouse gas reductions. What is the Government's intention with regard to aviation and shipping coming properly and fully into carbon budgets, and why are they continuing to delay what we all know is an essential inclusion if those targets are to be meaningful for the future?

Thirdly, does the Minister recognise, as I am sure he does, that net zero is the practical outcome of the legislation to require a 100% reduction in the UK's net carbon account? Net zero means that in addition to developing low carbon policies, as we were for the 80% target, we have to develop policies that are essentially carbon negative—that put carbon back into the ground in one way or another to compensate for the remaining positive carbon elements of our overall account. This means that techniques such as BECCS—bio-energy with carbon capture and storage—extended carbon capture and storage, carbon capture from the air and radical afforestation are all important policies for the future target. What plans do the Government have—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but before he comes to his further points I hope he is bearing in mind that there is well under an hour left in this debate and that a great many Members wish to participate.

Dr Whitehead: Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker. I assure you that I have about half a page to go, so I hope that that will keep the timetable intact.

What plans do the Government have to proceed urgently with negative carbon policies? We will be on hand to help them if they want to bring in those policies at an early stage.

Finally, the Minister will no doubt have been copied into the recent letter from the Chancellor concerning legislating for net zero, in which he urged that there should not be legislation until a review of the costs had been carried out by the Treasury. The letter was widely regarded as being somewhat climate economic illiterate, in that it set out only the costs and not the benefits of moving forward in this way. As I said, the Committee on Climate Change indicated that in its opinion the GDP cost of 1% to 2% was unchanged from when

the 80% target was set—this was presumably approved by the Treasury. Indeed, as Lord Stern reminded us in his seminal report of 2006, which seems a long time ago, the GDP costs of doing nothing might be several times as much.

Will the Minister provide assurance on that point? Indeed, I take it from the fact that we have this legislation, and that it has not been put off to some time in the future, that the Treasury's rather insidious advice has not been taken on board. Might it not be a good idea to set out in the round and well in advance what the overall costs and benefits of moving to this target will be? I look forward to the jobs in the low-carbon industries that we will set to work replacing our infrastructure, so that it works for a green future; the immense improvements in the quality of our environment that the measure will bring; and the assurance that we will leave a world fit for our children and grandchildren to live in. That surely does not have a price, but, if it does, it is well worth paying.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): The time limit for Back-Bench speeches will begin at five minutes and is likely to be reduced.

6.22 pm

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I give a warm welcome to today's legislation and to the Minister, who has taken this brief by the scruff of the neck since he was appointed, for which we are all grateful.

This is a moment to give sincere thanks to the Government and the Committee on Climate Change for acting and allowing us to act in the way we are set to, because the IPCC report, which the Minister referred to, is really devastating. If we do not manage to limit the rise in global temperatures to 1.5°C, we will find that sea levels keep rising to an unsustainable degree and that the impact on biodiversity is completely unsustainable. The difference between a 1.5°C and 2°C rise is clearly illustrated in that report. At 1.5°C, we will lose 6% of insects, 8% of plants and 4% of vertebrates. That is devastating enough by any measure. At 2°C, the IPCC forecasts that we would lose 18% of insects, 16% of plants and 8% of vertebrates.

Limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared with 2°C has other consequences, most notably for us as a species. Keeping it to 1.5°C may reduce the proportion of the world's population who are exposed to climate-induced water stress by 50%. The impact on an increasingly volatile and dangerous world can scarcely be overstated. We need to do this—the science is clear—and we need to rebut the notion that the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), referred to. I agree with him that we need to fight back against the idea that the costs exceed the benefits, because doing the right thing for the environment is not at odds with doing the right thing for our economy. The UK's performance since the 1992 Rio summit—we have decarbonised the most of any G7 nation at the same time as growing our economy the most—only goes to prove that.

The committee's report was crystal clear that we can deliver net zero at no additional cost relative to the 2008 commitment to an 80% reduction in CO₂ by 2050,

[Mr Simon Clarke]

owing to the pace of technological change. That needs to be factored into all our calculations when it comes to the achievability and costs of the commitment. Anyone who has listened to Lord Adair Turner talking about this, as he has done so well, and seen the work of the Energy Transitions Commission can be well assured that we are on track to deliver this in a cost-effective fashion.

This goes to the point that the coalition Government's energy policy, under David Cameron, was a huge success. The contracts for difference mechanism, which enabled huge reductions in the cost of offshore wind in particular, goes to show that we can achieve massive economic and technological change if we incentivise markets to deliver the outcomes that we all need. Anyone who looks at the proportion of the UK's energy generated by renewables—it stood at just over 6% in 2010 and is now 33%—will see that we can deliver far-reaching change in a very short period.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very important point about the good that Government can do and the change that they can bring about. Does he agree that to reach this ambitious target, we will need every level of government, including local government, the devolved Administrations and central Government, to work together to make sure that we can deliver this ambitious target for 2050?

Mr Clarke: I absolutely agree. No one can regard this as somebody else's challenge, and that goes for the private sector as well as the public sector. Everyone will have to realign their expectations in the light of this commitment because it is genuinely groundbreaking. It is easy to underestimate the significance of what we are gathered to legislate for. This is a world-leading initiative by a developed nation. It is a profound statement of our commitment to a cleaner and greener world.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Clarke: I will, but I promise not to take more than my allotted time.

Alex Chalk: My hon. Friend has campaigned so vigorously on this issue. He is right to say that this is world-leading legislation and that the UK is taking the lead, but does he agree that China, whose carbon emissions are something like 25 times that of the UK, really needs to play its part?

Mr Clarke: I do. That is not a counsel of despair. In many ways, we are setting a powerful example that other countries will be inspired to follow. By legislating for net zero, we start to create some of the economic opportunities that other countries will, in turn, be keen to seize. We can set a powerful moral and economic example for other countries to follow. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words. He, too, has fought long and hard to make this happen, and I thank him for that.

On the economic opportunity, I will briefly bang the drum for carbon capture and storage. The CCC is absolutely clear in its report that we need to deliver CCS—*[Interruption.]* Contrary to what the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) said from a sedentary position,

the Government are now taking CCS as an integral part of their green industrial strategy. We need to make sure that we get a number of clusters rolled out as quickly as possible, and one of those should be Teesside. I praise the work of the Teesside Collective, which is a pioneering group of industrial companies, all of whom want to see this happen, not least because there are certain industries such as steel, cement, plastics and fertilisers that emit CO₂ as an inextricable part of their production techniques. Even if we fully decarbonised our energy mix, those sectors would still need CCS to avoid contributing to our carbon emissions.

Finally, this is a wonderful example of how the UK can take a moral lead in the world after Brexit, and I praise how we are fighting to deliver the COP 26, alongside Italy, as part of our efforts. If we secure that, I hope we will make the drive for net zero an integral part of our prospectus for the conference.

6.30 pm

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): Like everyone in the Chamber, I found the results from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change according to which we need to limit the increase in temperature to 1.5° very sobering. Its findings should if anything spur us all into very determined action. The results of such a rise would be an increased likelihood of food scarcity, disease and poverty, which we cannot just stand by and watch. I am pleased to say that the findings have refocused minds, and I am glad to have this debate today—it is only a pity it is so short. Just last Friday, we saw another UK-wide school strike outside Parliament and across schools. That is particularly important given that we had a visit from the world's most powerful leader, who is a climate change denier, just a few weeks previously.

By contrast, last week, Glasgow Caledonian University hosted the world forum on climate justice, at which Nicola Sturgeon spoke about the big climate conversation—a nationwide conversation to discuss action to tackle the global climate emergency. We rightly realise that climate change is the challenge of a generation. Whether we are academics, activists or politicians, we have not only a duty to raise awareness of climate change, but an urgent obligation to take action and seek solutions.

I therefore welcome the UK Government's decision to legislate for a net zero target by 2050. Since the publication of the Committee on Climate Change's report last month, the Scottish Government have been calling for this, given that the Committee was explicit in its advice that Scotland could not achieve net zero emissions by 2045 unless the UK Government did so by 2050. Will the UK Government respond to the Scottish Government's request for an urgent meeting to discuss how reserved levers can be applied to help achieve net zero emissions in Scotland and the rest of the UK?

This is an important moment to take stock of what has been achieved so far, to examine our future plans and to set out what needs to be done imminently now that these new targets have been set. I am proud to say that Scotland is already world leading in its approach to climate change. We are committed to setting and meeting the most ambitious targets possible. We have already halved emissions since 1990 while growing the economy and increasing employment and productivity. Scotland continues to outperform the UK in delivering long-term emissions reductions, with statutory annual targets for 2014,

2015 and 2016 all met, and progress remains consistent with meeting the current interim target for 2020. The only country in the EU15 to do better is Sweden.

The Scottish Government declared a climate emergency last month and acted immediately on the Committee on Climate Change advice by lodging amendments to our Climate Change Bill to set a net zero target for 2045 and increase the target for 2030 to 70% and for 2040 to 90%. These are the most ambitious statutory targets in the world for these years and this immediate response has been welcomed by the committee, which said:

“Scotland has been a leader within the UK with many of its policies to tackle climate change. By setting a strong net-zero target for 2045 it can continue that leadership on the world stage.”

That said, simply discussing climate change, setting targets and reflecting on achievements will not solve climate change. Progress to date has been achieved with little impact on most people, and few of us have had to make any real radical lifestyle changes. As the committee pointed out, to achieve these new targets we will require “extensive changes across the economy”.

The next phase will require much more noticeable changes and tougher decisions, with people having to embrace significant lifestyle change in order to achieve our collective ambition. The sooner we start, the easier it will be to achieve.

Scotland has already made progress with efforts to ensure a just transition—I was pleased to hear the Minister mention that in his speech in relation to the UK Government’s own ambitions—and has set up a Just Transition Commission specifically to provide advice on how to transition to a low-carbon economy that is fair for everyone. I hope he will pay close attention to its progress. It will advise Scottish Ministers on how to apply the International Labour Organisation’s just transition principles to Scotland—for example, by examining the economic and social opportunities that the move to a carbon-neutral economy will bring; the impact on a sustainable and inclusive labour market; and lastly, issues that could arise in relation to cohesion, equalities and poverty.

Furthermore, climate change will be at the heart of the next SNP programme for government and spending review. Last year, the Scottish Government published their climate change plan 2018-32, which set out how we would continue to drive down emissions over the period. This is due to be updated within six months of the Climate Change Bill receiving Royal Assent to reflect these new targets. We are announcing new and ambitious action on deposit return, on the way we farm and on renewables. For example, a new part of the Scottish strategy for achieving 100% reduction in emissions is through establishing a publicly owned, not-for-profit energy company to deliver renewable energy to Scottish customers

“as close to cost price as possible”.

The UK Government should pay close attention to that.

Looking ahead, for the UK Government to be serious about meeting their new target, they must heed the advice of the Committee on Climate Change, which set out five scenarios for the UK to reach net zero emissions by 2050, based on known technologies. These included resource and energy efficiency, and societal choices that cut demand for carbon intensive activities; extensive

electrification supported by a major expansion of renewable and other low-carbon power generation; the development of a hydrogen economy to service demands for some industrial processes; and changes in how we farm and use our land.

None the less, the recommended scenario that sticks out for me is carbon capture, usage and storage. The committee’s report states that it is a “necessity not an option”. The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee report on carbon capture, usage and storage concludes that the UK will not be able to meet its Paris agreement climate change targets without deploying carbon capture. In spite of all this, the Conservative UK Government shamefully reneged on their promised £1 billion of investment in carbon capture and storage technology, which was expected to create 600 jobs in Peterhead, in a deal signed by David Cameron in the months leading up to the 2014 independence referendum.

Earlier this month, my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) pointed out to the Secretary of State that St Fergus near Aberdeen could at a minimum capture 5.7 gigatonnes—equivalent to 150 years of all Scotland’s 2016 gas emissions. With the right investment and commitment, this could be operational by 2023. I remind the Minister of the huge potential of carbon capture, usage and storage and encourage him to do all he can to support its development in Scotland. Will he please announce what further plans he has?

Finally, the Committee on Climate Change outlined the obstacles that needed to be overcome to achieve net zero emissions as well as a number of priorities for the Government, such as ensuring that businesses respond, engaging the public to act, developing the infrastructure, providing the skills and ensuring a just transition. Crucially, the report recommended that the net zero challenge be embedded and integrated across all Departments, at all levels of government and in all major decisions that impact on emissions. This would be the right course of action and one that I hope is followed through on.

Like the Scottish Government, the next Prime Minister must put tackling this climate emergency at the heart of what the Government do. It is something that each and every one of us must keep at the forefront of our minds every day. Make no mistake: climate change is a global problem and responsibility and its consequences will not respect national borders. Let us ensure that this target is delivered upon with no room for complacency and help to set the agenda for other nations to aspire to.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. The time limit must be reduced to four minutes.

6.37 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I very much support this motion and I congratulate the Government on bringing forward this legislation so quickly after the passing of the motion on 1 May accepting that there was a climate change emergency.

I hope that the motion will be approved this evening. If it is, we must not rest on our laurels but move immediately to provide the full policy framework so we can deliver what is an ambitious target. The good news is that much of the framework is already there: the Climate

[Peter Aldous]

Change Act 2008, the industrial strategy, the clean growth strategy and the sector deals. Some pieces of the jigsaw have been put in place, such as the offshore wind sector deal—the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), launched it in Lowestoft in March—which will help to revitalise the local economy.

Other pieces of the jigsaw are missing, however, such as a route map for decarbonising transport, a flexible policy framework for promoting local bespoke heating schemes and a comprehensive plan for meeting the domestic energy efficiency targets in the clean growth strategy, as put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) in her ten-minute rule Bill last week. The UK has made significant strides in decarbonising the nation's power supply, with offshore wind providing a means of regenerating coastal communities such as Lowestoft, but more work needs to be done, including providing a clear route to market for other clean energy technologies and getting on with delivering those big-ticket items of nuclear power and carbon capture, utilisation and storage, which are absolutely vital to delivering on the zero carbon goal. It is important for us not to be not a one-trick pony and concentrate only on power. We must immediately set about making significant strides in decarbonising transport and heat, as well as improving our performance in relation to energy efficiency.

The challenge is a big one, and the UK Government cannot deliver on their own. We need to be working with and leading other countries, and incentivising and encouraging the private sector to step up to the plate and invest. Norway is a country with which we have a great deal in common, as we share the North sea oil and gas basin. We must work with the Norwegians to ensure that oil and gas are produced in a low-carbon, efficient manner in future, and that we realise the full potential of carbon capture, utilisation and storage. Companies that were exclusively oil and gas businesses are responding to the winds of change and are making the transition to low-carbon forms of energy production. The Government must incentivise them to move as quickly as is practically possible, and to ensure that the highly skilled workforce on the United Kingdom continental shelf have every opportunity to move to jobs in the low-carbon economy.

The UK has a record of which we can be proud, but we now need to accelerate our efforts to meet the challenge, and the motion is the first step in that process. It is welcome, so let us now ensure that it is passed, and then get on with the enormous amount of work that is required for that challenge to be properly met.

6.41 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous). There is something paradoxical about the fact that this is a low-key debate on a Monday evening, but one thing that it indicates is that there is a great deal of consensus on the need for action, and that is a good thing. The fact that there is not a huge row going on shows that, on both sides of the House, we want to act.

I shall make three substantive points. The first is about the target itself. It is based on the recommendations of the Committee on Climate Change, and I welcome it,

but I believe that it should be regarded as—I hesitate to use this word—a backstop. [Laughter.] I could not think of a better word, although I asked my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) for one.

The reality is that the science is heading in one direction, towards more urgent action. Let me draw the House's attention to a document that was produced for the Committee on Climate Change by its international advisory group, chaired by Peter Betts, an excellent former civil servant who was responsible for the international negotiations. In that document, the group said that we should set a net zero date no later than 2050, and that there was a case for 2045. As the Minister said, it is good that there is a review clause, and I think that we may well have to bring that point forward.

My second point is this: if you will the end, you have to will the means. I am glad to hear that the energy White Paper is coming, and the Minister has built up my expectations about what it will contain. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West talked about cars. By the mid-2020s, the lifetime costs of electric vehicles will be lower than the lifetime costs of petrol and diesel vehicles. As the Committee on Climate Change says, the economically sensible choice is to make an earlier rather than a later transition. That is not to say that no issues are involved, but that makes a profound point about the benefits of moving forward.

Thirdly, if we will the means as well as the end, we should think not just about the 1% to 2% of GDP that this will cost—on top of what we already spend—but about the 98% of other economic activity. I raise the issue of the Heathrow third runway gingerly, but if we are so serious about this climate emergency, I do not see how we cannot look at all the things that the Government and the private sector are doing and ask whether they make sense in a net zero world. I hope that the comprehensive spending review will have a net zero carbon budgeting process attached to it.

My final point concerns the international negotiations. It is excellent that we shall be hosting the conference of the parties next year, but let me say to the Minister and to the House that this is a massive challenge. It is an incredibly important moment for the world, when every country has to update its Paris targets. In a way, this is the last chance for us to get on track for what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has described to us as a really dangerous and urgent situation. Let me say this to the Minister. Of course Brexit will be ongoing, at least for a bit, but will he please ensure that all the political and diplomatic muscle of Government will be put into this process? It is a massive thing for the world, and it will require a huge focus from the Government. This is an important moment, and I welcome it, but, in a sense, the hard work is only just beginning for all of us.

6.45 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), who has been one of the world leaders in the debate on this issue.

I welcome the Government's announcement today. Climate change is without doubt the biggest danger to our planet. The UK has a very good record in this regard, but the planet has a very poor one. All of us will have to up our game massively to meet the challenge.

Moreover, the next stages of the decarbonisation of our economy will be much more difficult than the progress that we have already made.

As I have said, the UK has a good record. The climate change performance index, which is collated by the independent organisation Germanwatch, lists it as fifth in the world, behind only Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania and Morocco. We are ahead of every other country that Members may want to mention, so it is not a question of the Government's marking their own homework. We are a world leader in this area. Ours is the best performance in the G20. We were the first country to announce that we would abolish coal energy production by 2025, and are now the first to announce a net zero target of 2050.

It has not been mentioned yet in the debate, but we should not forget that all this progress has come not necessarily at a cost to businesses, although they are having to change, but principally at a cost to consumers. All these levies are paid by the consumer. In 2010, we were spending just over £1 billion. Today, consumers are bearing a cost of more than £7 billion a year, and the figure will be more than £9 billion by 2020. When we make more progress—as we will—we must do so in a way that is sensitive to, particularly, those on low incomes, because otherwise the burden will be entirely disproportionate.

Yes, we have made progress. As has been pointed out, 33% of our energy comes from electricity. However, that is only 19% of the total energy that is being produced. The next challenges, particularly those involving heating and transport, will be much more difficult. We need a stable framework. It is great that the Government have made their announcement, because it means that businesses will respond and feel confident that their investments will be supported in the future.

There is plenty of innovation coming down the line that will have nothing to do with Government action. I am thinking of, for example, transport as a service. When we do not own cars any more, but simply dial a number on our iPhones so that they arrive outside our doors, energy requirements for transport will be transformed. Solar energy and batteries will transform them as well. This is more about a technology disruption than about a transition. As the right hon. Member for Doncaster North said, it is about economics. It will be cheaper to run a car that is electric and autonomous than to run one with a diesel engine.

It has been good to hear this issue debated on both sides of the Chamber today, but if we are to deliver these solutions, we need a fact-based debate. We cannot simply say that we need to decarbonise our energy and that therefore we need to stop using gas, and then stop producing gas. Fracking has been mentioned today. Given that 90% of my constituency is covered by petroleum exploration development licences, we will need gas. The Committee on Climate Change says that the widespread deployment of hydrogen is critical to the decarbonisation of our economy. That can only realistically be achieved by stripping the carbon molecule out of methane. We will need gas for many decades to come. Let us talk facts, and not just base what we say on emotions.

I welcome the Government's actions, and I have been delighted to speak in the debate.

6.49 pm

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): I am proud to speak in this debate, and I am proud that the country that first legislated with the Climate Change Act in 2008 is going a step further today by updating the Act and will be the first G7 economy to legislate for net zero. I think we should all be proud of those achievements. But the role of Parliament, and my role as Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee is, where appropriate, to push the Government to go further in a whole range of areas. Those areas include electric vehicles and carbon capture and storage, on both of which my Select Committee has produced reports. Another is energy efficiency, on which a report is coming shortly looking at energy efficiency in homes and at the building of homes—we must not build homes today that we know are not fit for the future given the new commitments that we are making.

Other such areas are international aviation and shipping, which I am disappointed are not included in the SI we are debating today. The chief executive of the Committee on Climate Change, Chris Stark, who gave evidence to our Select Committee, said that it was absolutely imperative to include international aviation and shipping in our climate change commitments, because they contribute 10% of our carbon emissions. I hope the Government will look at that evidence again and update our legislation in light of it.

There are other things that we need to do. Our Committee took evidence last week, including from the World Wide Fund for Nature, which said that a target of 2045 was eminently possible. We heard other evidence that by 2050 we should be looking not at net zero, but at taking carbon out of the atmosphere, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) said earlier, with a 120% target to do exactly that. I hope that when we have the five-year review we can look at being more radical and going further, so that we achieve net zero before 2050 and continue to be a world leader and ensure that we are at the forefront of creating green jobs and taking the opportunities that meeting this target will offer.

However, achieving all that goes well beyond our debates and the decisions we take in this House, and that is why I am also pleased that, along with five other Select Committees, my Committee announced last week that we will be setting up a series of citizens assemblies to bring the public into this debate. Debates and resolutions in this House are not going to take carbon out of the atmosphere; they are not going to get somebody to buy an electric vehicle, or eat less meat, or farm in a different way, or build houses in a different way. To do that we need to take businesses and everyone with us. I hope that those citizens assemblies will look at the evidence, take evidence from a range of experts and deliberate on how all of us can play our part, and I hope that we collectively find that we have in us, in all our communities, the solution to the challenges we face today so that all of us can play our part in achieving a really important objective. That is what all of us should set out to do.

6.53 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), the Chairman of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, on which I have the privilege to

[Stephen Kerr]

serve, and I concur with everything she said. I wish there was more time for this debate, because I would like to celebrate the fact that this issue has engaged the imaginations of the young people of this country. I would especially like to thank Sir David Attenborough for the extraordinary work he has done in raising public consciousness on this matter.

I am a grandfather, and I want my grandchildren to have a future in a cleaner and more sustainable world of wonder, and for that to happen—or to be a real prospect—we need to act now. To bring this into stark contrast, reference was made to the speech given nearly 30 years ago by Margaret Thatcher at the United Nations; she is the only Prime Minister, I believe, who was a scientist before assuming office. She said in that speech that it is life itself—human life, and the innumerable species of our planet—that we wantonly destroy. It is life itself that we must battle to preserve; we must never lose sight of the nub of this issue. So I fully support the Government's ambition to achieve a net zero target in CO₂ output by 2050—a target that will set a benchmark for the whole world to follow.

However, while I applaud the objective, a goal is only a wish if we do not have a fully detailed plan complete with milestones, and we need to fully communicate the implications of those details for our current way of life, because we will all need to change certain aspects of our daily lives and adjust the expectations that we have largely assumed. We owe it to the people of this country to have a frank and full discussion with them about the implications of what we are doing in this House this afternoon. It will require the very strongest signals from Government and from this Parliament for the target to be realised, and it must be agreed on a cross-party basis.

I want to say a few words about electric vehicles. Transport, energy-intensive industries, housing and agriculture will all need to be brought firmly under the microscope, but let me talk about transport. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) offered some really interesting ideas when he was a Transport Minister in relation to electric vehicles and charging points. We need more charging points up and down the country, and they need to be visible, recognisable and user-friendly. If we want driver confidence in making the move to EVs to increase, we must make a dramatic extension to the existing network of charging points; it is currently under-deployed. My right hon. Friend said that we would have a national design competition to create something recognisable and pleasing to the eye; I ask the Government where we are with that idea.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I am passionate about charging points. Does my hon. Friend agree that we perhaps ought to be looking at the planning system, particularly with regard to town centres?

Stephen Kerr: I completely agree. We need to upgrade our planning on that—and also, by the way, on broadband. We need charging points to be user-friendly. Why is there not already an app showing where charging points are, whether they are working, how much they will cost and why are there so many different and mutually exclusive ways of paying for the use of a charging point? Why are

we not acting in this place to hasten the day when there will be standard connection leads in plug-ins, and what are we doing in government to bring the momentum about?

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Kerr: I apologise, but I really should not give way again; I wish we had more time.

The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee recommended that we should bring forward our aim of stopping the sale of new diesel and petrol cars from 2040 to 2032, and that would be the prudent thing to do. We have seen the effect of mixed messaging from Government on diesel engine producers, and there must not be mixed messages on the subject of the move to EVs. The Government must give the industry very clear signals, which will lead to an upgrade in investment plans. Are we satisfied that the road to zero is clear or ambitious enough? I am not sure that we should be satisfied about that. Are we satisfied that government is really joined up? Government tends to work in silos: are the BEIS and Transport Departments and the Treasury all aligned in relation to this matter of public policy? I look forward to hearing—maybe not today but at some point—some assurances from Ministers that this really is a joined-up process.

I have already spoken for longer than the time limit, but let me just say that I endorse everything said in this debate on the subject of carbon capture, utilisation and storage. The Government must make an early move so that we can be on the front foot not only in achieving our targets, but in exporting our technological know-how to the rest of the world so that we can truly take a lead on this matter.

6.58 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome this statutory instrument, but have to say that although it is necessary it is insufficient. The Government lack ambition in this area; an 80% reduction on 1990 levels and a 2050 date are not the levels of ambition that I would expect if we are to avert catastrophic climate change. This is not net zero; this is net zero-lite.

I am also concerned about the Government's ability to meet even this modest ambition. For instance, the Minister raised the matter of the Leeds and Birmingham city councils' clean air zones, and those councils do a magnificent job; however, the Government have not stepped up to the plate because they are delaying the implementation of vehicle charging and the payments system, which means that we cannot implement those clean air zones in January 2020 as planned in Leeds.

The Green Alliance has briefed me that the Government will be unable to meet their fourth and fifth carbon budgets, and I am hosting a roundtable on this subject tomorrow. The Minister is welcome to attend. The explanatory notes to this statutory instrument state that the Government

“will continue to leave headroom for emissions from international aviation and shipping”,

but I urge him to take that headroom out. We cannot allow headroom in aviation and shipping to take us even further away from our carbon budget targets.

As others have said, the implementation date for the diesel and petrol car sales ban is far too far into the future and needs to be moved up to 2030 at the latest. In this House, I have raised the need six times for electric vehicle charging points in my constituency, mainly with the right hon. Member for Devizes (Claire Perry). The Minister will be pleased to hear that we are getting our first vehicle charge points in three weeks' time, so I will no longer be annoying members of the Government about installing points in Leeds North West. We have achieved that ourselves through Leeds City Council, which has a fleet of more than 100 electric vehicles. When the Environmental Audit Committee raised this same issue with the NHS, it told us that it had no plans to transition to an electric vehicle fleet. Why can the Government's own fleet not transition to electric vehicles just as local councils are doing?

On housing, the code for sustainable homes was set up by the last Labour Government but scrapped by the coalition. We have had eight wasted years with houses being built to poor standards that will not meet our carbon budget targets under the Paris agreement. And where is the onshore wind? I want the Minister to commit today to returning onshore wind.

However, I will finish on a positive note. I acknowledge that the UK has been a climate leader for the last 25 years or more and that that is reflected in our being awarded the COP 26 conference in 2026, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) referred to earlier. I wrote a letter with the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) on this matter, and I welcome the conference coming here, but I want it to be a net zero COP. I want to see Britain having a real net zero strategy and leading the world on net zero, not just this net zero-lite that we have been presented with today.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am reducing the time limit to three minutes. I call Colin Clark.

7.1 pm

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I assure you I will expel as little hot air and greenhouse gas as possible, and that I will be very short.

The UK shows no lack of ambition today. The debate has moved on from “why” to “how”, and the UK can be at the forefront of this revolution. Most importantly, the UK has the scientists, engineers, energy companies, natural resources and capital markets to deliver on this target. We must reduce carbon dioxide. Gas has played a massive part in displacing coal, and it could do that throughout the world. It creates half the greenhouse gas emissions that coal creates, and it fits perfectly into the intermittent supply that we need, along with renewable energy. If we could convince India and China to join us in this, we could reduce coal usage from a staggering 4 billion tonnes to under 1 billion tonnes by 2050.

However, it is important that we do not offshore our manufacturing. The UK will require a CO₂ main ring to decarbonise manufacturing, and that will involve carbon sequestration, in which the North sea could play a major part, but all of this will be possible only if we back our technology and energy companies. In my constituency, offshore wind goes hand in hand with the offshore oil and gas industry, and we will one day see a hydrogen

economy that is based on natural gas. The siren voices telling us to divest ourselves of energy companies put at risk this essential technological revolution. This will be of national importance, and all four nations can play their part. I finish by saying that we should not crush our national economy but liberate it.

7.3 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): This is the most ambitious target for emissions reductions that the UK has ever had, but it is still not enough: 2050 is too late. Christiana Figueres, the former United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change chief, described the prospect of the net zero target as not even a stretch. The UK is one of the world's richest countries and has caused more historical emissions than most. We have both the means and the responsibility to go faster, so we need a new kind of mobilisation of the kind that we do not normally see except in wartime. We need a transformation of our economy, with a green new deal bringing secure, cleaner jobs and genuinely sustainable industry. Not only is 2050 too late, but there remain huge loopholes in the target. First, the Government have avoided the chance to include legally in our carbon targets international shipping and aviation, despite advice from the Committee on Climate Change to do so. Warm words about whole economy strategies for net zero are welcome, but they must be given legal backing in order to be taken seriously.

The second door that has been left open is to the offshoring of our remaining emissions using international carbon credits. When I asked the Business Secretary to close that loophole earlier this month, he attempted to reassure me by saying that the Government would not be making use of these credits, but I am not reassured simply by those words. This Government might have no intention of using international carbon credits, but who can say whether a new Administration in five years' time—or, dare I say it, five weeks' time—will share such scruples?

Ultimately, Governments are judged by their actions not their words, and behind the warm words on climate leadership, distant targets and reassurances, the actions of this Government tell a different story. It is one of forcing fracking on local communities, blocking onshore wind, flogging off the Green Investment Bank, undermining solar power, building new roads and runways and the Heathrow expansion. We are in a climate emergency, so let's act like it. No one calls 999 and requests a fire engine for 30 years' time. We need to drop everything and put the fire out, as Greta Thunberg said. Let us take the far-reaching action now that we need to turn this crisis around, because in doing so we will not only save lives and livelihoods across the world but create a better life for people here in the UK.

There is a message of hope at the heart of this agenda. We can have improved public transport, cleaner air, thriving nature, warmer homes and much cleaner jobs. I welcome the new commitment, but I urge the Government to make their warm words mean something—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): The hon. Lady is under time pressure, but if she wishes to take an intervention, there is time for her to do so.

Caroline Lucas: Ah! I am sorry. I did not see the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon).

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. I have been present during this debate, but I had to go to another meeting. I hear what she is saying about onshore wind, but does she agree that 7 TWh of onshore wind power were generated in 2010 and that the figure is now 30.4 TWh? It has increased and it can increase more, but she has used this rhetoric time and again to say that it has not increased. It really has, and much more can be achieved.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I apologise for not hearing him earlier. I was too busy expounding my case. I am glad to take his intervention, but I do not agree with him. Of course, yes, we can say that onshore wind generation has increased from 7 TWh to 30 TWh, or whatever the figures were, but it would have increased an awful lot more if this Government had not effectively blocked its expansion. That is what they have done in recent years. Local communities are being told that they have absolutely every right to block onshore wind, yet they are not being given the right to block fracking. That just seems to be absolutely incoherent, so I rest my case that an awful lot more could have been done on onshore wind, not least because it is now one of the cheapest forms of energy generation, if not the cheapest. We do not have the counterfactual about how much could have been done if we had had an enabling Government for the last few years rather than one who have blocked onshore wind. Immediately post-2010, good work was done, but in the last few years they have been blocking it. The right hon. Gentleman can roll his eyes as often as he likes, but that is the case.

I conclude by saying that this is not the time to be patting ourselves on the back; it is the time for rolling up our sleeves, picking up the fire extinguishers, putting out the fire and treating this as the emergency it undoubtedly is.

7.8 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The Government's commitment to the 2050 target is welcome, but we must ensure that that general commitment today is turned into clear interim targets and legislation. There has been a fantastic rise in public awareness of the climate crisis in recent months, and young people have played a vital part in that. It is their future and this is a wake-up call for all of us, with difficult choices ahead. We need to get widespread public buy-in for climate change action. Citizens assemblies are one method that the Liberal Democrats believe could help to achieve that.

Secondly, we need to take a positive co-operative approach when working with the business community, but we must not be complacent. We are relying on business to find innovative solutions to many of the problems we need to solve. We need to replace jet fuel with a carbon-zero fuel, for example. Natural gas, petrol and diesel have no place in our energy future, but we should not be naive about the realities of tackling vested interests. The fossil fuel lobby will probably disagree with our approach.

Matt Western: Does the hon. Lady agree that France and Germany are showing ambition on electric vehicle charging points? France has four times the number that were introduced here in the past year, and Germany has 150% more than the UK.

Wera Hobhouse: I totally agree that we need to look at the progress being made by countries, because we have not made the progress that the Government are so complacently spouting about.

The current Government have effectively banned onshore wind which, as we have just heard, is the cheapest form of renewable energy. They slashed subsidies for solar power and scrapped zero carbon homes. They ended the green deal, which was there to improve energy efficiency. They have set meaningless targets for the phasing out of petrol and diesel cars. They continue to support fracking, which involves a fossil fuel, and airport expansion, with no plan for research into jet fuel.

Most importantly, transitioning to net zero risks placing an unfair burden on those who can least afford it. Energy and power is likely to cost more for the next 20 years, so we must ensure that the costs are fairly shared. We do not want to end up slapping punitive costs and taxes on the most vulnerable, so we must not ignore social justice. The transition to carbon zero provides an excellent opportunity to build a fairer society. We need to turn that opportunity into reality, and I wish that Ministers would listen.

7.11 pm

Chris Skidmore: The format of this debate prevents me from responding to many of the points made, so I commit to write formally to every Member who has raised matters that require a Government response. I will also seek Government time from the Leader of the House for a debate on this important issue as we work towards hosting COP 26. I thank all Members for their contributions. This debate is an historic moment and will ensure that we can progress the legislation for achieving net zero by 2050 to the other place.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 12 June, be approved.

Business without Debate

STANDING ORDERS (CONSIDERATION OF ESTIMATES) (NO. 2)

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the Order of 26 June 2018 (Standing Orders (Consideration of Estimates)), Standing Order No. 54 (Consideration of estimates) shall apply for the remainder of this Session as if, for the word 'Three' in line 1, there were substituted the word 'Seven'.—(*Matt Warman.*)

ESTIMATES (LIAISON COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 145(3)),

That this House agrees with the Report of the Liaison Committee of 18 June 2019:

(1) That a day not later than 5 August be allotted for the consideration of the following Estimates for financial year 2019–20: Department for Work and Pensions, and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government;

(2) That a further day not later than 5 August be allotted for the consideration of the following Estimates for financial year 2019–20: Department for International Development, and Department for Education.—(*Matt Warman.*)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (26 JUNE)*Ordered,*

That at the sitting on Wednesday 26 June, paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments) shall apply to the Motion in the name of Ian Blackford as if the day were an Opposition Day; proceedings on the Motion may continue, though opposed, for three hours and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Matt Warman.*)

ADJOURNMENT (SUMMER)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 25),

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 25 July 2019, do adjourn until Tuesday 3 September 2019.—(*Matt Warman.*)

The House divided: Ayes 223, Noes 25.

Division No. 423]**[7.14 pm****AYES**

Adams, Nigel	Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Afolami, Bim	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Afriyie, Adam	Elphicke, Charlie
Aldous, Peter	Eustice, George
Amess, Sir David	Evennett, rh Sir David
Andrew, Stuart	Fabricant, Michael
Argar, Edward	Ford, Vicky
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi	Foster, Kevin
Baldwin, Harriett	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Barclay, rh Stephen	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Baron, Mr John	Frazer, Lucy
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Freeman, George
Beresford, Sir Paul	Fysh, Mr Marcus
Berry, Jake	Garnier, Mark
Blackman, Bob	Gauke, rh Mr David
Blunt, Crispin	Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Bone, Mr Peter	Gibb, rh Nick
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Bowie, Andrew	Glen, John
Bradley, Ben	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Brereton, Jack	Graham, Luke
Brine, Steve	Graham, Richard
Bruce, Fiona	Grant, Bill
Buckland, Robert	Grant, Mrs Helen
Burns, Conor	Gray, James
Burt, rh Alistair	Grayling, rh Chris
Cartlidge, James	Green, Chris
Caulfield, Maria	Green, rh Damian
Chalk, Alex	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Churchill, Jo	Gyimah, Mr Sam
Clark, Colin	Halfon, rh Robert
Clark, rh Greg	Hall, Luke
Clarke, Mr Simon	Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Cleverly, James	Hammond, Stephen
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Hancock, rh Matt
Collins, Damian	Hands, rh Greg
Courts, Robert	Harper, rh Mr Mark
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Harris, Rebecca
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hart, Simon
Crouch, Tracey	Hayes, rh Sir John
Davies, Glyn	Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Davies, Mims	Heapey, James
Davies, Philip	Heaton-Jones, Peter
Dinenage, Caroline	Henderson, Gordon
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hinds, rh Damian
Dodds, rh Nigel	Hoare, Simon
Donelan, Michelle	Hollingbery, George
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hollinrake, Kevin
Duguid, David	Hollobone, Mr Philip
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Holloway, Adam
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Huddleston, Nigel

Hughes, Eddie	Redwood, rh John
Hurd, rh Mr Nick	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Jack, Mr Alister	Robertson, Mr Laurence
James, Margot	Robinson, Gavin
Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Robinson, Mary
Jenkyns, Andrea	Rosindell, Andrew
Johnson, Dr Caroline	Ross, Douglas
Johnson, Gareth	Rowley, Lee
Jones, Andrew	Rudd, rh Amber
Jones, Mr Marcus	Rutley, David
Kawczynski, Daniel	Sandbach, Antoinette
Keegan, Gillian	Seely, Mr Bob
Kennedy, Seema	Selous, Andrew
Kerr, Stephen	Shannon, Jim
Knight, Julian	Shapps, rh Grant
Lamont, John	Sharma, Alok
Lancaster, rh Mark	Simpson, David
Lee, Dr Phillip	Skidmore, Chris
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver	Smith, Chloe (<i>Proxy vote cast by Jo Churchill</i>)
Lewer, Andrew	Smith, rh Julian
Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Lopez, Julia	Spencer, Mark
Lopresti, Jack	Stephenson, Andrew
Loughton, Tim	Stevenson, John
Mackinlay, Craig	Stewart, Bob
Maclean, Rachel	Stewart, Iain
Mak, Alan	Stewart, rh Rory
Malthouse, Kit	Streeter, Sir Gary
Mann, Scott	Stride, rh Mel
Masterton, Paul	Stuart, Graham
Maynard, Paul	Sunak, Rishi
McVey, rh Ms Esther	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Menzies, Mark	Syms, Sir Robert
Merriman, Huw	Thomas, Derek
Metcalfe, Stephen	Thomson, Ross
Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Throup, Maggie
Mills, Nigel	Tolhurst, Kelly
Milton, rh Anne	Tomlinson, Justin
Moore, Damien	Tomlinson, Michael
Morgan, rh Nicky	Tracey, Craig
Morris, Anne Marie	Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Morris, David	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Morris, James	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Villiers, rh Theresa
Neill, Robert	Walker, Mr Charles
Newton, Sarah	Walker, Mr Robin
Nokes, rh Caroline	Warburton, David
Norman, Jesse	Warman, Matt
O'Brien, Neil	Watling, Giles
Opperman, Guy	Whately, Helen
Parish, Neil	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Whittaker, Craig
Penning, rh Sir Mike	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Penrose, John	Wiggin, Bill
Percy, Andrew	Williamson, rh Gavin
Philp, Chris	Wood, Mike
Pincher, rh Christopher	Wright, rh Jeremy
Poulter, Dr Dan	Zahawi, Nadhim
Prentis, Victoria	
Prisk, Mr Mark	
Pursglove, Tom	
Quin, Jeremy	
Quince, Will	

Tellers for the Ayes:
Amanda Milling and
Mike Freer

NOES

Berger, Luciana (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Gavin Shuker</i>)	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Blackford, rh Ian	Coffey, Ann
Blackman, Kirsty	Cowan, Ronnie
Brock, Deidre	Edwards, Jonathan
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Farron, Tim
	Gapes, Mike

Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Hobhouse, Wera
Laird, Lesley
Law, Chris
Linden, David
Lucas, Caroline
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla

Rowley, Danielle
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Stephens, Chris
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr Sarah Wollaston and
Tom Brake

Question accordingly agreed to.

PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That Alison Thewliss be discharged from the Procedure Committee and Kirsty Blackman be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Selection Committee.*)

PETITION

Nnamani Family, Glasgow

7.26 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I rise to present a petition from the ever-compassionate constituents of Glasgow East who have joined in solidarity with the Church of Our Lady and St George in Penilee.

The petition states:

The petition of Glasgow East,

Declares that Mary Nnamani and her family who fled from Nigeria in danger of their lives have become a full and valued part of our community in Glasgow through our schools and Church Community; further that the Nnamani family have claimed asylum here and we would dearly love them to say.

The petitioners, therefore, request that the House of Commons urges the Home Office to grant Mary Nnamani and her family the right to remain in this country, where they have claimed asylum.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002474]

Smart Cities

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

7.27 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The inspiration for this debate came from my visit to the mid-west USA last month with a cross-party delegation of MPs from the British-American parliamentary group. I admit to having been a bit of a technophobe prior to the delegation, and I still am a bit of a dinosaur when it comes to technology.

I thought 5G was about higher speeds—that was my understanding of what we should expect. However, it appears from our learning on the visit that there is so much more to 5G and to smart cities than just higher speeds. It is actually about transformative technology and its ability to connect not just people but things—5G is designed to increase connectivity. We are talking about smarter motorways, smarter factories, smarter homes and smarter cities, and I would like to see capacity for smarter towns, smarter villages and smarter rural areas, because connectivity must be inclusive across the whole United Kingdom and across all areas.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. Smart cities is a wonderful programme, with Belfast leading the way in smart city urban innovation. Does she agree it is imperative that we share good practice and information throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to ensure that the UK, as a whole, is able safely and effectively to make the most of technology and to ensure that we are not at cyber-war with each other within the UK, at the expense of lost opportunities for everyone?

Dr Cameron: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that important point. It is important that smart technology is used and regulated appropriately, and that communities buy into the technology so that they can benefit collectively, rather than be in opposition to and competition with each other. The hon. Gentleman's point is well made and I hope the Minister will reflect on it in his speech, because it is important that all areas benefit from this new smart technology. In my constituency, we are looking at redeveloping our new town, which was built after the second world war; it was new and shiny then, and it improved our lives and wellbeing dramatically. We are looking to develop smart technology and for us to have smart, sustainable East Kilbride moving forward.

With 5G, people will be able to control their home and car—everything—from a single device. I had always thought that autonomous vehicles were a bit pie in the sky, but having spoken to the technology leaders in the mid-west and internationally during the visit I know that this technology is already on the showroom floor and is now just being refined. So this is going to be happening. Autonomous vehicles—electric vehicles—can improve climate emissions, tackling CO₂, and reduce congestion, because we may be less likely to own vehicles in the future. We may have a share in these robot vehicles rather than own them, and they may come to our homes, take us where we want to go and then move on to the next person's home and take them where they

want to go. It will be like a robot taxi—that is how I would think of it. This would mean less congestion in our cities, because we will not all have to have cars and we might not all be travelling at the same time. Less car parking would be required in cities and in high streets, and we hope there would be a consumer benefit in terms of less cost. One question to the Minister is about consumer benefits and costs in the future, and how we make this beneficial for consumers.

Toyota is designing multifunctional vehicles, able to serve as not only a taxi but a hospital shuttle, delivery van or mobile co-working space. I therefore ask the Minister to ensure that determinations in this regard are fully inclusive and adaptable for those with special needs and disabilities. I chair the all-party group on disability, and I was thinking about the impact of these vehicles on the Motability scheme; it will be essential to ensure that vehicles can be adapted for wheelchairs and for people with special needs.

Space10 is the innovation hub run by IKEA and I understand it is piloting autonomous healthcare vehicles, which bring medical equipment and professionals to people's doorsteps. I was reading in *The Times* today that 5G can enable hospital specialists to make a diagnosis remotely while patients are still in the ambulance, as faster connections can allow paramedics to perform ultrasound scans as clinicians watch live; it is happening in the ambulance and guidance can be offered on what to do through robotic gloves. This technology would boost survival rates by allowing more timeous diagnosis, reducing diversions to other hospitals. What often happens is that the initial diagnosis may change when the patient reaches the hospital and they then have to go to a different specialist hospital. This technology should reduce the rate of those misdiagnoses and improve morbidity rates for patients, who will be able to get to surgery much faster.

We will therefore have to look ahead and alter our training—of paramedics, health professionals, doctors, surgeons, nurses and so on—to ensure that we capitalise on this technology. A whole-government approach will be needed. I do not expect the Minister to answer all those questions tonight, but it would be useful to find out how this is going to be co-ordinated in the future.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady is right about co-ordination, and perhaps the Minister will respond on this issue. It is imperative that the four regions of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland are part of this, so that Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England are doing this together. Does she feel that when it comes to working on a policy and a strategy it is important that we all feel the benefits?

Dr Cameron: Yes, I absolutely think that. It is why, although this debate is on “Smart Cities”, I have placed such an emphasis on all areas of our populations—towns, villages and rural populations, too. That has to be right, both across the United Kingdom and internationally. Specialists in the health aspects I was speaking about can be international specialists from across the world, who are able to lend their expertise through this technology, so that it does not just connect the UK, but instead connects us to the EU—although some in this House are trying to disconnect us, following the vote—and right across the world. That is important to specialists internationally.

Traffic management may be a particular issue that can also be improved—I am sure we would all be glad to hear that—particularly for those who have long journeys in the morning. I see lots of congestion in London when I am travelling to the House of Commons each day.

This technology may get people to the hospitals faster and police to critical incidents much more quickly. Our delegation heard in Chicago about how sensors on lampposts in high-risk areas are sensing gunshots in milliseconds, so that the police and emergency services can get to the area where someone has been harmed, both to apprehend those responsible and to treat those impacted much more quickly. So this technology is also aiding the police and emergency services, and such technology will also be expanded to look at sensors for fire and to respond to other types of difficulty that citizens can get into.

The data can also be used to convict those responsible. On the visit, we asked questions about data security and GDPR—the general data protection regulation. It appears crucial that any and all of these advances must be developed with community participation. That was what really helped this to work in Chicago. There was buy-in from the local community, who had experienced the gun-related deaths, wanted something to be done much more quickly and were then agreeable to the data being collected in this way and used to the community's benefit. That participation must be at the forefront, with communities on board.

We all need education in this regard, as members of the community and as Members of Parliament and leaders within the community. We therefore need to make sure that our communities are aware of the new technology, understand how it might improve their lives and put in place appropriate consultation about the data usage that can come from it. I ask the Minister for training for MPs in this new technology and its implications for our constituencies, so that we will also then be able to try to improve training locally to make sure that all the agencies that will be affected should be on board and understand how to take this forward for the best benefit.

I also heard about how 5G will also allow technologies such as augmented reality and virtual reality to become commonplace—so “Star Wars” fans may now be able to have their own Princess Leia moment. I even heard, in a local school I was visiting, Duncanrig Secondary School in East Kilbride, that a constituent who is an inventor has sought to bring holograms to children's reading materials. They may soon be able to speak directly to Harry Potter when they turn the page and, thus, have a much more interactive experience with their reading development.

The delegation heard that 5G had vastly altered infrastructure projects in South Bend. For instance, they were going to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on new sewerage systems, similar to the billions being spent in London for the same reason.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that the trip was worth while because a company in my constituency called InTouch, headed by John Walden, is now working with the sensor group EmNet on flooding logistics?

Dr Cameron: Yes, that is the value of the trip: we were able to make connections between the UK and the US, and between those who are developing the technology, to make sure that we share in the benefits seen in South Bend, which include the reduction of flooding through the use of new sensors in the sewerage system. The technology has saved billions of dollars, because South Bend was going to have a whole new sewage pipe infrastructure but is now able to regulate the flow with the 5G and the sensors. These technologies are transferable to other areas of the world.

The hon. Gentleman is assiduous in representing his constituents and the first thing he said when he spoke to EmNet was that he would make connections so that the benefits could be seen in his constituency. The technology can save money, and in South Bend the money set aside for new infrastructure can be spent elsewhere. London might consider at least liaising with South Bend and the innovative agency EmNet, which provides the technology there.

I am pleased to be able to speak about these developments today. My concern, and my request to the Minister, is that the technology is made fully available in towns, villages and rural areas. Everywhere the delegation went, people spoke about smart cities, but the technology has to be rolled out elsewhere. In some areas of our constituencies, internet speeds are not at the appropriate level to enable children to do their homework, and we are still waiting for 4G in some areas. Rural areas in particular tend to be the ones that miss out.

On rural areas, I read a magazine article by Tim Hulse that says that Beard Hill farm, which is part of the UK's agri-tech strategy, now has robotic milking, and it seems to be working well. I am not quite sure how it works—perhaps I will get to visit it—but it seems to be helping most by milking the cows when they want to be milked, rather than their being on a regime, thereby improving the quality of the milk and improving the cows' welfare. The Government are involved in work that is already being done in some rural areas, and I would like to find out more about that. What type of consultation and communication does the Minister have with the devolved Governments throughout the UK to make sure that, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, the benefits are shared throughout the different countries of the UK?

I thank the Minister for hearing and responding to the debate. Will he ensure that we have not only smart cities, but smart towns and villages, and even smart small businesses? Big business is often able to capitalise on new technology, but how do we get it rolled out to small businesses so that they do not lag behind and can be competitive, too? Please do not forget our rural areas; they must benefit from the technology. What will the strategy be not only to ensure that technology is applied to things such as infrastructure, roads and autonomous vehicles, but to give us a good work-life balance and enable a focus on wellbeing? We should focus on wellbeing in the community, and the technology that is being developed will augment that. We have just had a debate on climate change, and the technology that is brought forward and in which we invest should improve our climate objectives, rather than undermine them. There are a lot of points for the Minister to answer, so I look forward to his response.

7.45 pm

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this debate and welcome the opportunity to set out the Government's position on smart cities. First, though, I thank the hon. Lady and her colleagues on the British-American parliamentary group delegation for their valuable work in visiting the United States to inquire into smart cities. As Science, Research and Innovation Minister, I have spoken previously about the importance of remaining truly international in our collaborations—we recently published an international research and innovation strategy—and the hon. Lady's work contributes a great deal to the maintenance of our global partnerships. We must be able to learn from our friends and colleagues across the Atlantic and bring back that learning to the benefit of everybody in the House.

There is no bigger trend in the world today than the move to urbanisation. By 2050, it is expected that three quarters of the world's population will live in cities, with nearly 200,000 people globally making that transition every day. It is clear that city living presents unique opportunities and challenges. Smart cities, which involve the melding of digital technology and data to monitor, manage and improve our urban environment are what we need to harness those unique opportunities.

I reassure the hon. Lady that when it comes to Government policy on smart cities, we provided a formal definition in 2013. It stated that

“the concept is not static: there is no absolute definition of a smart city, no end point, but rather a process, or series of steps, by which cities become more ‘liveable’ and resilient and, hence, able to respond quicker to new challenges.”

A smart city can also be defined as

“an urban area that uses different types of electronic Internet of things...sensors to collect data and then use these data to manage assets and resources”.

Although termed a city, a smart city is actually a fluid concept that can incorporate anything that supports it. Those things range from 5G to autonomous vehicles, but it is crucial to note that smart cities are a process as much as a policy.

Smart cities encompass a vast array of technologies and policies that the Government have a role in creating and influencing, involving everything from transport to energy and communications, as well as the many issues that the hon. Lady raised in her valuable contribution. Because of that, the Government have recognised the need to support the development of smart cities, as part of the industrial strategy, in the interests of economic growth, combating climate change—I was proud earlier to be the Minister responsible for taking forward the statutory instrument that the hon. Lady mentioned—and, crucially, enhancing the quality of life for residents, which must always lie at the heart of any policy. This will be achieved through a number of Government initiatives, to which I shall now turn.

A smart city, town or area that recognises the need for new and emergent technologies to deliver better living standards for its citizens needs efficient transport, enabled by new technologies. The “Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy”, which the Government published in March, outlines our approach to urban transport innovations,

ensuring that technologies are safe, accessible and green. It is worth referring to some of the strategy's core principles to reassure the hon. Lady that putting the consumer and the citizen at the centre of our vision is exactly what we intend to do. The principles of the strategy include that new modes of transport and new mobility services must be safe and secure by design, and that the benefits of innovation in mobility must be available to all parts of the UK and all segments of society. As I will touch on later, if we are to convince the public of and maintain public trust in the need to invest in future innovation, technology and research, it is crucial that we are able to communicate the value of that for the taxpayer across every region of the United Kingdom.

Other principles from the strategy include that walking, cycling and active travel must remain the best options for short urban journeys, and that touches on the health-related points that the hon. Lady made in her speech. Mass transit must remain fundamental to an efficient transport system. New mobility services must lead to the transition towards zero emissions. Mobility innovation must help with British congestion through more efficient use of limited road space. The marketplace for mobility must be open to stimulate innovation and give the best for consumers.

The new mobility services are designed to operate as part of an integrated transport system, combining public, private and multiple modes of transport users. The data—the hon. Lady touched on data—from new mobility services must be shared where appropriate to improve both choice and the operation of that transport system.

In addition, we have established a future of mobility grand challenge, which I also cover as Science and Innovation Minister. This grand challenge is one of the four announced as part of the industrial strategy. It will take advantage of the extraordinary innovation in UK engineering technology to deliver better journeys for all. The main objectives are to be able to stimulate innovation, create new markets and secure a 21st century transport system. We believe that this could be a £900 billion global market in intelligent mobility by 2025, which is why it is equally important to be in the vanguard of developing those new technologies so that we can be world leaders. Since the “Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy” was published in early 2019, setting out the nine principles that will guide Government decision making, we have continued to ensure that we will take forward the biggest regulatory review of transport in a generation, taking advantage of technological advances to be able to better connect people, goods and services.

Alongside the strategy and the future of the mobility grand challenge, the Government have launched a competition for up to four new future mobility zones. This £90 million competition will test innovative transport ideas around the UK that could reduce congestion, pollution and costs, while making travel more accessible. Some £20 million of that £90 million was allocated to the west midlands last year to help develop the concept of future mobility zones—zones not just exclusive to cities but including urban areas and towns. As the Member of Parliament for Kingswood, near Bristol, I fully understand the importance of representing the urban region that includes not just the city centre, but areas around the outside of major cities. This can capitalise on related investments in the transport innovation in

the region. The remainder of the funding will be awarded through a competitive process, with the winners announced this autumn.

Internationally, it should be noted that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office hosted a smart sustainable cities workshop in Madrid in February, with a focus on transforming mobility in cities. The workshop brought together 20 cities, looking at planning and delivering new, smart, low-carbon mobility systems.

Turning to the issue of smart technology, only a few weeks ago, I visited the Bristol and Bath science park to unveil a foundation plaque for the new £70 million Institute for Advanced Automotive Propulsion Systems. This institute is a specialist hub, which aims to deliver transformational research and innovation within the automotive industry, looking at the development of clean, efficient, ultra low emission vehicles. This is just one example of an investment made in a region. We have seen others. I was at Warwick Manufacturing Group in the west midlands on Friday, demonstrating our commitment to invest not just in London, Oxford and Cambridge—that so-called golden triangle of research—but in other areas of the country with traditional technologies that may not have had the opportunity to demonstrate that they can also be in the vanguard.

I have been to Glasgow, which I know is not far from the hon. Lady's constituency, to see the fantastic work that is being done on quantum and the impact that quantum can have on the future of smart cities. It is potentially unfathomable at the moment, but we certainly know that those new technologies need to be supported to establish a future opportunity for visions in our cities and allow academic researchers at both Glasgow and Strathclyde to combine with industry to focus on what they know will be the huge potential for quantum. That is just one example of how we are trying to invest additionally not only in existing technologies, but in future and emerging technologies.

In further efforts to modernise our transport systems, the Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles, a joint Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Department for Transport policy team, was established in 2015 to secure the UK's position at the forefront of this technology.

Automation can save lives, improve traffic flow and offer people better travel options. The Government are committed to ensuring that we can all benefit from the advent of these technologies as they emerge, which is why we intend to invest more than £250 million of industry match funding up to 2022 in research and development and in testing infrastructure. That will accelerate the development of these technologies and, crucially, anchor them in the UK. In addition, the Department for Transport's £2.4 billion transforming cities fund was launched as part of the industrial strategy and expanded in the 2018 Budget by the Chancellor to address weaknesses in city transport systems. More than £1 billion has been devolved so far to six metro Mayors, and the Government are allocating a further £1.28 billion across another 12 cities on a competitive basis.

Creating an economy that harnesses artificial intelligence and big data, as the hon. Lady said, is one of the great challenges of our age. Data collected by smart meters, for example, facilitates innovative tariffs, with prices varying throughout the day as a result of a range of

[Chris Skidmore]

energy saving tools for households and small businesses. On Friday, I was in Solihull to see one of 100 homes in an experiment in which we are looking at having sensors placed in every single room.

As we talk about smart cities, smart towns and smart villages, I would extend the idea further to smart houses, smart dining rooms and smart living rooms so that we are able, for example, to meet the net zero target on carbon emissions by 2050. We know that some of the challenges that we face will be around clean growth. They will also be about looking at existing buildings to see what can be done to ensure that they are more energy friendly. That will allow everybody using smart meters to better engage with their energy use and save money on their bills. A better understanding of energy demand will allow new local networks to manage their energy flows by supporting the integration of local decentralised energy resources, reducing the cost of network upgrades, facilitating detailed asset and building-level data, and creating secure, more centralised communication networks. Smart meters are one of the enabling technologies for smart cities. What we have seen already is that by placing technology in individual homes, we are able to connect up with a wider picture. We can take advantage of the data to establish patterns and demonstrate how best we can create future networks.

Last week, I was fortunate enough to attend a roundtable with the Energy Systems Catapult, which champions a whole-system approach to our network. For that reason, it has been responsible for the Government's energy data taskforce. It has been challenged to identify gaps in the energy sector where data could be used more efficiently. This approach will be integral to the effective deployment of smart cities in order to encourage industry collaboration. Last week the taskforce published its recommendations, which we, alongside Ofgem, are considering.

In addition, we established the artificial intelligence sector deal in April 2018, which outlines nearly £1 billion of support for our future AI capability. This includes investment in leadership, skills, data, the new Office for Artificial Intelligence and the Alan Turing Institute, which I was able to visit this morning. Visiting the institute, it was absolutely clear that there is a huge potential for change in our public sector and our local authorities. However, that potential will be realised only if they have the opportunity to harness the high-performance computing and AI modelling that will demonstrate what can be done to define and establish behavioural change within cities.

Another field that can contribute greatly to the development of smart cities is robotics. At the beginning of the year, I enjoyed a visit to the University of Bristol, where I was promoting a £7 million funding announcement for robots that can be deployed into sewerage, water or gas pipes to inspect them and make repairs. That will be critical for transport systems on every road right down to village roads and country lanes. We know that the disruption caused by taking up pipework can stymie rural communities in particular for months on end, especially if it is the only road in and out of the village. It is estimated that innovations such as using robotics to inspect and make repairs without digging up the road in the first place could save the economy about £5.5 billion every year through reduced road excavations.

Turning to the need to benefit regions and towns, I could not agree more with the hon. Lady. As I said earlier, it will be vital to demonstrate that this is a shared initiative—that the research that is ongoing around smart cities is not just going to be put in place in the large cities of London, Edinburgh, Bristol, Birmingham or Manchester, but is to be devolved further down to the localities surrounding cities.

I am also the Minister for agri-tech, so I believe that we can do a lot through advances in rural technology and emerging technologies. The last agri-tech strategy was published in 2013; it is time that it had a refresh, because the technology has moved on. There have been fantastic opportunities to use British research in international partnerships to bring about agricultural change in other countries. We now have the opportunity to use some of that research to benefit rural communities.

When it comes to investment in areas such as those near the hon. Lady's constituency, I point to the benefits that have already come about, such as the Innovate UK future cities demonstrator. Innovate UK awarded Glasgow £24 million to become a future cities demonstrator site, developing digital infrastructure and data initiatives to make it an interconnected smart city. What was fantastic about that project was that it led to £144 million in savings and new investments for the council. At the time, it focused on four key areas: active travel, such as cycling and walking; energy; social transport; and public safety. The hon. Lady mentioned small businesses and SMEs. Local businesses reported significant benefits from their involvement with that programme; some 63% of SMEs attracted additional business. When we look at the projects and at the funding from our research councils, it is crucial that we can make those evaluations and communicate them to the public—to say that they did benefit people's lives. People may not necessarily have noticed that something was a specific part of a programme established as part of the smart cities initiative, but to further the work we need to do, we need to go out and celebrate those investments.

Other investments have been made across the country. I wanted to mention to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) that the Connected Places Catapult, which spearheaded the digital infrastructure innovation strand, was a key part of the Belfast region city deal, which brought industry, academia and local authorities together around that shared proposal to the Treasury. That resulted in a £350 million investment from the UK Government.

I went to Belfast back in February and spoke to representatives of the University of Ulster and to the vice-chancellor of Queen's University, Belfast. They demonstrated to me the importance of the triple helix—investment in a locality by the Government, with the university as a key locator of the knowledge economy in a local area and also with local businesses. It is about supporting local businesses and using the money to put them in contact with academics, who they might not have been in contact with before. I saw that with Quantum in Glasgow and the recent announcement of the ARCHER super-computer in Edinburgh, and with robotics in Bristol—it is about linking them up with Sheffield and Manchester and other regions that will have to adapt and demonstrate the new technology.

Jim Shannon: It is not just Belfast, but its peripheries: it is my constituency of Strangford; my council area of Ards and North Down; Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council; Mid and East Antrim Borough Council; and Newtownabbey Borough Council. Belfast and its surrounding areas all benefit—that benefit is for everyone.

Chris Skidmore: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Setting out the benefits beyond the inner city locations is so crucial. When it comes to dealing with the issues of science and technology, we need to demonstrate the need for smart cities that will improve congestion and public transport.

I have not yet touched on the critical need to make sure that the lives and experiences of disabled people are better met in our cities. As Universities Minister, I am really keen that inclusivity must be mainstreamed. We should not be thinking about disabled people as part of the strategies; they should be at the centre of any strategy. That is the same in a university campus as in an inner-city location or a pedestrianised zone in a shopping centre. Placing the needs of disabled people at the heart of a vision from the very beginning is also critical in the design of smart cities for the future. Any local authority should make sure that it takes those issues of inclusivity absolutely to heart.

I conclude on a point of principle. The Government are committed to spending 2.4% of GDP on research and development—both private and public spend; at the moment, roughly a third of that spend is public and two thirds private. At the moment, we spend 1.7% on research and development. Other countries such as the United States, Germany, South Korea and even China are spending vastly more than us. That allows them to make advances that we must match.

Hitting 2.4% of GDP by 2027—the Government's target—will just take us to the OECD baseline. We have to be able to make that investment, which would mean increasing the amount we spend on research and development across the public and private sectors from about £35 billion a year to £60 billion. To do that, we must convince SMEs to change their business models and recognise the value of research and development.

For example, we set up a robotics strategy in 2013. We invested about £386 million as a Government in robotics, and we leveraged in private capital of over £1 billion as a result. We need to see how we can increase that leverage; at the moment, the private sector puts in roughly £1.40 for every pound we spend on research and development in areas such as smart cities.

In Germany, the figure is nearer £2.40 and in Israel it is about £3. We could be doing more to ensure a greater sum total pot for research and development on smart cities and the technologies that underpin them. However, we have to be able to make that initial public investment.

I have been giving a series of speeches about the road to 2.4%. First, I have covered the critical issue of people—investing in universities and future research leaders. Secondly, I have spoken about international partnerships; I am delighted that the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow took part in the delegation to the United States, setting out the new countries with which we wish to work for the future. Thirdly, I have been focusing on the new technologies such as quantum and robotics—the underpinning of smart cities and a future R&D strategy. My fourth speech on 10 July will be about how we can increase leverage and private investment for the future.

All four speeches relate to the key point of smart cities, which will happen and expand into our regions, towns and villages only if we make the investment in research and development in the longer term. We will need to spend £60 billion across the private and public sectors by 2027. We will need a catalytic moment from the public sector.

As science and technology Minister, I am also determined to ensure that we increase spend on clean and green technology for the future. The debate earlier focused on carbon capture, utilisation and storage. It is the regions that are coming up with some of the great new ideas; on Thursday, I will be going to Cheshire to look at some of the latest technology in that area. We do need to invest publicly as well as trying to increase private investment. The 2.4% figure must be a cornerstone of this Government's and any future Government's desire to meet the net zero target by 2050.

I am delighted that the hon. Lady secured this debate. It has highlighted some of the challenges that will lead to huge opportunities if we make that commitment to spending 2.4% on research and development. We can reach out to the whole country. Rather than research being focused in certain cities, we will be able to make sure that everyone in this country can share the proceeds of growth from research and development. We are looking at smart cities, but every town can be a smart town and every village a smart village.

Question put and agreed to.

8.9 pm

House adjourned.

Recall of MPs Act 2015: Member for Brecon and Radnorshire

Text of the notification received by the Speaker:

Recall Petition 2019—Public Notice of Outcome of Petition Petition to Remove the MP for Brecon and Radnorshire, Chris Davies	
Petition signing period	Thursday, 09 May 2019 to 20 June 2019
Constituency	Brecon and Radnorshire
Recall condition	The relevant recall condition was due to Chris Davies MP being convicted of an offence of providing false/misleading information for a parliamentary allowances claim and also of a second offence of attempting to provide such information.
Petition successful	Yes

Recall Petition 2019—Public Notice of Outcome of Petition Petition to Remove the MP for Brecon and Radnorshire, Chris Davies	
Number of electors eligible to sign the petition	53,032
Number of electors who validly signed the petition	10,005
Percentage of electors who validly signed the petition	19%
Number of rejected signing sheets due to:	
No official mark	0
Unmarked or void for uncertainty	41
Total number of rejected signing sheets	41
Name: Caroline Turner (Petition Officer)	
Date: 21 June 2019	

Westminster Hall

Monday 24 June 2019

[SIR GEORGE HOWARTH *in the Chair*]

Unsustainable Packaging

[Relevant documents: Oral evidence taken before the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on 14 May 2019, on Plastic food and drink packaging, HC 2080, and written evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on Plastic food and drink packaging, reported to the House on 8 May, 14 May, 21 May and 12 June 2019, HC 2080.]

4.30 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 232684 relating to unsustainable packaging.

It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Sir George.

I welcome both Front-Bench spokespeople: my good friend and neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin), and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. When I entered this place, he was the Minister responsible for cycling, and since then he has held a number of important positions. I am tempted to say that although we might be debating single-use plastics today, there is no such thing as a single-use Minister. I wish the Minister well when the recycling period comes round soon, and I wish both him and my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich success in their search for a solution to reusable packaging, which is a subject I am pleased to raise on behalf of the Petitions Committee.

Let me start by reading the petition:

“Ban the use of all non-recyclable and unsustainable food packaging. Today the Earth is at a crisis point due to our plastic consumption, and as a result, people in the UK are more willing than ever to engage in recycling. Yet so much food packaging remains completely, frustratingly unrecyclable. Let’s aim for the UK to lead the world with a 100% recycling rate. Every day we send to landfill, to decompose over thousands of years: cereal box inner bags; peel-off film (fruit and veg punnets/ready meals/yoghurt pots); almost all plastic supermarket fruit and veg packets; crisp packets; sweets wrappers; chocolate bar wrappers; Styrofoam; vacuum pack plastic, to name a few. The British public WANTS to recycle but we can’t get away from the vast amounts of waste that poorly designed packaging creates—appoint people to design alternatives and the UK will thank you!”

What an uplifting petition. The sentiment behind it speaks for itself. It has been signed by 247,048 people—nearly a quarter of a million people—illustrating the strength of feeling. That includes nearly 1,000 people from my Cambridge constituency, where this is a matter of great interest and concern. It is clear that the public mood about packaging, whether it goes to landfill or pollutes our oceans and rivers, has changed over the past few years. We have woken up. There is genuine public recognition of the climate crisis and concern about the natural destruction caused by non-recyclable waste.

Over 14 million of us watched Sir David Attenborough’s “Blue Planet II”, which revealed the impact waste is having on our seas and wildlife. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall’s “War on Plastic” found UK plastic waste abandoned all the way in Malaysia.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): As a member of the Environmental Audit Committee, on which the Minister served when we had the inquiry, we heard from groups in countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand that they had UK plastic on their shores. Is it not time that we stopped exporting plastic waste and reprocessed it all here in the United Kingdom?

Daniel Zeichner: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, which I am about to amplify. He is absolutely right that we have international responsibilities. As the public watched, listened and participated, that so grabbed society’s consciousness that a constituent wrote to me saying that there should be “regular showings and reshowings” of those programmes, as they are so convincing and powerful. I suspect in Cambridge they are rewatched on a regular basis already.

Attenborough calls plastic waste an “unfolding catastrophe”, and, sadly, the evidence backs that up. A report from charities Tearfund, Fauna and Flora International, and WasteAid has warned of a public health emergency, claiming that between 400,000 and 1 million people die each year because of preventable diseases linked to mismanaged plastic waste in developing countries. These diseases include diarrhoea, malaria and cancer, all of which researchers have linked to plastic waste building up near people’s homes or being burned, which can result in damaging fumes.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I am pleased that in my local authority of Lewisham, recycling rates have rapidly increased in recent years and that there will be a consultation looking at continuing barriers to recycling in the area. I am also aware that many local authorities find it difficult to find solutions for certain types of black and low-grade plastic. Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Government are to reach their stated target of eliminating plastic waste by 2042, the Minister would need to better regulate the type of plastic businesses are using and to do more to establish suitable sites for recycling?

Daniel Zeichner: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which I will come on to and which I suspect will be brought out in the wider debate. The black plastic issue is very real, and we need to ensure that our recycling systems are consistent across the whole country and can deal with these more difficult issues.

To return to the international significance of where our waste sometimes ends up, the reports I referred to suggest that one person dies every 30 seconds because of diseases caused by plastic pollution in developing countries. Such a statistic brings home how significant this is. What we do in our local recycling has global consequences. It is not simply waste in the United Kingdom that we must consider, and our ability to recycle.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on introducing the debate. He is of about the same vintage as I am, so he will remember fish and chips in newspaper. Does he welcome the commitment made by some chip shops and fast food outlets to focus on paper rather than plastic? That should be praised. Does he also agree that there must be more focus on packaging for online businesses and they

[*Jim Shannon*]

should work with the Royal Mail to determine what level of packaging will protect goods, as well as the environment? Chip shops and fast food outlets are doing their bit, but more can be done with the Royal Mail and online packaging.

Daniel Zeichner: We are already diverting into a range of issues, and I will mention some examples. The hon. Gentleman gets there first on fish and chips; I am of an age that I can remember fish and chips in newspaper, so I agree with him on that. The point about the Royal Mail is not one I intended to make, so he has added an important point to the discussion.

To get back to the wider issues, it is clear to me that public pressure for action on all these issues is growing. We saw from the Extinction Rebellion protests, which have happened nationwide and are strongly supported in Cambridge, that these issues have seized the public policy agenda. The school climate strikes, which I found magnificent, uplifting and inspired, show that the next generation demands change. I am sure we all have examples in our local areas. Last Friday, I was at the Spinney Primary School in Cambridge, and I was impressed not only by the quality of the questions the young people asked but by the fact that they had held an “empathy for earth” day a week or two before, and one could see the young people’s enthusiasm.

We can see the public’s desire for meaningful change. The question is, what can we do? One area that we can start with is the food we eat. When options are given to people to avoid non-recyclable packaging, they can be popular. There are good examples of that, which we have begun to touch on.

I thank the Petitions Committee staff for their excellent work surveying more than 20,000 people on their attitudes to food packaging. For fruits and vegetables, such as bananas, apples, potatoes and onions, more than 99% of respondents said that, given the option, they would choose to buy the items without plastic packaging—that is, almost everybody. A large majority said that they would buy bread without plastic packaging—94.6%—whereas 94.9% said they would buy breakfast cereal without it, and 97.1% said they would buy nuts and dried fruit. Nearly 80% said they would choose to buy meat or fish without plastic packaging, so there is considerable public appetite for change. I will come to some issues around that later.

Last Friday, I welcomed the Petitions Committee engagement team—I thank those involved for their work—to Cambridge. We held a roundtable discussion with various organisations that are working hard to improve sustainability in how we eat and live our lives. In that discussion I heard from owners of sustainable shops, cafés and businesses, such as BeeBee Wraps, the organic reusable food wraps business; Cambridge Carbon Footprint, which promotes sustainable living, local resources and services; and Cambridge Sustainable Food, which focuses on partnerships, projects and campaigns that capture the imagination and increase the sustainability of local eating.

That was an illuminating discussion, and many complex issues arose. For example, inventing new types of potentially sustainable packaging seems to be easier than putting in place the infrastructure and processes to deal with

them. There was a concern about the proliferation of new so-called sustainable packaging products and different recycling schemes. Jacky Sutton-Adam described the situation, saying

“we’ve broken all our eggs into a bowl, mixed them up but haven’t made the omelette yet.”

While the Government ought to be investing more in solutions and incentivising people to try new things, Irina Ankudinova and others believed that manufacturers should be required to show that a system was in place to deal with the waste before new packaging products were brought to the market.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making an important point about the packaging surrounding the goods we buy, but there are also the goods themselves. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the prevention of plastic waste, I note that we have weaned ourselves off natural products and fibres and on to plasticised ones. Many of our clothes and carpets are polypropylene. We are wrapping plastic in plastic, and that is a real concern. Does he agree that we need to look at the big picture and have a shift back toward both more natural packaging and more natural fibres within the packaging?

Daniel Zeichner: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who makes a powerful point; I will touch on it a little later, but I suspect that others will want to amplify it further. When I look around the world, there are other countries that have perhaps not gone so far down this path, and some of their lifestyles are very attractive—dare I say it, but even some European lifestyles are very attractive indeed.

On Friday, I was also able to visit the Cambridge Cheese Company, which cycles its cheese deliveries around the city and presents gifts in recycled wooden cheese boxes. I am grateful to a very helpful assistant in its shop, Jade Tiger Thomas, who showed me the amazing aforementioned BeeBee wraps and explained a scheme that allows customers to bring their own Tupperware or reusable boxes to carry cheese home, and reusable jars for olives and deli items. The company is a long-established Cambridge gem. Many hon. Members find themselves in Cambridge from time to time, and I thoroughly recommend that they pay it a visit.

This is not an entirely new phenomenon. A long time ago, when I was a student in Cambridge, I remember going to the legendary Arjuna Wholefoods and buying spices measured into brown paper bags. That was happening long before it became fashionable, and Arjuna’s has proved itself a long-term Cambridge institution committed to sustainability and reducing food waste.

Buying food without throwaway packaging is becoming increasingly popular across the country. At the start of the month, Waitrose began a trial in its Oxford Botley Road store of a new “Unpacked” model, with a dedicated refillable zone of products from wine to cereals, frozen pick and mix and a borrow a box scheme. It also has refillable cleaning products and sells plants and flowers without plastic. Most of us have probably read the stories in the newspapers. It is too early to have solid statistics on the success of the trial, but Waitrose tells me that the reaction on social media to the announcement

of the trial was 97% positive and the store sold out of some products within the first week of the trial. I was told that

“customers have bought into the concept readily—they arrive with their own containers ready to fill with the loose cereals, pasta, fish and more. This started to happen within just a few hours of us announcing the trial”.

That put me in mind of happy times past in my life, in places such as Venice, where the wine shops allow people to take bottles to be refilled on a regular basis. Now, perhaps, we can extend that to washing-up liquid, even if it is slightly less enticing.

When these schemes are well advertised and communicated and efforts are made to help people to get acquainted with new ideas, such as the borrow a box scheme for those who may have been unaware or do not have their own, behaviour and culture change are possible. That can also be done on a smaller scale: the University of Sheffield students’ union has its own Zero Waste Shop, which sells a huge range of spices, herbs, grains, legumes, dried fruits and nuts by weight, so people can buy as much or as little as they need. Customers simply bring their own container, buy one from the shop or use one of the recyclable paper bags.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for mentioning the University of Sheffield students’ union Zero Waste Shop. That is a well-established initiative, and I join him in celebrating the groundbreaking work that it has been doing for some time now.

Will my hon. Friend also celebrate the work of the university’s Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures, which is looking at a range of approaches to eliminating plastic waste, recognising that, while we should be doing everything possible to minimise the use of single-use plastics, there will be some areas in which that is difficult? For example, we need to explore whether there is an opportunity to reuse single-use plastics currently used by medics. Similarly, the carbon emissions of recycling single-use plastic bottles could be more damaging than developing reuse. Does he agree that those areas are the innovations we should be looking at?

Daniel Zeichner: True to form, my hon. Friend raises the more profound points of the debate. Those are exactly the trade-offs that must be considered in depth and detail, and I will come on to some of them in a moment. He makes a powerful point that sometimes, the more obvious routes to doing the right thing might not have quite the consequences that one understood them to be liable to have.

I suppose the argument I am making is to encourage the zeal of the public to embark on this path, and the conclusion I will draw at the end is that they must be given help to ensure that they are indeed achieving the good outcomes that they are intending to achieve. This is a subject littered with potentially difficult trade-offs, and I am sure both Front-Bench speakers will refer those in the debate.

I will complete my tour of some of the great initiatives—

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)
rose—

Daniel Zeichner: Or perhaps others might help me in that.

Graham Stringer: I am stimulated to get to my feet by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), who is associated with the University of Sheffield, as I was some time ago, through the Sheffield students’ union. One of the things I learned at the university was that if we cannot measure it, or we do not measure it, we are unlikely to make progress with it.

Does my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) agree that some of the Government’s statistics are extremely dodgy in this area, particularly on recycling? When waste is exported, we assume that it is recycled, but that is unaudited. The best way to deal with these things is, first, to deal with them domestically and, secondly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central says, to reuse things rather than recycling them—glass bottles rather than plastic being an obvious example.

Daniel Zeichner: Once again, my hon. Friend introduces the gravity that I would expect of him, and he makes serious points. I am sure others will refer to the need to reduce, reuse and recycle in the correct sequence. The measurement issue is important. I am trying to adopt a non-partisan tone in today’s debate, because I suspect we are all trying to get to the same place, but he makes a very fair point about the need to ensure that the statistics on which we make decisions are reliable, and an even more important point that we cannot just export our waste and pretend that that is not having an impact somewhere else.

My final resting-point on my tour of great Cambridge places is Cambridge’s Daily Bread Co-operative, which is launching its zero-waste scheme this week. My point is that wherever we turn, we find people wanting to bring forward new and welcome initiatives. That brings me to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee; I am standing opposite its Chair, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), and I am grateful to him for being in the Chamber this afternoon. The Committee is in the midst of an inquiry on food and drink packaging, which has allowed me the delight of reading through both its proceedings and its evidence.

I suspect the hon. Gentleman will want to comment on some of that, but the experts consulted by the Committee tell us that while changes can be made, we must temper our enthusiasm with realism, because there is probably no easy answer or quick fix to the problem. Packaging plays an important role in keeping food fresh, safe and affordable, so although moving away from pre-packaged foods in shops, restaurants and cafes is probably possible, the question becomes more difficult and complicated when we consider freight and production.

Despite that, it definitely seems possible to me significantly to reduce the amount that we use here in the UK, but it would be simplistic to assume that we could just transfer that way of producing and transporting food all over the world, when in some places the same level of technology is not yet readily available.

It is important to remember where the most environmental damage is done. In evidence to the EFRA Committee inquiry, Peter Maddox, from WRAP UK, explained that

“when you look at a piece of meat, a nice eight ounce beefsteak in a package with a film on top...the carbon impact of the steak is over 100 times bigger than the carbon impact of the packaging. That packaging is providing extremely innovative barrier properties,

[Daniel Zeichner]

which enables that meat to last a lot longer. If you did not have it in that pack, that meat might last three days. If you have it in a really good sealable pack, it will last 10 days. You start then thinking about what consumers want, reducing food waste and the fundamental economic value of that piece of meat. You need to think about it in terms of the whole product.”

Having read through the evidence, that message comes through loud and clear. The whole product and the whole life-cycle analysis are key. We must recognise that as we continue our efforts to reduce non-recyclable packaging. There is so much we can do, but it is realistic to admit that we cannot eradicate its use completely overnight.

However, we must not lose our ambition. The Royal Society of Chemistry, based in Cambridge, highlighted in evidence to the inquiry that, although bio-derived and biodegradable plastics will play a role in addressing the challenges caused by conventional plastic waste, they should not be used to legitimise a throwaway culture; they are not necessarily more environmentally benign than conventional plastics; and their impact as a replacement for conventional plastics must be considered on a life-cycle basis. This suggests that despite technological advancement, cultural awareness and change are still crucial. The UK cannot absolve itself of responsibility for mass corporate and personal behaviour change just because technology is advancing.

At the roundtable in Cambridge last week, Seigo Robinson and others were concerned that reducing non-recyclable plastic packaging was not necessarily compatible with the drive to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. For example, it was said that “carting around loads of refillable jam jars” would use “loads of CO₂”; we may not have been precise or measurable on this occasion, but hon. Members will get the point. Alternatives to plastic packaging, such as paper, steel, wood and glass, could sadly have far worse carbon footprints. People said that plastic pollution of the oceans and carbon emissions needed to go hand in hand, and argued that recycling ought to be a last resort; people should look at using reusable containers for many years before thinking about the need for recycling.

Continuing my spirit of generosity towards the Government—I have no idea why I am in this generous mood, but I am—

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): He is a generous Minister.

Daniel Zeichner: Perhaps, and perhaps I have some sympathy with the Government’s current travails. However, it is fair to say that we have seen progress. The Government have looked at banning plastic straws, drink stirrers and plastic cotton buds, but I fear that they have so far been rather reluctant to introduce the fiscal measures that we now know do work. The plastic bag charge was discussed over many years, and it has now taken 15 billion plastic bags out of circulation. Imagine what proper fiscal incentives and taxes could do to change the way our society considers waste and how committed we all are to recycling.

The drink stirrer announcement grabbed headlines, but we need to seize this moment to make the “rapid”, “unprecedented” and “far-reaching” transitions that

the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report called for in October. In evidence to the EFRA Committee’s inquiry, the Green Alliance recommended moving away from piecemeal action and approaching plastic, packaging and resource use in general in a much more systemic way. This means viewing plastic as just one resource among many used in our economy, all of which have environmental impacts of some sort.

Jim Shannon: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the general public need to have a good look at how they perceive foods? I am always aware of this issue when it comes to the general public buying potatoes. What they want to see in Asda, Tesco and all the big superstores is a nice wee carton of half a dozen potatoes, washed, cleaned and ready for the pot. Potatoes as I and others in the Chamber know them come in a half a hundredweight bag bought from the farmer. You know something? That is real potatoes.

Daniel Zeichner: I am grateful for the intervention, but I think it leads us into a slightly broader discussion about people’s view of the world. I have to say that I rather hanker after a less homogenised culture in general. In a discussion we had last week, I recalled a time when we respected the seasons. We did not expect peppers to be available for 365 days a year, which perhaps gave us something to look forward to. There is something in the human spirit that we could look into. However, the supermarkets will say that it is what people want. That is the dilemma that we face.

Returning to the Green Alliance—I am on the way home from the supermarket—its overall recommendation is, to coin a phrase, to go back to basics: reduce the amount of unnecessary plastics used, reduce dangerous chemical use and rationalise the number of polymer types that go into plastic production to improve recycling, which is really important. That is all while promoting systems for reuse and ensuring that we use recyclable and recycled materials. It argues that this requires a more strategic approach to infrastructure, not simply leaving it to the market. I suspect this is where some of the political disagreements may emerge. However, I very much agree. I wish the Government would accept that challenge and develop a framework that advocates system change.

As the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton said when chairing the inquiry, reducing non-recyclable waste “is going to be quite difficult to do...but it is how far we go and how wide we go...it is down to the big retailer as well as the consumer. It is going to be an interesting education for all of us”.

I very much agree. This is the point: we must take people with us, rather than being punitive, which is why education and making change easy for people are crucial. Essentially, if we make it too much of a fuff for people to change their behaviour, people will be turned off and will not do it.

I believe that people want to do the right thing—to be environmentally conscious and to live sustainably—but time and resources dictate that we have to make this the easy choice, in a socially just way, and not simply for those who can afford the time or money to change their consumption habits. I hope the Minister will tell us how the Government might go about making this happen.

4.56 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I thank the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for securing this timely debate and for his favourable quoting of me as Chair of the Select Committee. We are very much on the same page: I think we have to reduce plastics, and we have to get more compostable plastics, but we also have to be quite sensible in how we go about that. Let us use some carrots as well as sticks to try to persuade people to change their attitudes. I very much welcome the debate, which comes on the back of the petition on stopping the use of non-recyclable, unsustainable food packaging.

I would be told off by my Committee Clerks, if they were here, if I went into too much detail of what I thought the Committee might or might not decide after taking our evidence. However, naturally, I will go through the evidence that we have taken so far. We have really seen that we can actually reduce a great deal of the plastics we use. Whether they are recyclable or not, do we actually need the amount of plastic that we have? Some people here are younger than others, but most of us have grown up gradually using more and more plastic. I still remember glass bottles and things like that, which were recyclable and came with a deposit on them—Corona bottles and the like. I used to go around collecting them as a boy, especially if they washed up in the river, because I could then get the deposit back. All these things are useful, because people not only returned them but they collected them as well.

I was at an event last week where Water UK suggested having more fountains, and making sure that we carried a reusable water bottle around with us. Millions and billions of plastic bottles are used for mineral water. We probably have some of the best tap water in the world. Do we need all this bottled water? It has become a real fashion. I know it is very difficult to tell people that they are out of fashion, but they may well be now, if there are so many unnecessary plastic bottles.

Graham Stringer: Some time ago, I had lunch with Eddie Stobart—I may have got this figure slightly wrong, because it was a long time ago that we had lunch—but I think he said that at any one time on the motorways he had 40 lorries carrying nothing but water. It is an extraordinary waste of energy making the bottles and, as the hon. Gentleman says, we have high-quality water in virtually every corner of this country. I have tried at different times to persuade the House authorities to use tap water, not bottled water. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we could make a small contribution by not having bottled water at our Committee meetings?

Neil Parish: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. The House could of course lead by having bottled tap water instead of mineral water. As a farmer and previously a dairy farmer, I can say that dairy farmers often joke that they would be better off if, instead of milking cows, they could find a spring on their farm and bottle the water, because more money can be made from bottling water than from keeping cows and producing milk. It is fair enough if people really want mineral water; perhaps some people need mineral water for health or other reasons, but we certainly do not need the amount that we consume and we do not need to have it in plastic bottles.

Of course, if we are going to have plastic bottles, let us ensure that they are properly recyclable. Some of the big companies—Pepsi and Coca-Cola—are looking at reverse vending machines. That is where someone takes a plastic bottle, puts it back through the vending machine, gets a deposit and another bottle can be made from that plastic. Of course, only 70% of that plastic can be used and it can only be recycled about twice. With everything in this world that we look at, we find, when we drill down, that it is not quite as recyclable and reusable as we believed it to be.

Mrs Main: On the recycling of bottles, I took the APPG to the Veolia recycling plant in Dagenham. A problem that we have is that a lot of plastic cannot be used more than once. That plant had empty machines because it needs to feed those machines. It is a dilemma: the more we take plastic out of the system, the more recycling becomes too expensive to do. That is something we have to think about.

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. We can recycle plastics, but if we recycle a mix of different plastics, we find that we get a very low-grade reusable plastic. If compostable plastics are mixed with the non-compostable, we have another problem. Everything in life is not simple; as with every inquiry that one does, the more one looks into the issue, the more complicated it becomes. I am a practical farmer, and the one thing that I want to see is that we really do good by reducing the amount of plastic, having properly compostable plastics and doing something that actually works. We have to be careful. Governments of all colours will naturally say, “Let’s tick this box. We’ve recycled this; we’ve done this; we’ve done that.” But does it actually work? Does it improve the environment? That is the issue.

Moving on to compostable plastics, we have to be certain that they will decompose properly so that the molecules break down and we can grow plants in our garden or put the material on to our fields and grow our crops and it does not leave tiny little particles of plastic that has not broken down. Most of it will compost, but it has to be composted in a certain way. If I put the beaker that I have with me in the Chamber in my garden with a whole load of other beakers and leave them together, that will never decompose, or it will take a very long time to do so. If we mix it with garden waste and other organic materials and can get the temperature up to 60°, it will break down, probably within 12 weeks to six months, so that can be done. It will break right down, but as I said, it has to be done properly. We do not want the plastic in these beakers mixing with other plastic that is not compostable. That is why the collection of plastics and the recycling of them are vital. We have local government all over the country—I was in local government before I came to this place—and local authorities are fiercely independent, but of course we have lots of different ways of collecting and recycling and so on.

The Government will probably have to be braver on this issue and give stricter advice to local authorities on how they recycle and on having a similar system across the country. For example, I do not have the patience that my wife has to sort things into every tiny little thing. I think that we need to make recycling a little bit

[Neil Parish]

more idiot-proof for people like me, dare I say. Do not smile like that, Minister. I was going to say something nice about you in a minute, but I may not now.

Sir George Howarth (in the Chair): Order. As a farmer, the hon. Gentleman should know that when you are in a hole, it is best to stop digging.

Neil Parish: Yes, I will carry on with my speech, Sir George; I apologise. On compostable plastic, we need to ensure much better public awareness. We also have to ensure that we collect the material separately and do not mix it with plastic that is not compostable.

I think that if we were to bring in a tax at the source, where plastics are made, that would raise the cost, but those plastics that were genuinely compostable could be made exempt or there could be a reduction in the amount of tax put on that particular plastic. That would ensure that the compostable plastics were more competitive in the marketplace.

The hon. Member for Cambridge rightly went into quite a lot of detail about what we actually need to wrap in plastic. When it comes to meat, fish and things that we want to keep for a long time, we can improve the shelf life by using plastic. We do not want to waste food; that is the last thing we want. We do not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater, so we need to be a little careful. As I have said, we must ensure that we do not waste food. When it comes to those vacuum packs, let us ensure that it is those foods that require a longer life that we concentrate the plastics on.

Other hon. Members have made this point: do we really need potatoes, carrots, onions and all those things wrapped in plastic? Do individual bits of broccoli need to be wrapped in plastic? When we go to the supermarket, the food is almost pre-digested and pre-eaten, before we actually eat it, because it has been prepared so thoroughly. We wash our potatoes, carrots and all those things and then put them in plastic bags. That is all very convenient, but I was told as a boy, "You have to eat a peck of dirt before you die." I think people would have a job to eat a peck of dirt today, because everything is washed so clean. Carrots, potatoes and all those root crops grow in the ground, believe it or not. They get soil on them, and a little bit of soil—well, I will not diverge from the subject too far, but there is iron in soil. All these things are part of life.

Without getting too romantic and reminiscing too much, we could look a lot more at how we used to eat our food. Not everything will work, and as I have said, we will still need some plastics, so let us make them compostable. Take cheese, for example. Does all of that need to be wrapped in plastic, so that it seems to be made of rubber, and delivered to us? We could have some really good flavoured cheese that is done in a more traditional way; perhaps we could take it home in some greaseproof paper or whatever. Do we need all the plastic and cardboard packaging that is used to package strawberries? For all these things, do we need it?

Another issue that we have not looked at is the glossy leaflets that we receive through the post. They are all plastic-coated. I do not think that the Select Committee will look at this in our inquiry, but when we start looking at something, we suddenly start looking at everything that arrives with different eyes. One of the

agricultural merchants sent me a whole thing to do with cattle drenches and goodness knows what, and it was all in a very glossy leaflet, all plastic-coated. That is not necessary. In fact, if we use something that looks more old-fashioned, with old-fashioned print, and put it on some proper paper, instead of a plastic-coated leaflet, it might work a lot better than carrying on with more and more plastic.

Mrs Main: We have all become used to seeing huge bales of hay in fields covered in plastic shrink wrap. Does my hon. Friend have a view on that?

Neil Parish: If my hon. Friend could guarantee the weather, so that we did not have to wrap the silage because of the rain and could make it all into hay, we could do away with a lot of plastic. She is right that we could use less plastic.

My issue—I will get into trouble with some farmers now—is the amount of plastics in the fields used for growing crops. We are all chasing the early market. We put down more and more plastic, but I wonder whether that is right. The plastic used to wrap those silage bales needs to be properly recycled. I suspect that we could look at the type of materials used, to ensure that they are properly compostable. Of course, one has to be careful to ensure that the acids released in the fermentation of the silage do not dissolve the wrapper. I think that more can be done. Farmers will have to look at that quite seriously. I am sure that the Minister probably does not want to talk about that today, but the farming industry will have to look at that seriously.

I will not carry on talking all day—although I probably could. The hon. Member for Cambridge has brought a very important issue to the Chamber. The real way forward is for the Government, industry and consumers to look at everything we do—the way we live—and ask whether we can carry on with this lifestyle. Do we need as much plastic? Can the plastic we use be properly compostable? If it is not compostable, can we ensure that it is properly recycled? Can we ensure that we collect that plastic in a way that retains the value of the plastic for recycling, rather than turning it into a low-grade plastic?

We can do a lot more. The Government need to consider taxation. I am not a great lover of taxation, but we could tax the overuse of raw mineral plastic made from oil and move people on to compostable plastics. Let us ensure in the future that we use half as much plastic as we do now, and not less than that, that most of it will be compostable and that we genuinely recycle the rest. That way we can use it for good purposes, such as making plastic fencing stakes, which would last forever, rather than rot out. That would be a good use of plastic.

There are many ideas out there. I look forward to the Minister's response, as well as that of the shadow Minister, who is a good member of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. The Minister is making, and will make, an excellent Agriculture Minister.

5.13 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I thank the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) and the Petitions Committee for securing this important debate.

By 2050, some 34 billion tons of plastic will have been manufactured globally. The waste might be shipped around the world and will blight many countries—many of which do not contribute to the waste, but host it. That is a wicked thing that some countries impose on others. It seems inexplicable that we have come to produce and rely on a material that is potentially detrimental to our future—but indeed we have. This material is allegedly cheaper to produce new than by recycling existing products. If it is subjected to fire, it will, in most circumstances, give off a potentially deadly cocktail of toxic gases, and if it is discarded in watercourses, it will continue to pollute our oceans. Neither of those outcomes is welcome.

The UK Government have confirmed that their strategy, as part of their new 25-year plan to improve the environment, aims to eliminate avoidable plastic waste—a worthy aspiration. Having spoken previously in debates on this subject, I am well aware of bans on microbeads, straws, stirrers and cotton buds, together with plastic bag charges and refill facilities for plastic bottles. I commend Scottish Water for its promotion of such facilities throughout towns in Scotland. Eventually, these measures will all have positive impacts on the environment.

Those actions alone are not enough and we need to do much more, but from that beginning I understand that the UK Government are consulting on proposals to incentivise producers and retailers to take responsibility for the environmental impacts of the packaging that they choose to use. Added to that, the Government have committed more than £60 million in funding for global research and to assist Commonwealth countries in preventing plastic from entering the oceans.

A constituent of mine recently highlighted to my office staff the fact that receptacles have been placed on Turnberry beach in South Ayrshire, into which the public can place plastic waste washed up on the shoreline. That is a good local initiative. I also commend the local rotary clubs in Ayrshire for their effective annual beach cleans. I am sure that that goes on all over the United Kingdom, and I commend the work of rotary clubs throughout the UK and Ireland. These beach cleans remove tonnes of potentially polluting plastic each year. Although I am not always there, I am happy to join them, when I can, on a Saturday morning.

I understand that another of the Government's aims is to work with retailers to explore the introduction of plastic-free supermarket aisles. Of course, as has been mentioned in previous debates, other more traditional forms of packaging—such as glass bottles—might have a similar cost to the environment in their production and transport, even if disposal and recycling can be easier. As glass is heavier than plastic, transporting it carries a higher carbon footprint. As with all things, we need to strike a balance.

I want to commend a local initiative, whereby reusable glass milk bottles have been introduced by the Kerr family of South Corton farm near Ayr. Their customers secure glass bottles, which they take to the farm to get fresh milk for themselves straight from that wonderful dairy farm. They get the freshest milk and reduce the use of plastic bottles, which are so commonly used for the conveyance of milk.

In the meantime, I note in the media that Asda, like Waitrose, plans to make its packaging 100% recyclable by 2025, and is encouraging local primary school children,

including those in Girvan in my constituency, to take part in a series of interactive activities to learn about plastic use and recycling.

The dangers of plastics are clearly being recognised by the younger generation. Pupils at Belmont Academy in Ayr have recently taken part in the “Full Cycle 2019” connected world challenge at Dumfries House in Cumnock. I am pleased to report that they received a pupils' choice award—well done to them and their teachers.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman mentions that people are moving towards the use of milk bottles as opposed to plastic containers. There was an interesting article a couple of weeks ago—in fact, it was on television in the midlands—which showed that more and more people are going back to their local milkman, because they use bottles rather than plastic containers. Does he agree that that is a good thing?

Bill Grant: Yes, exactly; that is a good thing. Many if not all in this Chamber will remember the wee phrase on milk bottles: “Rinse and return”.

Mr Cunningham: I used to deliver them.

Bill Grant: Yes, it is a good step forward. It is a small step, but a step in the right direction.

The pupils' choice award was won by the pupils for their innovative project on plastic pollution, and I commend them for their efforts. Let us hope that the politics of plastic proceeds with the same enthusiasm.

We must not fail our future generations. As has been mentioned, this might be one occasion when we should turn the clock back to the days of our parents and grandparents. They managed daily tasks, and to sustain themselves and their families, without the same reliance on plastic. The fish-and-chips wrapping of that era has been mentioned, and we all remember the days when fish and chips seemed to taste that wee bit better in yesterday's newspaper.

Finally, will the Minister provide an update on the consultation that closed last month, and can he confirm that the introduction of a new plastic packaging tax in April 2022 is still on target? A quarter of a million signatories to the petition cannot be wrong, and they have to be listened to.

5.19 pm

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George, and to participate in this timely debate. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the prevention of plastic waste, I must put it on the record that, as a society, we cannot turn back the clock. I recognise that there is nostalgia for days past, but I really believe that the public would struggle if we tried to get rid of plastic altogether. What we need is to minimise waste from plastic by reusing it wherever we can and ensuring that it is not a throwaway, disposal commodity.

We have got addicted to plastic—we even have chocolates with plastic toys inside. It is so important to slim down the plastic agenda, but we must recognise that some things need to be made of it; I really stress that point, because, if we are not careful, in our desire to take a

[Mrs Anne Main]

messianic approach we might end up swapping one problem for another, much as we did when we all embraced diesel cars. We do not want to increase food waste or the number of heavy bottles being transported around the country; we need to decide whether we actually need that packaging, rather than replacing it with something in a different form that might be just as damaging.

St Albans cares deeply about environmental issues and I am grateful to the 464 people from St Albans who signed the petition, because we all need that pressure. I hosted an event on the Terrace with the Coalition for Global Prosperity, which wants to take plastic out of the environment. David Attenborough was the chief guest and was enormously impressive, inspiring the audience in a way that no one else can. One thing he said that stayed with me was that when he was a little boy, his science teacher said, “Boys, you are at the cusp of something really exciting. We have had the ages of stone, iron and steel; now we are in the age of plastic—and it will never, ever go away.” That is our Midas curse: plastic does not go away, so we will have to come up with formulations that make it truly compostable.

We must also ensure that packaging is not mixed. I visited Tesco in my constituency a couple of weeks ago, where the composition of some packaging is so mixed that it makes things very difficult, whether that is the little windows on sandwich boxes or Pringles packets—unfortunately for poor old Pringles, it is seen as one of the worst, with plastic at the end, metal at the bottom and cardboard down the middle. We need to tackle that composite packaging and ask ourselves whether we can work smarter to ensure that our packaging is truly compostable.

We must be realistic. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), whose constituency is a lovely place, mentioned the concerns of farmers. We have moved so far away from natural products that sheep farmers tell me it costs more to shear a sheep than the fleece was ever worth, yet it was not so many years ago that wool was an extremely valuable resource. Now we have plastic in insulation materials, and we put plastic carpets on the floor because they are scrubbable and durable—all the things that we value about it are the flipside of the plastic curse.

We need to look at how to encourage the public to demand less plastic. The plastic that we cannot see is often more injurious than the plastic that we can see. We can be virtuous about seeing bottles and packaging, taking them along to recycling and feeling that we have done our bit, but it worries me that people are washing their Polartec fleeces—sorry; that is a brand, and I know that some fleeces are made from plastic bottles now, but fleecy jumpers and even polyester clothes knock off little bits of plastic into the environment, where it goes into the sea and is ingested by fish, filter feeders and so on. Our beaches are littered with nurdles, which are little tides and drifts of coloured plastic. Because it is indestructible, so to speak—I know that there are compostable variations now—and has been there for such a long time, we have a legacy of plastic. That is what I would like the Government to look at, as much as anything: the legacy of plastic from Governments of years past.

We, the countries of the modern age, have been the worst polluters. Our plastic piles up on shores or beaches and drifts around. That was the focus of David Attenborough’s wonderful “Blue Planet”: people may think that they can scoop up the floating bottles and the job is done, but the reality is that a lot of plastic has become a soup, which is very hard to remove. I would like to see more of our investment in international aid spent on clearing up that soup made from the plastic of years ago. I am all for improving the environmental impact that we are having now, but we cannot rebalance the scales without taking into account the damage that we have all done over the years.

We have become a throwaway society. We throw away clothes that may have been worn only once, which have been produced incredibly cheaply and are often wrapped massively in plastic when they come through the door. We are addicted to online retailing, which often comes with huge amounts of polystyrene around the more delicate items. We have to start looking at how we are shopping as consumers and at how we are living.

This is a massively important debate, but it can make you feel as if your head is going to fall off, because there are so many strands to the plastic story. I am keen to avoid a silo mentality. I applaud the petition for its genuine interest in packaging, but we must also look at the composition of packaging and help businesses to have a much better recycling rate. It seems perverse that in St Albans there are recycling boxes and cartons outside houses, yet businesses have to deal with the waste themselves. We need to incentivise big companies about their packaging and ensure that there is a market for it.

To my shame—although it is nothing to do with me—my constituency has one of the biggest waste tips for supposedly compostable and recyclable wood. The Appspound Lane site has been a disaster over the years because there is plasticised paint on most of the wood that is left there, so there is no market for it; it has sat there as a wet, rotting mountain that catches fire when it exceeds the allowed level. That means that we are kidding ourselves when we put packaging on our doorstep and think that it is being dealt with properly elsewhere.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) mentioned Tearfund, which I hope to do some work with in Bangladesh in September. From the work that I do in Bangladesh, I know that it has an awful lot of plastic packaging but does not have a good recycling industry. We have exported our waste, but not the technology for recycling. When the Department for International Development puts money into countries like that, I would like to see us doing more than trying to stop the tide of waste. There is so much legacy plastic—when we go to those countries, we see rivers, lakes and beaches polluted with it. We need to help countries to increase their recycling, but we also need to cut down our thirst and hunger for plastic in goods and packaging, as well as the legacy plastic that our society has put there.

I welcome today’s debate, which I think will be the first of many. We need to look at how we have got addicted to plastic. At the event that I mentioned, David Attenborough left us with the words that plastic is with us forever. Every time even the smallest bit gets thrown away, we have to remember that it will be there somewhere, and the fact that it may not land on our shores does not mean that it will not land on someone else’s.

I really hope that we will hear some joined-up thinking from the Minister today about weaning ourselves off plastic goods, including gratuitous plastic toys given as freebies to small children with meals at certain restaurants, as well as polystyrene foam wraps from fish and chip shops or other outlets.

We have to wean ourselves off plastic, but we cannot expect young mums to do away with disposable nappies. I have met the Nappy Alliance, which is trying to get people to use less plasticised nappies, but there is a huge amount of plastic that we have welcomed into our lives because it stops leaks or protects against things. The amount of clingfilm that we use, some of which is putting gender-altering phthalates into the environment, has concerned me for years. That is why it is thought there has been a rise in the hermaphrodisation of fish, and so on.

Our contact with plastic is huge and in the future people will ask why on earth we did not realise quite how injurious this was, not only to the environment but to those people and animals and plants in the environment that suffer as a result of plastic toxicity. I hope that this debate is part of a joined-up debate, Minister, and that we will all be encouraged today by hearing about lots of different avenues that will be open to us. We should not just be picking up our plastic waste, but cutting off the stream.

5.30 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir George.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) spoke about the mood of the public changing—he noted that—and this petition is a testament to that, as is the quality of the contributions to the debate today; that quality has really shown that change, as well. There has been a great deal of passion and commitment to real change shown by the speakers in this debate and I commend everyone who has taken part for that.

The hon. Gentleman also paid tribute to those programmes, such as “Blue Planet II”, that have brought these problems home to each one of us; indeed, they have brought them directly into our homes.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the impressive work of the Petitions Committee staff, with some 20,000 people having been surveyed. That is a huge number of people whose views we have taken into account and the survey has given us some incredibly useful statistics. I thank him for listing some of those statistics and look forward to looking up the rest of them, because that was obviously a really valuable exercise. It was interesting to hear exactly what packaging—or rather, the lack of packaging—remarkable numbers of people seem prepared to accept.

The hon. Gentleman highlighted what is something of a Catch-22 situation, with companies increasing production of genuinely recyclable packaging while we still lack the necessary infrastructure to properly deal with it. I suggest to the Minister that extra investment is urgently needed in that respect.

The hon. Gentleman made a very useful point about the importance of remembering to consider the whole lifecycle—that analysis of what is being packaged. It is also important to remember that items need to be reused considerably more times than they are now before they are simply thrown away, or indeed recycled.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) brought back happy memories for me of hunting for returnable bottles and exchanging the extra cash for sweeties, I am afraid to say. However, he also called for an end to Government box-ticking exercises, a proper appreciation of what is recyclable, and proper co-ordination between different local authorities. That issue exists in Scotland too, and I know that the Scottish Government are keen to try to iron out some of the differences in recycling approaches.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about the compostable cups that are now in use in Parliament. It is perhaps worth pointing out for the record that they are for commercial composting—they are not really for household composting—and the company that produces them also provides a collection service to enable that commercial composting to happen. I know that because the company's HQ is located in my constituency; I will say more on the company later.

The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) mentioned the excellent initiative of Scottish Water, which I would love to see being rolled out throughout the UK by different water companies. It involves installing free water fountains, like the Victorian fountains that were once so common everywhere. They are fountains for residents and visitors alike throughout Scotland, and it is a pleasure to see them after so many of the older, mainly Victorian water fountains fell out of favour.

The hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) quoted David Attenborough speaking of “the age of plastic”. She rightly pointed out that plastic was once very enthusiastically welcomed, but also spoke of the flipside of the “plastic curse”; she mentioned nurdles and micro-fibres and many other things that I have certainly become aware of through some of my beach clean-up days with the Wardie Bay beachwatch in my constituency. She also spoke of other very serious legacy issues for plastic. She called for the Government to address those and to commit to actions to deal with that “plastic soup”, which is a phrase that I think will stick forever in my memory; it is very unfortunate that we even have to think of such a thing.

The hon. Lady also called on us all to show joined-up thinking, saying that we should aim for that truly circular economy. She also mentioned clingfilm, so I should mention the fact that my mother still washes clingfilm and drapes it on the kitchen taps. She has done so for many years and was a very early recycler.

The phrase “horrors from the deep” took on another significance recently, when a plastic bag was found in the Mariana Trench, the deepest part of the world's oceans, along with sweet wrappers of course. We also heard that “there ain't no mountain high enough”, when 11,000 kg of rubbish, including plastic, was removed from Mount Everest. Still, plastic keeps fruit clean, right?

The hon. Member for Cambridge spoke of TV programmes that helped to create the increasing pressure for action. The recent disclosure that nations in other parts of the world are refusing to continue to accept waste from the UK, and plastic waste in particular, also brought that issue into the public consciousness with a bang. I am sure that many of us here muttered a wee profanity in relief as we realised that this news was

[Deidre Brock]

being laid out clearly on the public agenda—hooray, indeed. But it must not just be a press story that is here today and gone tomorrow.

It was no surprise perhaps that we were foisting our problems on countries that we regard as “developing” while we think of ourselves as “developed”, which is to our shame; there is perhaps no surprise either that we are happy to leave it to someone else to clean up after us; and there is perhaps no surprise that we did not think about the consequences before we made the mess.

The sheer volume of waste that cannot be recycled and that represents a hazard to other life on this planet is as mind blowing as the scale of our idea that it can all simply be swept under the global carpet. The task of cleaning up this mess, and the job of getting some semblance of order back, is of similar measure to that of sending people to the moon after Kennedy made that declaration in Houston in 1962.

We need to have a similar belief in our ability to achieve. We need to think that it is not only necessary but within our reach to take action; that this action is not only possible but desirable. We have to set our collective human mind to the task of setting right what we have made wrong. I do not think that anyone has all the answers yet, but at least we have started asking the questions.

We need to clear the backlog of waste that we have created, but we also need to do more to stop creating the stuff in the first place. I find myself going backwards and forwards, between praising supermarkets—as some speakers have done, quite rightly, today for developing products and packaging that can be composted or recycled, or that are even biodegradable, which are moves in the right direction—to thinking that if those supermarkets spent a fraction of their advertising and promotion budgets on this issue, we might see some real differences.

Since each supermarket watches all the other supermarkets and twitches at the smallest possible movement, smart supermarkets that find a way to market some real moves to sustainability will not only gain a commercial advantage, which they will keep, but trigger a chain reaction in the other supermarkets. It is good to hear that the first, somewhat tentative steps are being taken in that respect and that that opportunity is finally being grasped.

However, it is not enough simply to find ways to use a bit less packaging. Where packaging is desirable or necessary, we should make sure that it does not cost the future. We must make the packaging sustainable, recyclable and biodegradable—making it properly biodegradable would be even better.

In my constituency, there is a company called Vegware, which produces foodstuffs packaging that, as can be seen by looking at this cup, people might take for plastic, but it is not. Instead, it is made from plants and can be recycled with food waste, where it composts—commercial composting, yes, but that becomes nutrients for plants. That is a virtuous circle that is simple and rather beautiful.

Vegware has been in business only since 2006, but it has operational bases in the UK, the US, Australia and Hong Kong, and it distributes throughout Europe, the middle east, South America and the Caribbean. It has

corporate clients the length of the UK and, indeed, in this very Parliament. It has demonstrated onsite composting at Dundee and Angus College that produces horticultural compost from waste in just two weeks. It is showing the way forward, and that is not unusual in Scotland, either. The Scottish Government are showing leadership within their restricted scope for movement.

I am delighted to see that the deposit return scheme is coming in Scotland. I have often wondered why there has been so much attention on plastic straws, important though that matter is, and not enough on plastic bottles—as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee mentioned—especially when we can get compostable straws from Vegware, a company in my constituency that I might have mentioned previously.

Scotland’s recycling rates are high. More trees are being planted each year and communities up and down the country are taking action. I mentioned Wardie Bay beachwatch and I will also mention the fantastic Leithers Don’t Litter, a completely voluntary organisation that has been making a huge difference for years now to the Leith community with its clean-up days. I particularly pay tribute to Gerry and Zsuzsa Farrell, who have been utter champions in that regard.

Schoolchildren have become the environmental activists that our generation failed to be, and the future is brighter than it might have been as a result. But that is not enough; much more needs to be done. Governments need to go beyond strategies, plans and visions to some actual actions, and I will be delighted to see the Minister getting on with it.

5.41 pm

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for his excellent speech introducing the debate. As he says, the public determination to deal with the scourge of plastic packaging is overwhelming, and MPs and the Government need to take heed of those concerns and act now.

I also thank all hon. Members who spoke and intervened, and I am delighted that there is a high level of agreement across parties on the issue. I will pick out a few points. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) said that any recycling solutions we introduce need to fit with local authority capabilities. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) mentioned that there is no point trying to prevent plastic pollution in this country if we do not manage to prevent it in other countries and in their oceans.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), in his substantial speech, made the strong point that we can reduce plastic packaging—that that is eminently achievable—but that we need to ensure that the correct plastics are treated in the correct way. He also made the case for a coherent national system, a case with which I very much agree. The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) pointed out the importance of enabling communities to combat plastic litter. The hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) said that we need to recognise the difference between items for which plastic packaging is unnecessary and those for which it is a sensible solution, and the importance of ensuring that compostable plastic really is compostable.

The petition calls for an end to non-recyclable and unsustainable food packaging, and goes on to call for a 100% recycling rate. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge made the point that it is not enough to call for packaging to be recyclable—it has actually to be recycled. Virtually every form of waste could be recycled if the public were able to separate it out, the local authorities were able to collect it, the plant were there to process it, and the manufacturers were willing to use the resulting recyclate rather than cheap raw materials. Some materials are clearly far more easily recycled than others, and when materials can be and are being recycled people need to know that.

Mrs Main: Thinking about my Appspod Lane heap of wood, does the hon. Gentleman agree that there has to be a market, some incentivisation to use the recycled goods? Otherwise, they become a valueless commodity; they might be recycled but no one wants them.

Sandy Martin: The hon. Lady is exactly right. That is clearly an important part of the entire recycling cycle.

There is no point allowing manufacturers to claim that a package is recyclable when they know that the facilities do not exist, and even less so when the cost of doing so would be ridiculously prohibitive. For instance, it is theoretically possible to recycle the traditional crisp packet, but I believe it currently costs more to recycle it, taking into account the collection costs, than the original cost with the crisps in it. The Government's strategy paper "Our Waste, Our Resources: A Strategy for England" acknowledges that to a certain extent, but it still refers to targets for making packaging recyclable, so my first ask of the Minister is whether the Government will measure recyclability in future by whether the material is actually recycled, or simply on the basis of a theoretical claim by industry?

My second ask of the Minister is whether the Government will consider a graduated tax on plastic packaging, rather than a flat-rate tax on that which contains less than 30% recyclate. Many manufacturers are already pledging to move well beyond 30% recycled packaging, and I would submit that any regulation that aims to persuade people to do less than they are already doing voluntarily is either pointless or window dressing. Major multinational companies, such as SC Johnson, the American cleaning products company that makes the Ecover brand among others, are already aiming for high percentages of recycled material in all their packaging, and it would be a travesty if the 30% flat rate allowed other less ambitious companies to undercut their prices simply because the tax regime did not incentivise higher rates.

The plastics packaging industry makes various claims trying to minimise the perception of its impact. Plastics do not make up the majority of waste, measured by weight, but neither the climate change impact nor the pollution impact of waste is dependent on weight. Yes, of course, we want a sustainable solution for construction hardcore, but the environmental impact of a tonne of inert mixed rubble is negligible in comparison with the enormous problem that would be represented by a tonne of polystyrene foam or polythene bags.

The feedstock for most plastics is still fossil fuel, and the absolute necessity eventually to bring to an end the consumption of fresh fossil fuels, if we are to achieve

net zero emissions by 2050, must include an end to the use of fossil fuels to create plastics as well. The industry proudly insists that 78% of plastics are currently recovered, but that mainly refers to recovery through incineration in energy-from-waste plants. The exact efficiency of the electricity generation varies from plant to plant, and depends on the mix of waste being incinerated, but we can be sure that plastic incinerated in an energy-from-waste plant will generate significantly less electricity than the oil it was made from would have done in a conventional oil-fired power station.

We do not use oil-fired power stations any more, as a rule, because of their unsustainable climate change implications. How much more unsustainable is it to incinerate plastic in an energy-from-waste plant? My third ask of the Minister is whether the Government have any plans to ensure that the proposed extended producer responsibility for packaging production will simply be allowed to subsidise more energy-from-waste plants, or whether they have any plans to ensure that the money is used to incentivise recycling instead?

As the petition makes clear, the public want to be able to recycle their packaging, but the best way to deal with unwanted plastic waste is to not create it in the first place. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge mentioned all sorts of imaginative ways in which mainly small retailers are avoiding the use of plastic packaging, all of which are laudable. However, we need a consistent, across-the-board step change in the way we purchase goods, the way packaging is designed, the materials it is designed from, and the way it is dealt with at end of life. Only a coherent national strategy from Government can achieve that, so my final ask of the Minister is this: will he pledge to ensure that all the good intentions, suggested actions, aims and targets in "Our waste, our resources" are pursued, accelerated where possible, and not shoved into the long grass under the next Prime Minister?

Dealing with our waste will be a crucial part of our ability to deal with the environment and climate emergency that we face. We need to reduce the amount of waste we create, and to reuse our packaging wherever possible and recycle or compost what is left, if we are to achieve zero net emissions by 2050 or stand any chance of maintaining any quality of life on our planet, for ourselves or any other creatures.

5.51 pm

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr Robert Goodwill): I thank the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner)—he represents a city that leads the world in many ways, including cycling—for securing this debate, as it comes at a time of significant public interest in plastics and concern about their environmental impact. Plastics used in food packaging, which generates a considerable amount of waste plastics, are a great concern. The number of signatories to the e-petition—almost 250,000—is testament to the public's concern, and I welcome a debate on the issue, not least because I was involved with it as a former member of the Environmental Audit Committee. Having heard the contributions of Members across the Chamber, I think we are all pretty much on the same page, and I hope I am paying the hon. Gentleman a compliment when I say that I could happily have read out his speech.

[Mr Robert Goodwill]

The Government share the public's concerns about the environmental issues surrounding plastics and have set out ambitious plans to address the problem. When plastic use cannot be prevented or plastics cannot be reused, they should be recycled wherever possible. However, managing plastic waste that cannot be reused or recycled is complex and depends on a number of factors, including the type of plastic, the overall environmental impacts of landfill and the efficiency of energy-from-waste facilities. As we have heard, it is not just Government-led initiatives that can push this agenda, but consumer-driven progress in places such as Sheffield and Cambridge. Indeed, in the meal I ate last night, the spinach and the strawberries were picked in the garden without any need for packaging; the potatoes were in a 25 kg paper sack from a farm less than 10 miles away, not using any plastic; and the beef was produced on the estate where we live.

Bans or restrictions on international export markets for waste, such as China's bans on typical types of paper waste and plastic, present us with a longer-term opportunity to focus on the quality of recycle and to provide and ensure there are end markets for it. The Government have therefore set out ambitious plans to address the problem of plastics. A key commitment in our 25-year environment plan is to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste within 25 years, and we want to move faster for the most problematic plastics. In our resources and waste strategy for England, published last December, we committed to work towards all plastic packaging on the UK market being recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025.

I stress that we currently have no plans to ban the use of food packaging that cannot be recycled. Most food packaging is technically recyclable, although as we have heard, the current market does not make all recycling economically viable. Our general approach is to help people and companies make the right choice and develop alternatives, rather than ban items outright. There are circumstances in which a ban is appropriate as part of a wider strategic approach: we have already banned the inclusion of plastic microbeads, and Members might be aware that we will be banning the supply of plastic drinking straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds in England from April 2020.

The European Commission recently published its single use plastics directive, which includes a ban on cups, food and beverage containers in takeaway packaging made of expanded polystyrene, and—as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) pointed out—all products made of oxo-degradable plastic. We will, of course, consider that requirement in the context of our work on eliminating unnecessary plastic waste. However, in the case of food packaging, we are of the view that alternative measures would provide strong incentives for businesses to move away from using packaging that is unrecyclable or environmentally damaging and towards more sustainable packaging. We therefore made a commitment in our resources and waste strategy to reform the current producer responsibility system as an immediate priority, in order to incentivise producers financially to take greater responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products.

Our priority is to prevent or reduce waste in the first place. The system already requires businesses to ensure that all their packaging does not exceed what is needed to make sure that their products are safe, hygienic and acceptable for both the packed product and the consumer. The regulations apply to those responsible for the packing or filling of products into packaging and those importing packed or filled packaging into the UK from elsewhere. This is a market-based system that has succeeded in ensuring that the UK has met its wider packaging recycling targets at the lowest cost to producers. The UK reported to Eurostat that 64.27% of UK packaging waste was recycled in 2018, surpassing the 55% recycling target set in the European directive.

The current system does not, however, sufficiently incentivise design for greater reuse or recyclability, and less than a tenth of the cost of managing household packaging waste is covered by producers. In February, we published a consultation setting out our proposals to reform the system. That was one of several Government consultations published on overhauling the waste system, including a consultation on introducing a deposit return scheme for drinks containers and increasing consistency in recycling collections—in that regard, we look forward to drawing lessons from the Scottish experience.

We also consulted on introducing a tax on plastic packaging containing less than 30% recycled content. The proposal is for that tax to apply to all plastic packaging manufactured in the UK and to plastic packaging imported into the UK with less than 30% recycled content. It will be charged on plastic packaging that manufacturers place on the market, and the consultation sought views on the precise tax point. Imported unfilled plastic packaging—packaging that does not yet contain goods—will be taxed when it is released on to the UK market, and unfilled plastic packaging that is exported would not be chargeable. The tax will be charged at a flat rate per tonne of packaging material. We plan to introduce that tax in 2022; in its consultation, the Treasury asked whether it should be at a flat rate of 30% or should vary for different purchasing formats, and whether the threshold should increase over time.

The proposals for reforming the packaging producer responsibility regime tie together the broader set of principles for extended producer responsibility included in our resources and waste strategy and our ambitions for the packaging sector in future. Those include the reduction of unnecessary packaging, the reduction or elimination of materials that are difficult to recycle—for example, composite products such as coffee cups, made of cardboard material with plastic applied to it—and the increased recycling of packaging waste. A key proposal is that producers fund the net cost of managing the packaging that they place on the market once it becomes waste. That creates an incentive for companies to use less packaging, as that will reduce the cost of complying with the regulations. A further proposal includes adopting approaches to incentivise producers to adopt recyclable packaging along the way.

In conclusion, I stress that the Government see the elimination of avoidable plastic waste as a priority, and we look forward to introducing further measures to make this country greener still. We are already the greenest Government ever, and we plan to build on that. I will allow a little bit of time for the hon. Member for Cambridge to respond.

5.58 pm

Daniel Zeichner: I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to this interesting and useful debate, which has been conducted in a positive and constructive spirit. The contributions from all the Front-Bench speakers were very welcome. I was particularly enthused by the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), and his passion for change, and I was very much taken by the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) and her talk of a plastic calamity or crisis.

I will conclude by returning to the petitioners. When they say:

“The British public WANTS to recycle but we can’t get away from the vast amounts of waste that poorly designed packaging creates”,

they are putting out a plea to us to get this right. When they say,

“appoint people to design alternatives”,

I am not sure who they have in mind, but if we do get it right,

“the UK will thank you!”

That is something with which we could all agree.

I will end on a slight note of difference: I do not entirely agree with the Minister that we are in exactly the same place. I suspect that in the end, the Opposition are a touch more interventionist—in fact, we are much more interventionist.

Sir George Howarth (in the Chair): Let me take the slightly unusual step of saying from the Chair that this subject, which is hugely important to the people we all represent, has been covered so well that I am hugely impressed. I do not think that a single word was wasted in any speech made by anybody, on whichever side of the House. It has been a privilege to chair the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 232684 relating to unsustainable packaging.

6 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 24 June 2019

TREASURY

ECOFIN

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):

A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) was held in Luxembourg on 14 June 2019.

ECOFIN was preceded by a meeting of the European Investment Bank (EIB) Board of Governors:

Annual EIB Board of Governors meeting

The meeting included: statements from the Chairman, President and Chairman of the Audit Committee; a governors discussion; a presentation on the annual report of the Audit Committee; and a vote for partial renewal of the Audit Committee. The UK was represented by Mark Bowman (Director General, International Finance, HM Treasury) during the EIB meeting.

Following this, EU Finance Ministers discussed the following at ECOFIN:

Early morning session

The Eurogroup President briefed the Council on the outcomes of the 13 June meeting of the Eurogroup, and the European Commission provided an update on the current economic situation in the EU.

Banking union

The Council endorsed the progress report on the banking union.

Financial transaction tax

The Council received a progress update in relation to the enhanced co-operation on financial transaction tax.

G20 follow-up

The Romanian presidency and Commission presented the main outcomes of the G20 meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, which took place on 8 to 9 June in Fukuoka, Japan.

European semester

The Council discussed a horizontal note on the draft 2019 country specific recommendations, and progress towards the Europe 2020 targets.

Stability and growth pact

The Council adopted Council decisions and recommendations on the implementation of the stability and growth pact.

Clean planet

The Council held an exchange of views on a strategic long-term vision for a climate-neutral economy.

Non-performing loans

Under any other business, the Commission provided an update on the implementation of the action plan to tackle non-performing loans in Europe.

[HCWS1648]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

EU Environment Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):

The next EU Environment Council will take place on 26 June, in Luxembourg. I will be attending to represent the UK.

On environment items, the main legislative focus will be a general approach on the regulation on water-reuse. In addition, there will also be an exchange of views on the environment implementation review (EIR), as well as the adoption of Council conclusions on a sustainable EU chemicals policy.

Any other business (AOB) will include information from the Commission and the presidency on four items:

Clean Planet for all: Strategic long-term vision for a climate neutral economy (information from the presidency);

A discussion on current legislative proposals (information from the presidency):

A discussion on regulation on LIFE; and

A discussion on shipping monitoring, reporting and verification.

Reports on main recent international meetings (information from the presidency and the Commission):

Triple conference of the parties to the Basel (COP 14), Rotterdam (COP 9) and Stockholm (COP 9) conventions (Geneva, 29 April-10 May 2019); and

Fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-4) (Nairobi, 11-15 March 2019).

Communication on the draft integrated national energy and climate plans (presentation by the Commission).

There are currently five member state led AOBs:

Workshop on the “Future environment action programme” (information from the Austrian delegation);

Possible European measures to support clean mobility and in particular, electromobility (information from the Bulgarian delegation);

Conference on carbon pricing and aviation taxes (information from the Netherlands delegation);

G7 Environment Ministers’ meeting (information from the French delegation); and

Work programme of the incoming presidency (information from the Finnish delegation).

[HCWS1646]

TRANSPORT

High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport

(Ms Nusrat Ghani): I am today publishing the statement of reasons Command Paper for the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill. The Command Paper is titled the “Government overview of the case for HS2 Phase 2a and its environmental impacts”. This is required by parliamentary Standing Order 224A to assist the House during the Third Reading of the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill. This document summarises the work that has already been done to assess, control and mitigate the environmental impacts

of HS2 Phase 2a, and explains why the Government continue to take the view that the HS2 Phase 2a project is worthy of their support.

Copies of the statement of reasons will be made available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-06-24/HCWS1647/>.

[HCWS1647]

Petition

Monday 24 June 2019

OBSERVATIONS

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Non-stun slaughter

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that animals killed by having their throats cut while fully conscious is unacceptable; further that animals should not be made to suffer such profound trauma in the name of religion; further that this method of slaughter runs counter to any belief in compassion and mercy; further that animals should be stunned before they are slaughtered; further that, Shechita slaughter does not allow animals to be stunned before they are slaughtered; further that, when the Holy Prophet was alive, modern stunning methods did not exist; further that the Food Research Institute states that killing an animal before it is bled out by high voltage electrical stunning does not affect the amount of blood from the carcass; and further that this petition relates to e-petition 131591.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons debate non-stun slaughter.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented to the House but not read on the Floor, Official Report, 22 May 2019; Vol. 660, c. 8P.*]

[P002456]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley):

The Government encourage the highest standards of animal welfare and would prefer all animals to be stunned before slaughter, but is committed to respecting the rights of Jews and Muslims to eat meat prepared in accordance with their beliefs.

The European Council Regulation 1099/2009, on the protection of animals at the time of killing, sets out the main requirements for slaughter including a requirement that all animals are stunned by a permitted method before slaughter. The EU regulation includes a derogation from stunning for religious slaughter and also allows individual member states to impose stricter national rules for religious slaughter.

In England, the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 (WATOK) enforce the EU requirements and contain stricter national rules that apply when animals are slaughtered by either the Jewish or Muslim method.

National regulations on religious slaughter have a long history. Religious slaughter was first debated in Parliament in 1875. The Slaughter of Animals Act 1933 introduced a legal requirement for stunning of animals prior to slaughter, and contained an exemption where animals were slaughtered for specific religious communities. Over the years, the rules governing religious slaughter have developed to provide additional protection for animals slaughtered in accordance with religious rites and have maintained the long standing exception for Jews and Muslims to eat meat prepared in accordance with their religious beliefs.

Animal welfare requirements are monitored and enforced by official veterinarians of the food standards agency to ensure that animals are spared unnecessary pain, suffering or distress during the slaughter process.

The Government are aware that there is public concern about meat from animals being slaughtered in accordance with religious beliefs being sold to consumers who do not require their meat to be prepared in this way and that there are calls for such meat to be labelled. The Government believe that consumers should have the necessary information available to them to make an informed choice about their food. This is an issue the Government are considering in the context of the UK leaving the EU.

The Government are currently engaging with religious communities and other stakeholders on issues around religious slaughter, including consumer transparency.

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 24 June 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
EDUCATION	447	EDUCATION—continued	
Apprenticeship Levy	458	SATs: Pressure on Students.....	459
Child Health: Healthy and Active Living	464	School Budgets	451
Early Literacy: Phonics	453	School Places	454
Free Childcare.....	449	School Standards	461
National Funding Formula	463	Sixth-Form Students: Funding.....	457
OECD Programme for International Student Assessment	455	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.....	463
Post-18 Education and Funding Review	462	Topical Questions	465
		UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	447

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Monday 24 June 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	22WS	TREASURY	21WS
EU Environment Council	22WS	ECOFIN.....	21WS
TRANSPORT	22WS		
High Speed Rail (West Midlands to Crewe) Bill...	22WS		

PETITION

Monday 24 June 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	3P
Non-stun slaughter	3P

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Monday 1 July 2019**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Monday 24 June 2019

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 447] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Education

European Council [Col. 471]
Statement—(The Prime Minister)

Kew Gardens (Leases) (No. 3) Bill [Lords] [Col. 493]
Motion for Second Reading—(David Rutley)—agreed to
Programme motion (No. 3)—(Rebecca Harris)—agreed to

Climate Change [Col. 506]
Motion—(Chris Skidmore)—agreed to

Adjournment (Summer) [Col. 531]
Motion—(Matt Warman)—on a Division, agreed to

Petition [Col. 533]

Smart Cities [Col. 534]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Recall of MPs Act 2015: Member for Brecon and Radnorshire [Col. 545]

Westminster Hall
Unsustainable Packaging [Col. 207WH]
E-petition debate

Written Statements [Col. 21WS]

Petition [Col. 3P]
Observations

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
