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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 10 July 2019

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

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

Scottish Local Authorities: Communication with UK Government

1. **Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that communication between the UK Government and Scottish local authorities is maintained. [911848]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): We continue to work collaboratively with local authorities in Scotland. For example, the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city and region deal will deliver £45.1 million of UK Government investment to the region, demonstrating effective working between Governments, local authorities and stakeholders.

Stephen Kerr: I thank the Minister for that reply and may I say how proud I was to stand up for the principle of devolution yesterday in this House? I know that the people of Stirling want their Governments to work together at all levels. Will the Minister tell us what meetings he and his officials may have planned with COSLA—the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—so that the voice of Scotland's local authorities can be heard in Whitehall?

Kevin Foster: My ministerial colleagues will continue to work with all levels of government in Scotland. I am certainly very happy, in my role as Minister for the constitution, to meet COSLA to discuss how much further we can take that level of co-operation.

Cyber-security

2. **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to help improve the cyber-security of (a) public and (b) private sector organisations. [911849]

7. **Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Government are taking to help ensure the security of (a) UK Government assets and (b) critical national infrastructure from cyber-attacks. [911854]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): The National Cyber Security Centre is providing advice and practical guidance on how to improve standards of cyber-security to organisations in both the public and private sectors.

Mr Sharma: The Minister will know that the cyber-defence of the Government and industry is stronger when the best skills from around the country are deployed. With that in mind, what is he doing to encourage women and those from a black and minority ethnic background in the UK to develop their mathematical and IT skills from an early age, and to enter the cyber-security field, to protect our country and businesses?

Mr Lidington: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. We do need to improve our cyber-skills capacity. I am very pleased that more than 55,000 young men and women have now taken part in the CyberFirst and Cyber Discovery schemes that the NCSC helps to organise, but he is right that we need to make a particular effort with under-represented groups, including bright young men and women from our ethnic minority communities.

Stephen Doughty: Given the shocking leaks we have seen from the National Security Council and of diplomatic telegrams, can the Minister for the Cabinet Office give some reassurance to our civil servants on the cyber-security of crucial confidential documents and their ability not to be compromised by foreign states or insider jobs?

Mr Lidington: The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to comment on individual cases, but he is right about the need both for the highest possible levels of technical cyber-security in protecting those systems, and for the highest standards of discipline and respect for the confidentiality of advice on the part of everybody who has access to such material.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): Cyber-security is one of the biggest threats facing not only the Government, but our major and smaller companies. What will my right hon. Friend do to ensure that the private sector has access to the ability of state services?

Mr Lidington: The great strength of the NCSC is that it makes available the expertise developed by our agencies, in particular GCHQ, in a way that permits open access by private sector companies and third sector organisations. I held a roundtable in recent months with directors of FTSE 350 companies to highlight concerns and challenges, and to learn from their experience. There is a range of materials targeted particularly at small and medium-sized enterprises.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What assessment have the Government made on whether the leaking of Kim Darroch's statements was the result of a cyber-attack by a foreign Government?

Mr Lidington: I hope my right hon. Friend will understand that I cannot make any comment about an inquiry that is in progress. I will say, however, that I hope the person or persons responsible will be found out and that they will be subjected to all appropriate disciplinary and, if necessary, legal sanction.

Strengthening the Union

3. **Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to strengthen the Union.

[911850]

11. **Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to strengthen the Union.

[911860]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): Our commitment to continued work to strengthen the Union can be seen in practice through such initiatives as scrapping the Severn tolls, delivering city deals across Scotland and the entire United Kingdom, and investing in digital connectivity in Northern Ireland.

Giles Watling: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the long-standing and hugely successful Union, which has seen the Welsh, Scottish, Irish and English standing shoulder to shoulder and taking on the world for generations, should not be trashed by those in other regions of this great country who seek to pursue their own populist and secessionist ends? We are stronger together, are we not?

Mr Lidington: Every part of the United Kingdom gains from the membership of each other member nation of the United Kingdom. It is important that those in Government now and those who will be in Government in the future work for an outcome that respects the devolution settlement and is confident about the United Kingdom and the great strength that that collective endeavour brings.

Bill Grant: A number of my constituents have expressed concern that Scottish National party colleagues will use our departure from the European Union to justify their agenda of breaking the country apart. Can my right hon. Friend assure this House that everything is being done to anticipate potential devolution consequences of Brexit, in order that the SNP cannot exploit it to shore up its own narrow agenda of breaking up the United Kingdom?

Mr Lidington: There is no doubt that the success of the SNP agenda of separation would do enormous damage to businesses and living standards in Scotland. I can reassure my hon. Friend that there has been good co-operation on frameworks to ensure that the United Kingdom single market continues to function after we leave the European Union, but also that it is in the interest of every part of the United Kingdom that we leave the EU in an orderly fashion, in a way that protects jobs, living standards and investment in our country.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Regional Ministers right across England—not only in areas such as that covered by the northern powerhouse—were a successful initiative before 2010 and could be introduced virtually immediately. Will the Minister look at that idea, perhaps supplemented by regional Select Committees in the House of Commons?

Mr Lidington: I am always happy to look at evidence that is brought forward on how we can improve our arrangements further. As I have said before, both the devolved nations and individual areas within each of the four nations of the United Kingdom have a lot to contribute.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I have a lot of time for the right hon. Gentleman, but these answers are a disgrace. While he is giving us these platitudes, both Tory leadership contenders are willing to sell the rest of the country down by prioritising a no-deal Brexit over the rest of the Union. Will the Minister now give us the assurance that he has previously given, that no deal will cause potentially fatal damage to the Union and that he will fight against it?

Mr Lidington: I have been very clear in a number of public statements that I believe that a disorderly no-deal exit from the European Union would not only cause significant economic harm in all parts of this country, but place further strain on the Union. I believe it is in the interest of everybody in every party in this House and in every part of the UK that we deliver on the referendum result of 2016, but do so in an orderly fashion that protects jobs, investment and living standards.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): My right hon. Friend told *The Times* last week that he feared that what he called “English indifference”, if I recall correctly, was something of a threat to the Union. The reports that my Committee has produced about devolution and Brexit have called, with the support of the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments, for much more concrete machinery to exist between the Government of the United Kingdom and the devolved Governments, and for there to be inter-parliamentary machinery. I must say that I have found the response of the Government to be slow and somewhat indifferent. I appreciate that he is battling on many fronts at the moment, but can he speed up his enthusiasm for dealing with these issues?

Mr Speaker: And in the process, we will try to ensure that the hon. Gentleman’s Committee’s reports become bestsellers. That is the ambition.

Mr Lidington: Much of the work of the UK and devolved Governments in the last year and a half has involved making practical arrangements for Brexit through the completion of work on the UK frameworks on the various matters that will come back from Brussels and intersect with devolved competence. I would have hoped that my hon. Friend, given his views on Brexit, would welcome that. It is important that we and the next Government press forward with work on the intergovernmental review. I would welcome efforts by this Parliament to work more closely with devolved Parliaments in the future.

Devolution

4. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the merits of devolution over the last 20 years.

[911851]

8. **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the merits of devolution over the last 20 years.

[911855]

10. Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the merits of devolution over the last 20 years. [911858]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): I have recently participated in events to celebrate 20 years of devolution, which has transformed the constitutional landscape of the United Kingdom. Devolution has successfully brought decision making on key public services closer to the people who use them while keeping the benefits that arise from the strength of our United Kingdom.

Patrick Grady: It is nice to hear the Minister say it like he means it. The Scottish Government are launching an innovative, engaging and participatory programme of citizens' assemblies to look at what direction the devolution settlement in Scotland might go in. By contrast, this Government have appointed Lord Dunlop, an unelected peer, to review devolution. Does that not tell us everything we need to know about this Government's attitude to devolution? They never really wanted it in the first place.

Kevin Foster: Dearie me! The SNP need to stop misrepresenting the review. A key part of its terms of reference states that it will

"need to respect and support the current devolution settlement".

It is about how the UK Government can work better with the devolved Assemblies and Governments. The SNP should be welcoming the review, instead of trying to foster yet another false grievance.

David Linden: The Scottish and Welsh Governments recently wrote to the Minister expressing disappointment that 15 months on a review about intergovernmental relations has stalled owing to the Government's unwillingness to make reforms. Will the Minister commit to addressing in detail each of the points in that letter, including the one on a strengthened dispute resolution process?

Kevin Foster: Constructive discussions continue on the intergovernmental review and its structure, although it has been slightly hamstrung by the lack of a Government in Northern Ireland. We hope that that can be resolved in the near future. We will of course consider all submissions with respect, because ultimately we all need to agree the way forward.

Alison Thewliss: Health and justice are both devolved areas, but the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is not. Will the Minister help to remove the blockage in the Home Office, which is preventing the Scottish Government from opening a drug consumption room? The drug death figure to be released next week is set to be over 1,000 for last year.

Kevin Foster: I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will be visiting to look at this issue. As we have discussed in other areas of common frameworks, there will clearly need to be some consistency on these types of issues, as crime does not respect political boundaries or borders.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): I wish the Front Bench all the best in the coming reshuffle. We will be watching their futures and careers with interest. In

recalling Labour's achievement in introducing devolution, we are reminded that our country is still very over-centralised, power being concentrated in the hands of a tiny elite governing at the expense of the rest. For example, in the north and south-west alone, more than 1 million children are now living in poverty. If power was truly devolved, that situation would not arise. Basic social justice requires us to recast the constitutional contours of the British state. When will the Government finally abandon their top-down, old-fashioned ways and help to build a modern decentralised state based on a partnership with the nations and regions that reflects our diversity, instead of suppressing it, as they do now?

Kevin Foster: I do not recognise the shadow Minister's description, not least given that we have been driving forward devolution settlements and devolving power to combined authorities in England, as well as what we have seen happen in devolution in the nations. Only this week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales met those in the potential great western powerhouse to see how that could be taken forward. I find it ironic, however, to be lectured on control from the centre by a party whose leader wants to take control of the entire economy from Whitehall.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): We understand that the Dunlop review is to look at the organisation of Departments and whether they are optimised for devolution. Do the Government have any plans or intention to review policy with regard to the constitution that underpins the Union and to the devolution settlement in particular?

Kevin Foster: As I said a few moments ago, the review will need to take into account and support the current devolution settlement.

I wish that, in my assessment of devolution, I could have said that it had produced better education standards in Scotland. In fact, however, Scottish schools have fallen in international rankings, and a smaller percentage of Scotland's most deprived children go to university than in any other part of the United Kingdom. It is not devolution that is at fault; it is the Scottish National party.

Innovative Technologies: Public Services

5. Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): What progress the Government have made on using innovative technologies to deliver public services. [911852]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden): Last month I launched the Government's technology innovation strategy, which sets out how we will approach the use of emergent technologies in future. I also launched an artificial intelligence guide which will help Departments to build on areas in which artificial intelligence is already being used effectively across Government—for example, to improve MOT inspections and prison safety.

Gillian Keegan: Chichester Careline is the only telecare monitoring centre in West Sussex. It operates Mindme, a service that GPS-tracks vulnerable people, usually those with dementia, so that families, friends, carers and Careline staff can locate them 24/7. It has saved

lives, and countless hours of worry. Will the Minister look into how innovative technology of that kind can be used across Government to support the most vulnerable in our society?

Oliver Dowden: It is very important to highlight that sort of work. It is just another example of the impact that innovative technology can have in improving people's lives. The purpose of the GovTech Catalyst challenge is to explore the use of technologies for adult social care, and the Geospatial Commission is helping the Government and the private sector to make better use of GPS data.

Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): Any innovative technology is welcome if it is applied appropriately, but will the Minister ensure that when such systems are being considered, account will be taken of whether or not they make a service less personal than it is already?

Oliver Dowden: Experience of innovative technology suggests that it can make services more personalised and more tailored to individual circumstances. However, it is important for us to continue to make services accessible to everyone, which is why they will always be available in a non-digital format as well.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that while our country has always been at the forefront of innovation, to allow businesses to thrive and flourish we need a sound and successful economy, which would then result in innovative public services?

Oliver Dowden: As ever, my right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. It is only because we have a strong economy that we are able to invest in innovative technologies, which is why we have such a great track record.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Let us have a single-sentence inquiry from the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron).

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Will the Secretary of State oversee the innovative technology in radiotherapy that will be needed to meet the NHS long-term plan to diagnose more patients earlier?

Mr Speaker: Excellent.

Oliver Dowden: I regret to say that I am not a Secretary of State; I am but a junior Minister. However, I will be looking into the matter that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I am working closely with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health examining precisely those issues, and the Government have set up NHSX, which oversees the use of innovative technology for that very purpose.

Devolution

6. **Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con):** What steps his Department has taken to mark 20 years of devolution in Scotland. [911853]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): Speaking at the Law Society of Scotland's conference entitled "20 years of devolution and Scotland's parliament", my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster set out the Government's clear vision of a union of strong devolved Parliaments within a strong United Kingdom, and of Scotland's two levels of government working together to deliver for its citizens.

Douglas Ross: Devolution means that Scotland's two Governments can work together to deliver more, and city and growth deals are an example of that. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will visit Moray tomorrow, and we are eagerly awaiting news of the Moray growth deal. Will the Minister urge him to use his visit as an opportunity to confirm the UK's commitment to a deal that will transform our area?

Kevin Foster: As we mark 20 years of devolution, the UK Government are committing more than £1.36 billion to support economic development in Scotland through city and growth deals. All Scotland's seven major cities now have deals, and heads of terms are expected to be agreed for Moray very soon, thanks to my hon. Friend's tireless campaigning.

Contaminated Blood Inquiry

9. **Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab):** What recent progress he has made on the NHS contaminated blood inquiry. [911857]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): I am pleased that the inquiry is now hearing evidence. Sir Brian Langstaff is right to put those who have been infected, and affected, at the heart of his inquiry, and I am glad that their voices are being heard. They have been waiting for too long.

Diana Johnson: The Minister is absolutely right, but with one victim dying every 96 hours and compensation still not being paid, I wrote to the Prime Minister, along with seven Opposition party leaders, to ask for compensation to be paid now. The Prime Minister has refused. I then wrote to the two Conservative party leadership candidates on 21 June, because they are making huge spending commitments, but I have not had the courtesy of a response. Perhaps the Minister could help me with that.

Mr Lidington: I am happy to try to prompt a response to the hon. Lady's letter. She will know that the Department of Health and Social Care has announced a major uplift in the financial support available to beneficiaries of the infected blood scheme in England, and talks are now going on with the devolved Governments about trying to get a UK-wide agreement. Questions of legal liability fall therefore to compensation and are expressly a matter for the independent inquiry.¹

Mr Speaker: The Minister's power and charm will achieve the desired effect, I have no doubt.

1. [Official Report, 22 July 2019, Vol. 663, c. 12MC.]

Topical Questions

T1. [911862] **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): Last week the Government responded to Lord Holmes's independent review of access to public appointments for disabled people. We have accepted in principle all of Lord Holmes's recommendations and will use them to update our diversity action plan, which is aimed at increasing the number of people from under-represented groups on the boards of public bodies right across the United Kingdom.

Scott Mann: Cornish minority status was granted in 2014. The Minister will be aware that the Office for National Statistics is resisting giving Cornish people the ability to recognise as Cornish on the census. The six Cornish MPs will be submitting an amendment to the census Bill. Will the Minister apply pressure on the ONS to ensure that Cornish people can recognise as Cornish?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): I recognise the passion with which Cornwall's champions in this House put the county's case, but the Government will be guided by the ONS's recommendations to Government and Parliament regarding the demand for particular questions in the next census.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): This morning's Committee on Climate Change report should make stark reading for the Cabinet Office, which has a responsibility to co-ordinate the cross-governmental response to climate change. What steps is the Department taking to meet the climate change demands on the country?

Mr Lidington: As the hon. Lady knows, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy leads within Government on climate change matters, but the Government have a good record of delivery, having overseen a cut in emissions of more than 42% since 1990 and with the United Kingdom being the first member of the G7 to sign up to a legally binding net zero target.

T5. [911866] **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): We shall be leaving the European Union on 31 October. May I therefore ask the Constitution Minister if he will update the guidance on the flying of flags so that the European Union emblem no longer takes precedence over the national flags of Canada, America, Australia and New Zealand?

The Minister without Portfolio (Brandon Lewis): My hon. Friend asks a fair question, and I will update the House: the Government encourage Departments and other institutions to fly the Union flag on designated days, but no others. The flying of flags is deregulated outside planning controls, and as we will be leaving the European Union on 31 October I share what I suspect is

my hon. Friend's view: that it is unlikely that we will be seeing it flying anywhere, particularly with enthusiasm, after then.

T2. [911863] **Anna McMorris** (Cardiff North) (Lab): The Committee on Climate Change today sent a stark warning to Government over their abject failure to take urgent action and cut emissions fast enough. As Greenpeace said, the fire alarm has been sounded, but the Government have gone back to sleep. So when will the Government get on, show that they are serious about this, and take urgent action across every single Department on this matter?

Mr Lidington: I just wish that the Labour party had been less grudging in its response to the net zero target, which was a historic step by the Government, endorsing explicitly a recommendation from the independent Committee on Climate Change. I was in south Wales just over a week ago, and I talked there to businesses and scientists who are working at the sharp end to deliver emissions reduction technologies that will make a real difference. We should all, regardless of our politics, get behind that work, welcome the achievements we have made so far and commit ourselves to future change too.

T7. [911869] **Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Will the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster explain what plans the Government have to increase support for small and medium-sized enterprises through Government procurement?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden): As my hon. Friend knows, small businesses are the backbone of our economy and we are determined to level the playing field so that they can win Government contracts. That is why, for example, we have introduced tough new prompt payment requirements and simplified the procurement process, and through our digital marketplace we have spent £2.5 billion, with £1.28 in every £3 going to SMEs.

T3. [911864] **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): According to the recent Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission report on elitist Britain, there has been a 4% increase in privately educated permanent secretaries. With the civil service already massively unrepresentative of society, does the Minister agree that that figure should be going down rather than up?

Mr Lidington: I think the most important thing is that we encourage as many people as possible from the most diverse backgrounds as possible to enter the civil service and that we mentor them through, but at the end of the day it should be ability to do the job that wins out. Frankly, that matters more to the public interest than which school somebody's parents sent them to.

Mr Speaker: One sentence. Michael Fabricant.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): The 5G testbed in the west midlands is working with the car industry in Coventry and with the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham. Will my right hon. Friend commend the work of the Mayor of the West Midlands, who brought the 5G testbed there, and visit the system?

Mr Lidington: I am delighted to congratulate Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands, on that initiative. It is a telling example of the importance of business and academic professionals working closely together, and I would be delighted to accept my hon. Friend's invitation.

T4. [911865] 2002 **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): The Department's response to the cross-party Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport report on electoral reform does not display the level of urgency required. Will the Minister convene an urgent cross-party meeting to discuss the reform of electoral law?

Kevin Foster: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be delighted to hear that I was in the other place only last week, meeting Members there on a cross-party basis to discuss electoral funding issues. We have already announced a consultation paper on this, and we will look to achieve what broad cross-party consensus we can.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): On the subject of strengthening the Union, does my hon. Friend share my determination to deliver Brexit and provide a new era of sovereignty and a sea of opportunity for fishermen across Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland?

Kevin Foster: We look forward to the powers that will be coming back from Brussels and going to Scotland's Parliament. Of course, there is one party that opposes that and wants those powers to stay away from the devolved level of government, and that is the Scottish National party.

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, and never forgotten: Laura Smith.

T6. [911868] **Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Can the Minister assure the House that the proportion of businesses certified for the Government's cyber essentials standard is higher than the dismal 4% reported in 2018?

Mr Lidington: I am happy to write to the hon. Lady with the latest figures as we have them, but I can assure her that the work that has been put in place on achieving higher Government cyber-security standards and on outreach to the private and public sectors is having a demonstrable impact on improving our resilience.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked— **Engagements**

Q1. [911832] **Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 10 July.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): This morning I have spoken to Sir Kim Darroch. I have told him that it is a matter of great regret that he has felt it necessary to leave his position as ambassador in Washington. The whole Cabinet rightly gave its full support to Sir Kim on Tuesday. Sir Kim has given a lifetime of service to the United Kingdom, and we owe him an enormous debt of gratitude. Good government depends on public servants being able to give full and frank advice, and I

want all our public servants to have the confidence to be able to do that. I hope that the House will reflect on the importance of defending our values and principles, particularly when they are under pressure.

The whole House will want to join me in sending our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Tammy Minshall, the student paramedic who was killed in a traffic accident last week while on duty. This is a reminder of the members of all our emergency services who risk their lives each day on our behalf.

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

Alex Sobel: First, I associate myself with the comments regarding the tragic accident last week.

I am pleased to see the Prime Minister is wearing green. I hope it is not merely a greenwash, as I welcome the Government legislating for net zero by 2050. Before they did that, when the target was weaker, the Committee on Climate Change had already reported that they would miss their target, and today it says that the "policy ambition and implementation now fall well short of what is required".

Targets are helpful, but what we need is policies that actually deliver. Clearly the Prime Minister wants to leave a climate legacy, so will she bring forward the ban on diesel and petrol cars from 2040 to 2030 or sooner, and when will she end her Government's opposition to cheap onshore wind power?

The Prime Minister: In fact, we have an excellent record on dealing with climate change as a Government. We outperformed on our first and second carbon budgets, from 2008 to 2017; we are on track to meet the third, and the latest projections suggest that we are on track to deliver more than 90% of our required performance for the fourth and fifth carbon budgets; and we are the first major economy to legislate for net zero emissions by 2050. The UK is leading the world on climate change; I want other countries to follow our example.

Q6. [911837] **Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): North Staffordshire used to have one of the most extensive rail networks in the world, but now people in Stoke-on-Trent often have to rely on their cars. Will the Prime Minister join me in my petition to reopen Meir station in my constituency, as the next step to improving our local transport?

The Prime Minister: I know my hon. Friend has been campaigning on this matter for some time and has met Ministers to discuss it. I understand that the area is about to benefit from refurbished modern trains on the Crewe to Derby line from December this year, as part of the new east midlands rail franchise. The Department for Transport will have heard my hon. Friend's call to reopen the station at Meir, and I know that he will continue to campaign on behalf of all his constituents.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I too regret the resignation of Sir Kim Darroch. I think the comments made about him are beyond unfair and wrong. He has given honourable and good service, and he should be thanked for it. The whole House should join together in deeply regretting his feeling that he has to resign.

I join the Prime Minister in passing condolences to the family of Tammy Minshall, who died providing emergency services to our people.

Many people welcomed the powerful points the Prime Minister made when she was first appointed about burning injustices in Britain. Does she agree that access to justice is vital in order to tackle burning injustices?

The Prime Minister: There are many burning injustices and they can be tackled in a variety of ways. That is the action I have taken not just as Prime Minister but as Home Secretary. I will give the right hon. Gentleman one example: the race disparity audit, which shines a light on inequality in public services, is enabling us to put into place action that helps to ensure that people across this country, whatever their background, have access to the public services they need.

Jeremy Corbyn: This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Legal Aid and Advice Act 1949. That Act, introduced by the post-war Labour Government, gave all people access to justice, not just the rich, and was an essential pillar of a welfare state and a decent society. The Tory-Lib Dem coalition slashed legal aid in 2013 and the results are clearly very unfair. The number of law centres and other not-for-profit legal aid providers has more than halved, and there are now legal aid deserts across the country. Does the Prime Minister think that has helped or hindered the fight against burning injustices?

The Prime Minister: The point I was making to the right hon. Gentleman, which he seems to fail to recognise, is that the whole question of burning injustice is not about just access to the legal system—[*Interruption.*] It is all very well Opposition Members shouting about this. If the Labour party really cared about burning injustices, they would have done a darned sight more when they were in power to deal with them.

Jeremy Corbyn: Some people have very short memories; the Tory-Lib Dem coalition cut legal aid but also brought in fees for employment tribunals. The then Minister for employment relations, the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson), piloted that through the House. Since that time, my union, Unison, took the Government to court and won, and, as a result, employment tribunal fees were cancelled. The cuts to legal aid affect people such as Marcus, a 71-year-old on pension credit, a leaseholder who is threatened with being evicted. He says:

“I’ve paid taxes and national insurance all my life. How is it right that when I’m being bullied and threatened with homelessness, the state won’t protect me?”

He goes on to say:

“I’ve been working to 2 am every night for the past six months collecting evidence....I’ve got no idea if I’ve prepared my evidence correctly”.

Doesn’t Marcus, trying to save his own home, deserve legal aid, in order to get proper representation in a court and be fairly heard?

The Prime Minister: Obviously I recognise the concerns that Marcus has about taking his case, but the right hon. Gentleman might reflect on the fact that a quarter of the Ministry of Justice’s budget is spent on legal aid.

We spent £1.6 billion on legal aid last year. We are committing to ensuring that people can access the help they need into the future, but that is only one part of the picture. We have published a plan for legal support, to maintain and improve access to support for those in need, and we are conducting a fundamental review of criminal legal aid fee schemes, which will consider criminal legal aid throughout the life cycle of a criminal case. So there are aspects of this issue that we are indeed looking at, but it is important that we ensure that we are careful with the provisions we make for legal aid, and as I say, a quarter of the MOJ budget is spent on legal aid.

Jeremy Corbyn: Just so that everyone is aware of this, Labour is committed to restoring legal aid funding for family law, housing, benefit appeals, judicial review preparation and inquests, and real action on immigration cases. And, as we announced yesterday, we will end the leasehold scandal.

The Department for Work and Pensions is failing disabled people. The MOJ has spent tens of millions of pounds each year defending appeals, over two thirds of which were won by the claimants. Rather than spending millions defending incorrect and often immoral decisions, would that money not have been better used increasing poverty-level benefits and providing legal aid to disabled people wrongly denied their basic dignity?

The Prime Minister: I am not going to take any lectures from the right hon. Gentleman on what this Government have done for disabled people. We are committed to tackling the injustices facing disabled people, so that everyone can go as far their talents will take them. Our spending on support for disabled people and people with health conditions is at a record high. We are seeing many more people—over 900,000 more disabled people—in work as a result of what this Government have done. If he is really interested in tackling injustices, let me tell him that the biggest injustice he should tackle is in his own Labour party—he should deal with antisemitism.

Jeremy Corbyn: My party is totally committed to eliminating racism in any form and antisemitism in any form. While the Prime Minister is about the lecturing, how about the investigation into Islamophobia in her party? [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Bowie, you are as noisy as your illustrious late namesake, David Bowie, but, sadly, nothing like as melodic, my dear chap.

Jeremy Corbyn: This is one lecture the Prime Minister might not want to take from me, but she might care to listen to what the United Nations said when it condemned the UK Government for their “grave” and “systematic violations” of the rights of disabled people. The Windrush scandal has resulted in the Government having to allocate £200 million in compensation to people wrongly deported from this country and denied services, with their lives totally pulled apart. These are people who have given their life to this country and our services. Does she think that scandal would have happened if legal aid had not been slashed by the Government and so many of those people had not been denied any representation in court?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman really needs to think rather more carefully about his arguments. Let us look at the issue of people of the Windrush generation. I have apologised for what happened to people of the Windrush generation. I have been very clear that they are British, they are here and they have a right to be here, and that these things should not have happened. We have apologised for the mistakes that have been made.

The right hon. Gentleman raises issues relating to people who were incorrectly deported. The initial historical review looked at around 11,800 detentions and removals and identified 18 people who were most likely to have been wrongly deported or removed. Of those, six were removed or detained under the last Labour Government.

The way the right hon. Gentleman talks, we would think he was a man of principle, but what do we actually see from him? Labour policy is to ban non-disclosure agreements, but his staff have to sign them. He was an anti-racist; now he ignores antisemitism. He has been a Eurosceptic all his life; now he backs remain. He is truly living up to the words of Marx: “Those are my principles, and if you don’t like them, well, I have others”—

Jeremy Corbyn *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I know the right hon. Gentleman is keen to get to the Dispatch Box when the name Marx is mentioned. I was merely going to point out to him that those were the words not of Karl but of Groucho.

Jeremy Corbyn: Coming from the Prime Minister who created the hostile environment that brought about the Windrush scandal, who ordered “Go home” vans to drive around London, who refuses to acknowledge Islamophobia in her own party, and whose party consorts with racists and antisemites in the European Parliament and sucks up to those Governments across Europe, we do not need those kinds of lectures.

One legal aid firm said:

“We see people more desperate and in more extreme need than they were five years ago, and there is nowhere to send them. Those people are invisible to the system.”

That is a denial of people’s basic rights. The United Nations says that legal aid cuts have

“overwhelmingly affected the poor and people with disabilities”.

Without equal access to justice, there is no justice. Today, in modern Britain, millions are denied justice because they do not have the money. Isn’t that a disgrace? Isn’t that a burning injustice?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman may do his best to ignore the antisemitism in his party, but I think—[HON. MEMBERS: “Answer the question!”] I think he should listen to the words of the former Labour party general secretary, the noble Lord Triesman, who said:

“We may one day be the party of anti-racism once again but it certainly isn’t today.”

The right hon. Gentleman has asked questions about injustice; let me tell him about an injustice. It is an injustice when you force people who are working hard day and night to earn an income for their family to pay more taxes because of a Labour party economic policy

in government that led to the destruction of our economy. What do we see from the Labour party? You earn more; they want you to pay more tax. You buy a home; they want you to pay more tax. You want to leave something to your children; they want you to pay more tax—Labour’s £9 billion family tax. Labour used to have a slogan of “Education, education, education”; now, it is just “Tax, tax, tax. Injustice, injustice, injustice.”

Q8. [911839] **Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): I am a Unionist with every fibre of my being, which is why I was so aghast to hear Nicola Sturgeon’s colleagues talking about their wish to railroad through an independence referendum without a section 30 order—at a time when public services in Scotland are mismanaged and need that desperate resource, and with an economy that has stagnated. They are continually pursuing policies that cut off the circulation of our United Kingdom at Berwick, and not because they are in the interests of Scotland. Will the Prime Minister join me in condemning this illegal referendum approach and push the SNP to prioritise the areas that are actually in the interests of the people of Scotland?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The SNP promised people in Scotland in 2014 that the independence referendum was a once-in-a-generation vote. Now it is laying the foundation for another vote in just 18 months’ time. SNP Members often claim—they stand up and claim it here in this House—that Scotland is being ignored. It is being ignored by an SNP Government, obsessed with another referendum against the wishes of a clear majority of Scots. I agree with my hon. Friend that people in Scotland want a Scottish Government who focus on improving their schools, improving their health service and improving their economy—not one obsessed by separation.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I must say, every time the Prime Minister speaks in Scotland, our vote goes up.

Today is Srebrenica Memorial Day. I trust that everyone in this House will want to recognise the unbelievable sacrifice that so many faced. Yesterday, I met some of the survivors of genocide. We must do all we can to make sure that we call out the genocide-deniers, and that we learn the lessons from man’s inhumanity to man that we witnessed in the continent of Europe. Never again should that happen in Europe, or anywhere else.

May I join the Prime Minister in her words to Kim Darroch? It is a pity that the former Foreign Secretary, the candidate for leadership of the Tory party, did not stand up for our leading diplomat in the United States yesterday.

I also pay tribute to Winnie Ewing, who has her 90th birthday today. She is the only parliamentarian to sit in this House, in the Scottish Parliament and in the European Parliament. We remember the words of Winnie:

“Stop the world, Scotland wants to get on.”

Mark Carney has said that the UK economy does not appear to be growing. Danny Blanchflower, one of the few to predict the financial crisis in 2008, has said:

“The early evidence suggests the UK is already in a recession.”

The dark clouds of Brexit are with us. Will the Prime Minister continue to ignore all the warning signs of recession?

The Prime Minister: First, in relation to Srebrenica, I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Every time we see a massacre of this sort, we hope that humanity will learn from it. Sadly, all too often we see that that is not the case. I was at the Western Balkans summit last Friday in Poland, working with the countries of the western Balkans, encouraging them and working with them to find peaceful ways of working together so that we can ensure that those countries see political stability and prosperity for their people in the future.

The right hon. Gentleman then talked about the state of the UK economy. I am very pleased to see that we actually have the best record in the G7 in terms of growth. We have the longest period of growth of any of the countries in the G7. We also have record numbers of people in employment, a record low in unemployment, and investment in our economy. This is an economy that is doing well, but it could really take off, and it would have done if the right hon. Gentleman had actually voted for Brexit and voted for the deal that we put to this House.

Ian Blackford: Perhaps we should look at the facts: we have record food bank use; Ernst and Young tells us that the Brexit bill so far for financial services companies alone is as much as £4 billion; foreign investment projects into the UK have dropped 14%, the lowest level in six years; car production fell 15.5% in May, the 12th straight month of decline; UK retail sales have experienced their “worst June on record”; and the near stagnation of the services sector in June is one of the worst performances we have seen over the past decade. We have the evidence, Prime Minister, on how your legacy will be driving the UK economy over the cliff into another recession. Has not this Prime Minister sacrificed the jobs and livelihoods of people across the UK in order to please her Brexiteer Back Benchers? Take no deal off the table, and take positive action to restore confidence in the economy. The blame for any recession will lie at the door of this Brexit-obsessed Government, who are incapable of doing their day job.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talks about the car industry; I am sorry that, in referencing that industry, he did not reference the fact that in the last week we have seen the announcement by Jaguar Land Rover that it is going to manufacture electric vehicles in Castle Bromwich, preserving 2,700 jobs at the plant. We have also seen BMW announce that it is going to manufacture the electric Mini in its Oxford plant, preserving 5,000 jobs in that plant.

The right hon. Gentleman knows that he could have taken no deal off the table by voting for the deal. But if he wants to talk about economic forecasts and the future of economies, perhaps he should give a little more reflection to the fact that the forecasts for Scotland show that its economy will grow more slowly than the rest of the United Kingdom over the next four years—under an SNP Government in Scotland.

Q9. [911840] Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Cross-party work can be immensely beneficial, especially when delivering on the people’s priorities. Does my right hon. Friend

agree that an excellent example is Farnworth and Kearsley First’s work with the Bolton Council leadership—which is now Conservative—to win an award for a future high streets fund? We can all agree that our high streets are the keystone of our local communities.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an absolutely excellent point. What we have seen in the example that he has cited is the benefit of cross-party working. This can be immensely good—immensely positive—for local communities. I am delighted to hear that Bolton Council’s bid for Farnworth town centre has been successful in progressing to the next phase of the future high streets fund. My hon. Friend is right: we believe in our high streets—that is why we have created the high streets fund. This cross-party working by Conservative-led Bolton Council has shown what can be achieved.

Q2. [911833] Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Children as young as seven have been groomed and exploited to commit crimes, such as placing drugs inside their bodies to move them across the country, yet they are often treated as criminals, not victims. There is also a sad lack of support for them: two thirds of councils have no plan for tackling this kind of exploitation and just half collect the data on those at risk.

If the Prime Minister wants to secure any legacy on tackling modern-day slavery, will she instruct the Home Secretary to develop a cross-departmental strategy to tackle this despicable crime and end the criminalisation of these vulnerable youngsters?

The Prime Minister: We are indeed continuing our work on tackling modern slavery. I was pleased that the Government responded yesterday to the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act; we have taken on board the majority of the recommendations from that independent review. That includes, of course, looking at the independent child guardians—a concept that we created—and how they can give support.

The issue that the hon. Gentleman references of the criminalisation of those forced to undertake criminal activities was addressed in the Modern Slavery Act when it was put through this House, but we continue to look at what more we can do to ensure that we are bringing an end to that crime—not just in the UK, but internationally as well.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): Due to extreme pressure on services across Cornwall, leaders of our health and care services have declared a critical incident. The pressure has impacted on the Royal Cornwall Hospital in particular. That is extremely worrying for all families across Cornwall who rely on Treliske. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that she will do everything she can to enable Health Ministers to support leaders in Cornwall to resolve the situation as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, this is a very important issue for my hon. Friend and her constituents. We are aware of the issues at the Royal Cornwall Hospital, and we know that the hospital is taking steps to rectify them. Of course, last winter Cornwall Council was supported with over £2 million of additional funding to help alleviate the pressures on the local NHS trust, but I can assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the

Secretary of State for Health is going to meet MPs to discuss this matter and recognises the importance of this issue for my hon. Friend's constituents.

Q3. [911834] Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): In the run-up to the 2010 general election, the Conservatives in my constituency claimed that no children's centres would close, and yet, within a matter of months, they were closing them and downgrading those that remained. Now Suffolk County Council is proposing to close half of those that remain, leaving just four full-time children's centres in Ipswich out of the original nine. So will the Prime Minister tell us what sort of guarantees the Government can give on any future policies that they want the British people to believe?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, we recognise the importance of ensuring that children have access to high-quality care. We have been putting extra money into social care, including for children. But it is also about the sorts of services that are delivered. It is important for us that we have taken a number of steps to improve the facilities that are available for looking after children in communities where those children require that—for example, the standards we have set for social workers. We do see the number of children's services that are rated "outstanding" growing across the country. I think that is important; that is a Government who are actually looking at the issues that matter to parents and to children.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): My right hon. Friend may be aware that the live animal export season out of Ramsgate port is, shamefully, in full swing, with a further shipment due out tomorrow. Does she agree that long-distance live animal exports, particularly across the channel to an unknown future, should not form part of any future post-Brexit agricultural policy, when we can be free of single market strictures that treat animals as mere goods?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, my hon. Friend has raised an issue that I know is of concern to a lot of people. We are committed to maintaining our high standards on animal welfare, and food standards, once we have left the European Union. We will be replacing, of course, the EU's common agricultural policy. What we will be doing is enabling ourselves, by being outside the European Union, to take decisions for ourselves, so we will be able to determine needs. That is an important first step towards a better future for farming—for our natural world. It is important for us to be able to do that and to maintain the high standards and quality standards for which we have a very good reputation across the world.

Q4. [911835] Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): Head teachers and parents in Bristol South tell me that the lack of schools funding is impacting significantly on children with special educational needs, in addition to the wider impact on teaching across schools. Both the Prime Minister's potential successors now acknowledge that schools are underfunded and have promised more money. Does she agree that that welcome new funding should be targeted at our most vulnerable children?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Lady knows, we are already putting more money into our schools. We are already putting more funding into special educational needs. I recognise the importance of ensuring that special educational needs are properly catered for, and that the needs of those children can be properly supported. That is why I am proud of the fact that we have been putting more money into our schools. What is also important, of course, for schools is what standards of education are provided within those schools—*[Interruption.]* Well, the hon. Lady talks about teaching. Yes, teaching is an important element of that, and we thank all our teachers, both in mainstream schools and in special educational needs schools, for the work that they do, day in and day out. I am pleased that we are seeing improved standards in our schools. That means more young people, whether they are in mainstream schools or with special education needs, having an opportunity to go far in life.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): The consequences of not leaving the European Union are profound, from the loss of trust in our democracy and institutions to the economic impact of civil unrest. Can my right hon. Friend help to dispel the myth peddled by some in this House that we could simply go back to the way things were, and could she share what assessment the Government have made of these risks?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that it is imperative for this House to deliver on the vote of the British people in 2016. I have said that on many occasions, standing at this Dispatch Box and elsewhere. I think it is important that we do that. We could already have done that—I am sorry, but I am going to return to this theme. We could already have done that, had this House supported the deal. It will be up to my successor to find a way through this to get a majority in this Parliament, but I agree that it is important that we do deliver trust in politics by saying to people, "We gave you the choice, you told us your decision, and we will now deliver on it."

Q5. [911836] Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Vauxhall Motors in my constituency has a future if we can avoid crashing out of the EU without a deal, but my constituents are very concerned to hear in recent weeks the Prime Minister's potential successors talk up the prospects of a no-deal Brexit. Will she tell them both in no uncertain terms that if they pursue that option, they will consign thousands of jobs in my constituency and beyond to history?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman could have voted to save jobs in his constituency—*[Interruption.]* It is no good Labour MPs trying to deny this. They had the opportunity three times to vote to leave with a deal, and three times they rejected it.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Many of my constituents deeply oppose the Mayor of London's plans to build over station car parks at High Barnet, Cockfosters and Finchley Central. Will the Prime Minister urge the Mayor to drop those plans, which would only make life harder for long-suffering commuters who just want to get to work and provide for their families?

The Prime Minister: I am sure my right hon. Friend appreciates the emphasis that the Government have put on more homes being built. We want to meet the ambition for 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s—it is a top priority for us—and London is a crucial part of achieving that. While it is important to get the homes built, it is also vital that the impact on the local community is properly assessed when planning decisions are made. We want to see more homes. They need to be built in the right place, and local concerns need to be properly taken into account.

Q7. [911838] **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The all-party parliamentary group on electoral campaigning transparency is fairly new, but it is already very clear to us that something is rotten in the state of UK. The Prime Minister is legacy-shopping, so let me help. Will she commit to a clean-up of our election campaigning, as a truly dignified legacy upon leaving office? She has refused to reveal her Government's spending with Cambridge Analytica and AggregateIQ. Before she leaves, will she change tack and start a new era in which elections and referendums cannot be so easily rigged?

The Prime Minister: I have answered the question in relation to Cambridge Analytica on a number of occasions, and it has been answered in writing to the hon. Lady by the appropriate Minister. Elections in this country are not rigged, as she puts it. The referendum was not rigged. These are the views of the British people who go to the ballot box and put their votes forward. If she is so interested in ensuring that democracy is respected, she needs to ensure that she votes for a deal, so that we can deliver on the 2016 referendum.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): The Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust is an academy schools trust that operates across the Witney and Maidenhead constituencies. Will the Prime Minister join me in celebrating its successes, such as at Holyport Primary School in her constituency and “outstanding” rated Brize Norton Primary School in my constituency? Does she agree that that is an example of how academisation can really work in rural constituencies like ours?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust on its success. I am also happy to congratulate Holyport Primary School on the recognition it has received as a good school and Brize Norton Primary in his constituency, which was rated outstanding. It shows that smaller schools in rural areas can provide an excellent quality of education and that the academy movement can provide for those schools and those children. It goes back to the point I made earlier: what matters is the quality of education our children receive, and in Holyport and Brize Norton they are receiving a first-class education.

Q10. [911841] **Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): This week, the Stoke-on-Trent Hardship Commission published its report, which demonstrated that income, education and employment were the driving factors of poverty in our city. I have sent the Prime Minister a copy, and I invite her to read it. Will she use what time and authority she has left in office to look at fixing universal credit, funding our schools and our

further education colleges properly and raising the national living wage for under-25s, so that collectively we can deal with the root causes of poverty?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman raised a number of issues. As he will know, I believe that universal credit is a better system than the legacy system we inherited from the last Labour Government. It helps people into the workplace and ensures that, as they earn more, they are able to keep more of that money. On the back of the Augar review, which looked at post-18 education, I have indicated that I think it is important that we ensure that our further education colleges are funded and are able to provide an alternative route through education for those young people for whom that is right.

Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in commending the hard work and dedication of staff at West Cumberland Hospital, the Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, the working together group and my fantastic community for their innovation and commitment, which, in addition to the over £100 million of investment from this Conservative Government, mean that consultant-led maternity services will be staying open for future generations?

The Prime Minister: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend: I know she has been campaigning long and hard on that issue on behalf of her constituents. We welcome the clinical commissioning group's decision to retain those consultant-led services in west Cumbria. Better Births has established that personalised care means safer care, and greater choice should be made available to women accessing maternity services. They should be able to make decisions about the support they need during birth, and where they would prefer to give birth. I think that a good decision has been taken, and I once again congratulate my hon. Friend on the campaign she has run.

Q11. [911843] **Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): The Prime Minister's Government have once more lost in court to a public sector union, the Fire Brigades Union, over pensions. While fighting this case, the Government penalised all public sector workers by suspending pension valuations, meaning poorly paid frontline civil servants, many in the Public and Commercial Services Union, are not only being denied the money they are owed, but are making monthly pension overpayments of 2%. When will the Prime Minister give these loyal workers the money that is rightfully theirs?

The Prime Minister: Of course, as the hon. Lady has made clear, there has been a case recently in the courts in relation to public sector pensions—on particular aspects of public sector pensions. We will of course have to look at the implications of that judgment across public sector pensions, and it is right that we take our time and that the Government make their decisions based on that careful consideration.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I am extremely proud to represent a constituency with world-leading defence manufacturers that underpin our country's credibility as an ally and strategic partner. Does my

right hon. Friend agree with me that, as we contemplate our fantastic future role in the world as an independent, self-governing and sovereign nation, the UK must continue to be a credible partner and ally in an increasingly dangerous world? Does she also agree with me that her successor should commit our country to a fully funded defence budget, so that we can remain a tier 1 military power?

The Prime Minister: I commend our world-leading defence manufacturers. They are an important industry, not only in creating and supporting jobs here in the United Kingdom, but in terms of significant exports. It is important that, as that independent, self-governing, sovereign nation, we are a good partner and ally in what is an uncertain world. We always have been that, and we will continue to be that. We continue to meet the NATO requirement of spending 2% of our GDP on defence. We are one of the few NATO countries that does that. We are the biggest European contributor to NATO, and we are the second biggest contributor to NATO. We are a leading military power, and we will remain a leading military power.

Q12. [911844] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): During the right hon. Lady's premiership, we have marked 100 years since the armistice of the great war, 100 years of women's suffrage, 70 years of the NHS, the treaty of Rome and the universal declaration on human rights, and 20 years of devolution, and a week on Saturday will mark 50 years since the moon landings, one of the greatest human endeavours ever accomplished. In 50 or 100 years' time, will history not judge Brexit and her legacy to have been one giant leap backwards for the people of these islands?

The Prime Minister: No.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): The Eden Project wants to come to the north of England—to Morecambe. I would like to have a meeting with the Chancellor and the Prime Minister to talk about putting Eden into Morecambe to make sure it is the jewel in the north-west that it should be.

The Prime Minister: I was not previously aware that the Eden Project wanted to come to Morecambe. I am happy to arrange suitable conversations for my hon. Friend so that he can make that case.

Q13. [911845] **Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): A dental practice in my constituency has this week been forced to close due to unfair NHS dental contracts, leaving yet another neighbourhood without any dental service at all. Residents who urgently need care have had to get treatment from Dentaid, a charity set up to provide dental services in the world's most deprived countries. Does the Prime Minister accept that the real decay is in the values of a society that does not provide free healthcare to all of its citizens, and that it is her Government who are responsible? When will she keep her promises to my constituents, and guarantee that all of them, wherever they live, can access NHS dental care when they need it?

The Prime Minister: My understanding was that the CCGs have a responsibility for ensuring the provision of dental care in their area, but I will ask the Department of Health and Social Care to look at that specific case.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I commend the Prime Minister for her leadership in ensuring that this Government have legislated on the net-zero carbon emissions target for 2050. I am sure she would agree that the next step is to make sure we improve our economy and our living standards, rather than destroying them. I am hosting a conference in my constituency to talk about this issue. Will she agree to be the guest speaker?

The Prime Minister: First of all, I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that such initiatives at a local level are an important part of the wider work we are doing on climate change and on making sure we leave the environment in a better state for the next generation.

I thank my hon. Friend for his invitation, and I will look to see how busy my diary is in the autumn. *[Interruption.]* Well, you never know. I may have a bit more free time in the autumn. This is an important issue, and I commend him for taking this initiative at a local level, because raising awareness of climate change at a local level is important for all of us.

Mr Speaker: It is certainly an innovative approach to the issue of invitations, upon which the hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami) is doubtless to be complimented.

Q14. [911846] **Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): There are nearly 50 dog attacks on UK postal workers every week, which is why I back the Communication Workers Union's dog awareness week campaign this week. I hope the Prime Minister will join me in both supporting dog awareness week and in recognising that the law is not currently fit for purpose.

Will the Prime Minister support Royal Mail and Parcelforce postal workers by launching an independent review of the effectiveness of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and of dog control more widely?

The Prime Minister: A number of steps have been taken over the years to legislate in relation to dangerous dogs, and we all recognise the problems that some postal workers face, including being subjected to attacks by dogs when they are just going about their business—going about a job that is of benefit to the people of our constituencies.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): This week has been a game changer in the politics of Northern Ireland, with this place legislating on devolved issues and with the sad death of Sir Anthony Hart. Sir Anthony chaired the historical institutional abuse inquiry, which investigated the rape and sexual abuse of thousands of the most vulnerable children in Northern Ireland between 1922 and 1995. Some were raped over a period of months, and some over decades.

Will the Prime Minister commit to bringing forward legislation before the summer recess to compensate those victims and to give them the justice they deserve?

The Prime Minister: First, I would like to pass on my condolences to the family and friends of Sir Anthony, who did an excellent job in the Hart inquiry of shining light on some horrific incidents that took place in Northern Ireland. Obviously, this issue was addressed

by an amendment made to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill last night. As the Bill passes through Parliament, the Government will look carefully at these issues.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): The Prime Minister's last major duty will be to recommend her successor. How does she plan to satisfy herself that the next leader of the Conservative party will command a majority in the House of Commons?

The Prime Minister: The next leader of the Conservative party will be an excellent Prime Minister, whichever candidate wins, and they will ensure that they take this country through Brexit, deliver on the 2016 referendum, ignore the attempts by the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends to try to go back on the democratic vote of the British people, and lead us forward to a brighter future.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): Early diagnosis is key to further improvements in the survival rates for breast cancer. With that in mind, is the Prime Minister aware of the change and check campaign being run by Helen Addis, a member of the ITV show "Lorraine" team, and will she join me in congratulating Helen on that excellent initiative, which is already saving lives, especially at a time when she is going through her own breast cancer journey, as she describes it?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important issue and I recognise the work that he has done on it. I will look carefully at the specifics of the issue that he has raised and respond to him in writing.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): A Nottinghamshire woman whose husband is in prison for her attempted murder was yesterday served with a letter from his lawyers demanding £100,000 as a settlement in their divorce. She would have to sell her family home to give him that money, and it is simply wrong. Would the Prime Minister support a change in the law to remove automatic entitlement to joint assets in such cases?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady invites me to comment on a matter that is currently before the courts and will be determined through our justice system. We have careful legislation on divorce and the associated arrangements, and it is right that this is a case that is obviously, as she says, going through the courts.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): North Dorset is predominantly an agricultural constituency. Does my right hon. Friend agree that were we to leave on WTO terms, it is likely to be RIP for British agriculture?

The Prime Minister: It is incumbent on all of us as we look to the future to ensure that we take into account the needs of all parts of our country, of all industries and of all sectors of employment. I continue to believe that the deal that was negotiated, which would indeed have ensured the continuation of our agricultural sector, was the right way forward. Post Brexit we will be able to establish our own rules in relation to support for the farming industry in the United Kingdom, which will be to our benefit.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): My constituent Lizanne Zietsman, who has made her home on the island of Arran with her husband, has been told by the Home Office that she must leave the UK by Friday 12 July. Arran residents are understandably angry and upset at the prospect of losing a valued member of their community and a petition has garnered more than 16,000 signatures in a few days. Will the Prime Minister urgently intervene and instruct the immigration Minister to meet me so that we can ensure that Lizanne can continue to contribute to, live and work on the island of Arran?

The Prime Minister: We have a set of immigration rules and it is right that the Home Office enforces those immigration rules, but I will ensure that the immigration Minister responds to the hon. Lady on the particular case.

Universal Credit Fraud

12.53 pm

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to make a statement on the universal credit fraud that has been uncovered by the BBC.

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): Universal credit is now in all jobcentres, with around 2 million people claiming this benefit. In accordance with our approach to test and learn while rolling out universal credit, we have made several changes to the advances claimants may receive while they wait for their first payment. If they need it, people can now claim an advance from day one of their claim. They can apply in person, by phone or online—a facility we introduced in July 2018. On Monday, the BBC published an article that described cases where fraudulent applications had been made to acquire advance payments. The figures quoted are unverified.

Those who defraud the benefits system take taxpayers' money from the poorest people in society. We have a dedicated team of investigators working on this issue, and are working with the Crown Prosecution Service to ensure that, where appropriate, perpetrators will be prosecuted: we have in fact already secured our first successful prosecution. We frequently raise awareness among frontline staff to be vigilant to fraud risks, and raise concerns where appropriate.

I remind hon. Members, and their constituents, that DWP staff will never approach a claimant on social media, or in the street, to discuss their benefit claim. Claimants should never give out personal or financial information to a third party unless they are certain they work for DWP, and have followed a password or security protocol. Anyone with concerns about their benefit claim should contact their local jobcentre directly.

Neil Gray: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to Mr Speaker for granting the urgent question. I am also grateful to the BBC whose investigative journalism uncovered this scandalous situation. The cases we have seen in the news are truly alarming and heart-breaking. The Minister says that the figures are unverified, but according to the BBC the figures come from a member of his jobcentre team, who released them to the BBC. One jobcentre reported that a third of all claims are the result of such scams by criminals operating on behalf of claimants, while at another £100,000 a month is being lost to criminals and not going to claimants who actually need it.

Those people already desperately need help. They have been pushed into serious debt by the actions of those appalling scammers and it is clear from the leaked communications that staff, and perhaps Ministers, in the Department for Work and Pensions were aware that the scams were happening. It is also worth pointing out that, from the cases that we have heard about, claimants have been doubly hit by their money being stolen by the scammers and then having to pay back the advance payment, which—as we all know—is in fact a loan. The SNP has consistently condemned the system of advance payments and feels that it is counterintuitive. The advance payment needs to stop being a loan.

The BBC has uncovered what we have been talking about for years—people being left in desperate straits by cuts to universal credit, which have seen increased food bank use and, now, people being driven unwittingly to criminals to help them to get the money they need to survive. The cases highlight the failure of universal credit to protect those who most desperately need the support that it is supposed to offer. Can the Minister not see that until universal credit is properly fixed, such desperation will continue?

The DWP says that it has already secured its first conviction, so it already knew about this situation. The Minister was quoted in a BBC article on 20 May about another heart-breaking individual case. Why did the Department not identify the loophole and attempt to correct it sooner? Why was a statement not made to the House so that we could have helped to advise our constituents? What is the scale of the fraud? When were Ministers informed? Has this activity gone unnoticed or unchecked because of the 21% cut in staff numbers reported by *The Independent*? Of course, Social Security Scotland has a clear commitment that when an error or fraud occurs that is not the fault of a claimant, they will not be penalised or out of pocket. Will the Minister follow that lead for the people who have been affected?

The Government's initial response, and the Minister's response today, has put the onus on the claimants, and that is wrong. They cannot wash their hands of this responsibility. What will the Minister now do to ensure that those affected are not left out of pocket, those who have ripped them off are brought to justice and practices are put in place to ensure that it cannot happen again?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman, who has taken a proactive approach to this important issue. I share his comment that it is alarming. These are criminal actions by what are, frankly speaking, parasites who target some of the most vulnerable people in society. I give the House an assurance that the Department will do everything in its power to protect those vulnerable people, and I am sure that all hon. Members would support that.

There have been 4.4 million universal credit claims and, as it stands, 42,000 staff referrals for fraud have been made, which is less than 1% of all universal credit claims. That said, each and every one of those has the potential to be a serious case. We take them seriously, they are all fully investigated and, where appropriate, we will take action. We are in talks with the CPS on several cases and, as I have said, we have already had a successful prosecution. We will look at each of the cases raised and, where it is clear that the claimant is an innocent victim who has been targeted, there would be an expectation that they would not pay the money back.

I refute, however, the broader point about universal credit. We will spend £2 billion more than the legacy system, and I very much welcome the introduction of the help to claim scheme to provide an independent additional tier of support across the jobcentre network, provided by Citizens Advice.

We are actively making improvements to the system. We are using more real time information. We are working with data suppliers. We are doing more data matching. We are using the DWP landlord portal to verify housing costs and we are developing risk models to help to assess confidence in information that is provided. There

is a balance, however. In debates we have had in recent years, hon. Members have rightly pushed to make advance payments available as quickly as possible. It is the balance between being able to support people who need funding—under current rules, a vulnerable claimant in need of financial assistance can access that funding on the first day of their claim—while ensuring that we have 100% confidence that the money goes to the right person.

We are not complacent. We take this matter very seriously. We have a team of 120 staff dedicated to working on advanced payments. As I said, every case referred to us is taken very seriously and we will use the full force of the law where appropriate.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): There are people offering help to those applying for benefits in exchange for a cut of what they subsequently receive—sometimes a very big cut. Will my hon. Friend consider outlawing that activity, and consider a public awareness campaign to warn people against this harmful exploitation and to signpost people to free, qualified benefits advisers such as Citizens Advice?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank my hon. Friend, who works tirelessly in this area. This is yet another example of a really helpful, constructive and proactive suggestion. I know the Secretary of State is very keen to see that brought forward, so that is a big yes from us. In terms of raising awareness, we are increasing training and guidance for frontline staff. Working in partnership with Action Fraud, we will be doing further national and regional press releases, social media and stakeholder engagement to raise awareness of the potential risk of fraud and of how to report it as quickly as possible.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): The Government claimed that universal credit would reduce social security fraud and error by £1.3 billion. Now we know that they are clearly failing to do that, just as they are failing to protect people from poverty. The Government's own figures show that the rate of fraud in universal credit is far higher than the rate of fraud in the benefits it is replacing. According to the BBC, fraudulent applications for advances are leaving claimants scammed and at risk of destitution, costing millions of pounds of public money.

Labour Members have repeatedly highlighted the hardship that the five-week wait for an initial payment causes, pushing many people into debt and rent arrears or forcing them to turn to food banks to survive. The Government's stock answer is that people can apply for advances—indeed, on 28 March, the Secretary of State said that he felt the system of advances was working well. What does she think of it now?

When the National Audit Office highlighted delays in paying people last year, the right hon. Lady's predecessor claimed that they were largely due to the need to verify identity. In June 2018, she said:

“Verification is a necessary part of any benefits system... We need to make sure we are paying the right people the right amount of money.”

How is it, then, that advances have been made to claimants with names such as Lisa Simpson, Bart Simpson and Homer Simpson?

Will the Minister tell the House how much the Government estimate this fraudulent activity is costing the taxpayer? How does that cost compare with the cost of abolishing the five-week wait? What action are the Government now taking to make sure they verify correctly the identity of people who request an advance? What action are the Government taking to support claimants in financial hardship who have clearly been the victim of a scam?

It is clear from this report that advances are not the answer to the five-week wait; they are loans that have to be paid off by claimants—in this case, the victims of scams. The Government must finally listen to the evidence and stop the roll-out of universal credit.

Justin Tomlinson: I am afraid there was a bit of a muddle, mixing the difference between the verification process with advance payments and the main claims for universal credit. As a Government, we take the issue of fraud, error and overpayments seriously. We anticipate that by the time we have full roll-out of universal credit, there will be a reduction of over £1 billion.

Margaret Greenwood: How did Bart Simpson get in there?

Justin Tomlinson: Be patient. I am answering the questions. I can only address one point at a time.

The legacy benefits system was complex. Claimants had to deal with local authorities, HMRC and the DWP. The majority of welfare issues that led to fraud, error or overpayment related to failing to provide information on changes of circumstances. Under the legacy benefits, there was an increased likelihood that people would fail to report changes of circumstances. Universal credit, however, with a single point of contact on a digital interface, makes it easier for claimants to report changes once, and it is easier for us to proactively identify when there are changes. The Government are still on target to see, with the full roll-out of universal credit, a reduction of £1 billion.

We talk about the principle of advance payments, but remember that under legacy benefits at the end of the claim the payment came too soon. We saw that claimants would in many cases be going into work, having spent a long time out of work, being anxious. They were often paid in arrears at work, so would not have access to funding. People who were desperate to work and do the right thing were financially unable to do so. Under universal credit the wait for the money is at the beginning, but with advance payments to bridge that wait. That is vital to ensuring that claimants can transition into work. As I said in my earlier response, it is the need to balance making advances available to claimants quickly and ensuring that payments are paid based on the correct circumstances.

The shadow Secretary of State raised a point about children. When verifying advance payments, we will verify identity, bank accounts, national insurance and, where they are declared a non-UK national, nationality. However, to make sure we can provide support to those who are often the most vulnerable people in society, there is manual checking of housing and children. That is the bit that can take time beyond when we have issued the advance payment, although it would be checked before the actual main claim. As I have said, by using

[Justin Tomlinson]

greater access to real-time information and data matching, we will be able to speed up that process to improve confidence that all claimants for advanced payments are valid.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): It is vital that we crack down on fraud, but will the Minister reassure us that he will protect the vital advance system, which provides a vital financial lifeline for many, many of my constituents?

Justin Tomlinson: My hon. Friend is absolutely spot on. It is absolutely vital that we strike the balance between having absolute confidence that money is being correctly paid out and ensuring that we do not leave vulnerable claimants without access to money. Rightly, the Government have listened to the constructive work with stakeholders to ensure that on the first day of a claim people who need financial support can get it. That is the right thing to do.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): The Department has a risk register to safeguard taxpayers' money. Is this fraud listed on the risk register?

Justin Tomlinson: I will have to write to the right hon. Gentleman to give him a specific answer. Any case that is referred is treated seriously. We have a dedicated team—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Do not shout at the Minister. Members are supposed to ask questions and get answers. Shouting at the Minister is not a part of that, and certainly not while I am sitting here.

Justin Tomlinson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We treat every case seriously and we encourage claimants who feel they may be a victim of fraud to report it immediately either directly to jobcentre staff or to Action Fraud, with which we work very closely. I will write to the right hon. Gentleman with a full response.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): It is obviously really important that people who need benefits should not have to wait for long periods with no money in their pocket. Will my hon. Friend confirm that any new measures to prevent fraud will not prevent our constituents receiving the advance payments they desperately need?

Justin Tomlinson: My hon. Friend makes a really important point. We must not forget the need to balance making advances available quickly to claimants with ensuring that payments are paid based on current circumstances. We must not lose sight of that.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I think the general public will be incredulous at the level of incompetence around the universal credit system. How can it be possible that, as has been revealed this week, a brand new system is open to grotesque fraud at these levels? Does the Minister seriously expect us to accept that it is somehow acceptable for the universal credit system to recognise the "Bank of Springfield" and allow payments to be made into it?

Justin Tomlinson: I understand the hon. Lady's passion on this subject. She is right that we should be doing everything we can to protect vulnerable claimants, but I remind her that there have been 4.4 million universal credit claims, that as it stands today there have been 42,000 referrals, each of them very important, and that to put it in context, since January, every month we have had more than 110,000 requests for advance payments.

We will continue to tighten up the procedures, using real-time information, data matching and the digital platforms, so that we are as robust as we can be, but we must not lose sight of ensuring that vulnerable claimants have access to funding as quickly as possible. Nobody in this House would want people not to be able to access vital financial support.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): I have been raising this matter with the Minister for some time, and I welcome the fact that he says that claimants who have made a claim in error, or not made one to their knowledge, will not have to repay the advance. Will he also confirm that those claimants will be allowed to return to their legacy benefits, since they have not made a valid claim for universal credit that they are aware of, and that he will deal with these cases much more quickly than the eight weeks that my very vulnerable constituent has been waiting since I first raised this with him?

Justin Tomlinson: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady, who raised this case with the Minister for Employment, who is responsible for this area. It helped to focus our minds on what more could be done. Every individual will be treated individually, and we will look at the unique circumstances. Where it is clear that they have been a victim of fraud through no fault of their own, no, we would not expect them to pay it back, and yes, we would consider putting them back on to the legacy benefits if they were better off under those.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): There is huge potential for fraud in Northern Ireland, especially around the border areas; in fact, traditionally there has been a lot of social security fraud in those areas. Given that the Northern Ireland Assembly is not meeting at present and therefore the opportunities for scrutiny are limited, what contact has the Minister had with the Department for Communities and the Social Security Agency of Northern Ireland, first to identify whether fraud has been taking place, and secondly to share the methods being used and indicate the steps that the Department is taking, so that those can be used in Northern Ireland?

Justin Tomlinson: On the specifics of the meetings, I will have to write to provide a full answer. However, we are seeing that the cases that are being reported are clustered around particular areas, so there is a real focus in those areas on raising awareness and on targeting often very sophisticated criminal activity. As we bring forward prosecutions, we are finding that that is making a significant difference as a proactive deterrent, and rightly so.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Ministers have made one monumental misjudgment after another with universal credit. The five-week delay is forcing people into debt and dependency on food banks, and now we

learn that it has opened up a bonanza for crooks and fraudsters. Will the Minister now urgently review the catastrophic five-week delay policy?

Justin Tomlinson: As is very clear, any claimant can access financial support from day one where it is needed. We will continue to do all that we can to ensure that everybody benefits from the personal, tailored approach that universal credit offers, which is an integral part of how we are helping to deliver record employment across all regions of this country.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for saying that, where there has been fraudulent activity and claimants have been transferred on to UC, he will consider revoking that. Can he explain and enlighten us all on the testimony of the DWP officials at the most recent Select Committee hearing, who said exactly the opposite?

Justin Tomlinson: This is in relation specifically to the cases of fraud relating to advance payments. I understand the point that the hon. Lady raises, and as ever we will continue to consider all our operational activities to ensure that we continue to deliver much-needed improvements.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): The bit about this that I find most difficult is that the whistleblowers were themselves jobcentre staff. What does it say about the culture in the DWP that they felt that they could not come to the Department and had to go to the BBC? My question is simple: did the Department know about any of this or any of these cases before the BBC revealed them, and if so, what did it do about it?

Justin Tomlinson: Yes, of course we did. That is why we have created a team of 120 dedicated members of staff specifically looking at the area of advance payments, why we have been improving training and awareness for both claimants and our frontline staff, why we are working with Action Fraud on our communications strategy and why, rightly, we are using the full force of the law to undertake prosecutions against the parasites who are targeting some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): The advance payment fraud was reported in the media as long ago as last November, so whatever has been happening over the past eight months, as the Minister has set out, has simply not been good enough. What would it take for him to conclude that, rather than having this advance payment system, we should take away the five-week wait altogether?

Justin Tomlinson: But the hon. Gentleman would then have the problem of the legacy benefits: at the end of the claim, as someone moved into work, they would not have the run-on of financial support, which would leave a gap, since the majority of people who go into work are paid in arrears. With legacy benefits, we saw that people who were desperate to do the right thing and to unlock their own talent were left with a financial gap at a point when they could not get financial support. It is not a good thing to advocate going back to a legacy system that trapped people in generations of unemployment.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): In responding to the urgent question from my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) on this shocking and disgraceful criminal activity, the Minister said that he would do everything he could to “protect vulnerable people in society”. If that is the case, he will be aware that the all-party parliamentary group for terminal illness published its report last week on his Government’s six-month rule, which is causing harm and heartbreak for the dying and their families. Has he read the report’s damning evidence? If so, how can he justify his Government’s continuing with this policy?

Justin Tomlinson: I pay tribute to the work of the APPG and in particular the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), who has campaigned tirelessly with organisations such as the Motor Neurone Disease Association, Marie Curie, Parkinson’s UK and a number of others. As the Minister for Disabled People, I have had a number of meetings on this matter, particularly on the process as somebody claims through the special rules. We are aware of it, and the Secretary of State is personally passionate that we should do everything we can. This is an area in which we will be making significant improvements in the very near future.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): The Minister’s defence of this system increasingly sounds absurd. The reason so many advance payments are necessary is the five-week wait introduced by his Government, which has left people in Wigan completely destitute. It is humiliating to have to beg for money at a time when they most need help, in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Why does he not just give up on this defence, do the right thing and get rid of this degrading five-week wait?

Justin Tomlinson: The hon. Lady simply does not understand what has happened. Under the legacy benefits, people at the end of their claim as they moved into employment would lose the financial support while they waited to be paid, as more often than not people in work are paid in arrears. That left people without financial support. Under universal credit, while there is a five-week wait for the full payments, people can access advance payments.

Those moving from legacy benefits can also benefit from two weeks’ run-on, no-strings-attached additional money from housing benefit. Since the announcement in the Budget, that will also be extended to an additional two weeks of jobseeker’s allowance, income support and employment and support allowance funding. Again, there will be no strings attached to that, so potentially, combined, that means four weeks of additional funding.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): The people who have suffered in this, the claimants themselves, had no part in the design of the system, and feel increasingly disempowered by the whole system. The system fraud that is being applied was originally targeted against the banks. The banks have been criticised across this House for their slowness in protecting individual customers, but they are now moving to a stage where they reimburse immediately and then look into any fraud. Why cannot the DWP do the same for each and every claimant, to take the stress of debt away from them?

Justin Tomlinson: I know that the hon. Gentleman is being constructive with his two suggestions. I recognise the point about people engaging with the formal process, which is one reason why I was so passionately supportive of the roll-out of the Help to Claim scheme, putting in a level of independent support across the jobcentre network, particularly for vulnerable claimants, delivered by Citizens Advice. I think that will make a significant difference.

On the broader point about learning lessons within the banking sector—at times, I am afraid, the banking sector had to be dragged and cajoled into doing the right thing—we continue to look at what more can be done. If there are vital lessons that can be taken from that, those are things that we should give serious consideration to.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): This whole situation is immensely concerning. Can the Minister tell us the average and maximum amounts that victims of these scams have lost?

Justin Tomlinson: I cannot at this stage, but we are looking at this as we work through the cases referred. Regardless of the amounts, for each and every victim it is incredibly serious, which is why I reiterate our commitment to do everything in our power to use the full force of the law to target the criminal gangs targeting some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I recently spoke to somebody who works for Jobcentre Plus, who said they felt that universal credit was not designed to support people and that the five-week delay was an example of that. She said that people were turning instead to prostitution and crime to top up their money. In the light of this recent fraud, it is time the Government abolished the five-week wait.

Justin Tomlinson: When we talk to work coaches up and down the country, they tell us that for the first time in generations they feel empowered to deliver a personalised and tailored level of support that treats everybody as an individual. It is an integral part of how we are delivering record employment and doing everything possible to reduce the amount of unclaimed benefits. Under legacy benefits, £2.4 billion a year was being left unclaimed, which for 700,000 of the most vulnerable—[*Interruption.*] Some hon. Members are laughing, but this £2.4 billion amounts to £280 per month on average for some of the most vulnerable in society. By delivering through universal credit we can get support to the people who need it.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): This latest problem exposes the need for greater safeguards for anyone moving on to universal credit, be it through natural or managed migration. The Secretary of State told the Work and Pensions Committee that we would have a vote on those safeguards this month. When will that vote take place?

Justin Tomlinson: We are still considering how we can do this correctly. We are still on track to do the planned managed migration from the summer. We are aware that it needs to come back to the House and will be reporting to the House on it shortly.

Point of Order

1.22 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance. I am sure you are aware that the Cabinet Office has a role in co-ordinating the cross-governmental response to climate change, including the greening government commitments and the UN sustainable development goals, and is responsible for procurement across Government, which obviously relates to sustainability. We have discovered that in Cabinet Office questions this morning the Cabinet Office decided to unilaterally withdraw from the Order Paper one question that had been drawn four times, each having been submitted by a Labour Member. The question was about what steps the Department was taking to facilitate cross-governmental co-operation on tackling climate change. The Opposition had approached the Table Office, and it confirmed that the question would be in order, but the Department decided to unilaterally withdraw it. I seek your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker, as to how we can ensure that questions are in order. If the Table Office say they are, is it okay for Departments to unilaterally decide they are not?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order and for having given me notice of her intention to raise it. It is not for the Chair to interfere in such matters, of course, but it is for the Chair to make sure that Members are given proper answers to any question they ask and that Departments are accountable to Parliament and therefore to individual Members of Parliament. [*Interruption.*] We really do not need commentary from the Back Benches while I am giving a polite answer. I have never known a point of order to be heckled like that.

The short answer to the hon. Lady's question is that it is perfectly in order for Departments to decide which Department is responsible for any matter a Member raises, be it in a written question, an oral question, a letter to a Minister, and so on. It is quite normal for a Department to say that a matter cannot be properly answered by one Minister but that it could be answered by another. Even where the Table Office might have said that a matter is properly for one Department, that Department has every right to transfer it to another one.

That said, if the hon. Lady or the four Members who tabled questions they thought would be answered publicly this morning do not get answers in a timely fashion, please come back and draw it to the attention of the Chair, because the Chair is concerned that Members have their questions properly answered. I hope that helps the hon. Lady.

Public Advocate

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

1.25 pm

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a public advocate to provide advice to, and act as data controller for, representatives of the deceased after major incidents.

The Bill is about changing how we handle the aftermath of public disasters so that we can better enable families of the deceased and injured survivors to get what they need from the events that inevitably follow. It aims to provide collective representation for bereaved families and injured survivors during the investigations in the aftermath and to provide for the establishment of an independent panel to review documentation relating to the disaster. It should prevent families and survivors from feeling excluded by the official processes and feeling like their needs are being ignored. It will enable a more cost-effective response that helps families and facilitates a collective solidarity amongst them, as well as putting their voices at the very centre of the aftermath.

The Bill arises out of the experience of the Hillsborough families and its aim is to prevent others from having to go through the trauma and agonies that the Hillsborough families and survivors have endured simply to get the truth about what happened to their loved ones officially accepted and to get justice and accountability for what went wrong. Families and the injured survivors in disasters usually want two simple things—to find out what happened and why, and to stop it ever happening again to other people—yet it is striking how frequently they feel let down. We have seen it time after time: Hillsborough, the MV Derbyshire, the Marchioness, terrorist attacks such as Lockerbie and other bombings, and more recently the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower. In all these cases, there have been reports of families and survivors feeling alienated and ignored and often feeling the need to campaign for truth and justice because they do not feel that their needs have been met by the proceedings that have happened.

I would like to thank Lord Wills for drafting the Bill, following work that he and I did consulting family support groups involved in a number of public disasters. It is he who devised the mechanics of how the Hillsborough independent panel should work in 2009, when we were both Ministers in the Ministry of Justice. Its establishment followed a call for transparency and the publication of documents on the 20th anniversary of the disaster by Andy Burnham and me—both then Ministers. Without Lord Wills, the Hillsborough independent panel would never have happened, and without the HIP the full truth about Hillsborough would never have been officially acknowledged. The original inquest verdicts of accidental death would never have been quashed and replaced after the second inquests with verdicts of unlawful killing. It was the HIP that finally and definitively reported the full truth of what happened at Hillsborough, 23 years after the events, and it did so using the principles of openness, transparency and the publication of documentation.

I have had an involvement with Hillsborough families for 29 years. When I was an articled clerk in a legal practice in Liverpool in 1990, my principal was one of the solicitors on the Hillsborough steering committee conducting the original civil litigation. I have known and tried to help the Hillsborough families ever since that time. When I was first elected to this House in 1997, members of the executive committee of the Hillsborough Families Support Group were amongst the first of my constituents to come to me for help, and I have been helping them ever since. Significant progress has been made over these years—very much against the odds, it must be said—so I have a deep understanding of what has happened to them in the past 30 years. The members of the executive committee of the Hillsborough Families Support Group have told me that they support the Bill because they think that it will make a difference to bereaved families in future disasters.

The Hillsborough families' experience is extreme, but not unique. In the aftermath of disasters, things often seem to go wrong for the families of the deceased and for injured survivors. I have handled other cases myself. The families of the 44 people who were killed when MV Derbyshire sank with all hands in 1980 spent 20 years campaigning to clear their loved ones of blame for what happened. They felt that the British Wreck Commission had blamed alleged poor seamanship for the sinking, thus casting aspersions on the victims—who could not answer back—rather than on the owners, builders and insurers of the vessel. As the secretary of the all-party parliamentary group on MV Derbyshire, I saw what a heavy toll that took on them, and I helped them to succeed in their long and difficult campaign for official acknowledgment of the truth of what had happened. The truth was that their relatives had been wholly innocent victims of the disaster, and their campaign was fully vindicated, but it should not have taken 20 years.

There have been, and will continue to be, other disasters that kill and injure people, creating more bereaved families and injured survivors. We should use the experiences of past disasters to improve the way in which we handle the aftermath of those that happen in the future. The Bill would establish an independent, adequately resourced public advocate for those who are bereaved in public disasters, and for injured survivors. It would locate the public advocate's office in a Government Department; the advocate would be able to call on its resources but, crucially, would be totally independent of the Government. It would require the public advocate to act if 50% plus one or more of the families of the deceased and injured survivors asked for that to happen. The advocate would then act as a representative of the collective interests of the bereaved and survivors in securing the openness and transparency that families need.

The process would not replace any representation in legal proceedings, but the advocate would have an additional role intended to give families and survivors confidence that their needs were central in the securing of truth and justice. That would be done by ensuring transparency and openness in a way that cannot be hijacked by organs of the state or other interested parties in the various legal proceedings that often follow in the aftermath of a disaster.

The public advocate, as a data controller, would establish a panel—like the Hillsborough independent panel—in consultation with relatives of the deceased and survivors, to review all documentation at a much

[Maria Eagle]

earlier stage than was the case with Hillsborough, thus facilitating transparency and disclosure by way of reports to Parliament and the Lord Chancellor. That would counterbalance legal proceedings, inquiries, inquests and other trials leaving families feeling like unimportant, unrepresented parties—which is how they often feel. It would complement and add to the sum of knowledge about what happened and why, and it would do so in a timely fashion and at an early stage.

In the Queen's Speech of 2017, the Government promised to establish such an office, but—unbelievably, given how straightforward such legislation would be—they have made no progress beyond conducting a consultation. It is also clear from their consultation document, published in September last year, that their public advocate would not be independent, would not be a data controller, would not be able to act at the behest of families, would be directed by the Secretary of State, and would not have the power to establish and appoint independent panels such as the Hillsborough independent panel.

Let me say to the Government that unless the families have more agency and the public advocate is truly independent, that simply will not do the job of maintaining families' confidence and putting them at the centre of the search for the truth in the aftermath of disasters. To be effective, the public advocate needs independence, the confidence of the families and survivors, and the ability to establish an independent panel as a data controller and to report findings. Those are the essential elements that will prevent the aftermath of future disasters from being made more traumatic for families and survivors, as has happened in the past.

I believe that, if implemented, these measures will prevent bereaved families and injured survivors from ever again having to endure decades of fighting for the truth to be acknowledged by officialdom, and decades of striving for justice and accountability. If passed, the Bill will also stand as an enduring monument to the dignity and collective strength, fight and stamina of the Hillsborough families and survivors, so that they can know at last that something good and permanent has come out of their decades of agony and trauma, and that no one will ever again have to go through what they have endured simply because their family has had the great misfortune to be caught up in a public disaster.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Maria Eagle, Sir George Howarth, Derek Twigg, Alison McGovern, Ms Angela Eagle, Dame Louise Ellman, Ms Marie Rimmer, Conor McGinn, Frank Field, Stephen Twigg and Luciana Berger present the Bill.

Maria Eagle accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed (Bill 419).

Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill

[*Relevant Documents: Second Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the draft Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Bill 2017, HC 709, and the Government Response, HC 984.*]

Second Reading

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I can inform the House that Mr Speaker has certified the whole Bill, in accordance with Standing Order No. 83J, as being within devolved legislative competence and relating exclusively to England and Wales.

1.36 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.

The Bill delivers another important commitment from the Government on animal welfare, cementing our place as a world leader in the care and protection of animals. Under the current legislation, the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the maximum penalty for animal cruelty offences is six months' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine. The Bill extends the current maximum penalty to five years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine for the worst animal cruelty offences relating to animal welfare in England and Wales. It is a simple yet vital measure to ensure that those who perpetrate cruelty on animals are subjected to the full force of the law.

We all agree that there is no place for animal cruelty in this country. Those who mistreat and abuse animals through unacceptable activities such as dog fighting, the abuse of pet animals, and cruelty to farm animals will be faced with tougher responses from the courts. An increase in the maximum custodial sentence from six months to five years will help to deter people from committing detestable acts against animals, and will demonstrate that such behaviour is not tolerated in this country.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Is the Minister aware of the growing concern about the welfare of tethered horses? Many horses are attached to a short rope all day long, next to a highway, with no water and surrounded by ragwort, which is harmful to them. However, the authorities seem reluctant to take action. Might the reason be that the law is not quite clear enough in this respect, and if so, could that be addressed by the Bill?

David Rutley: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention, and for his concern about horse tethering. I share that concern, which is why we recently had a roundtable meeting with the relevant welfare groups and authorities to discuss how we could achieve best practice in this regard. I think that there have been some case studies—particularly in the Swansea area, if I remember correctly—and that real action has been taken. We need to spread that best practice far and wide.

It is a pleasure to introduce this important Bill. We committed ourselves in September 2017 to increasing maximum sentences for animal cruelty offences, and in December 2017 we published our draft Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny. That followed the introduction of the Animal

Fighting (Sentencing) Bill in July 2016 by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), and the introduction of the Animal Cruelty (Sentencing) Bill, also in July 2016, by the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley). I pay tribute to both of them and the supporters of their Bills; I thank them for their hard work.

I am delighted to have secured the parliamentary time to introduce this small but incredibly valuable Government Bill, which is of great importance to the House, the animal welfare community and the public more widely. I pay tribute to all who campaigned for the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019, popularly known as Finn's law, which is closely linked to the Bill. Finn is a police dog fondly known as Fabulous Finn to his friends, and a distinguished example of the incredible bravery and hard work of service animals. This Bill will ensure that those who cause injury to a service animal will receive a proportionate penalty for their horrific actions; I will speak on this in more detail a little later.

Many animal welfare charities and other organisations have been calling for increased sentencing for a number of years. I thank them for their campaigning on the matter and for ensuring that this issue has remained at the top of the agenda: Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, Blue Cross, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the League Against Cruel Sports, to name but a few, have been incredibly effective in their support for an increase in the maximum penalties, and I praise their tireless efforts. Claire Horton, chief executive of Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, stated that the introduction of this Bill is a "landmark achievement".

This Bill is indeed a landmark step forward for animal welfare in this country. It demonstrates our commitment to protecting this nation's animals. I pay tribute to Northern Ireland and my hon. Friends in the Democratic Unionist party for setting such a great example in support of animal welfare; Northern Ireland has already introduced a higher maximum penalty of five years for animal cruelty offences, which we are pleased to be able to match in England and Wales.

I also pay tribute to those hon. Members who have consistently advocated introducing this Bill, notably my hon. Friend—most of the time my friend—the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. He can be grumpy on occasions—[*Interruption.*] Oh, he is there! I had not realised he was behind me! Indeed, I thank all members of the Committee, who tirelessly press the Government on this issue.

Our Bill and the proposals therein on animal welfare sentencing have received strong support from across the House, and I am grateful to the Opposition Front-Bench team, not least the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) for her full and wholesome support; it is much appreciated.

Bill Wiggins (North Herefordshire) (Con): Thirteen years ago in 2006 when the Animal Welfare Act was going through its stages, I proposed an amendment that would do exactly what this Bill does, so may I thank the Minister for bringing it in but express regret that it has taken 13 years to do so?

David Rutley: I am pleased the Bill is before us today; sometimes these things take time—too often in animal welfare—but I am really pleased that through working

together across this House we have seen a number of pieces of legislation come forward in recent weeks and months. That is because we are working so closely together. I am extraordinarily grateful for that and for the support we have had from the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), who has long called for higher sentencing.

It is also important to recognise the hard work of our Whips. They are not able to speak on this matter, but I know that my hon. Friends the Members for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) and for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) are very keen for this legislation to come through. It would be remiss of me not also to mention the irrepressible hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), who is a complete enthusiast for this Bill and I am sure would love to be associated with it.

The Bill amends the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which currently sets out a maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine for the more serious prevention of harm offences. That is much lower than the current European average for animal welfare offences, which is two years; indeed many countries have much higher maximum penalties. I am pleased to say that the Bill introduces one of the toughest punishments in the world and will bring us in line with the maximum penalties in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, India and Latvia, which are all five years' imprisonment.

The Government published the draft Bill for consultation and pre-legislative scrutiny in December 2017 as part of the Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Bill. The consultation closed in January 2018 and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs received over 9,000 direct responses to it; 70% of respondents agreed with the new maximum penalties. In the summary of responses document, the Government committed to bringing forward the sentencing clauses in a separate Bill as recommended by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee scrutiny report in January 2018.

There have been a number of recent cases related to serious animal welfare offences in which judges have expressed a desire to impose a higher penalty or custodial sentence than that currently provided for under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. For example, in 2016 an 18-year-old man kicked his girlfriend's pet spaniel to death in an horrific attack. The dog was kicked repeatedly so hard that her brain stem detached. The man was sentenced to six months in prison and ordered to pay costs and victim surcharges of more than £1,000. The judge at the magistrates court said that he would have imposed a stronger, longer sentence if the law had allowed it. It was a sickening act of deliberate cruelty and in such cases a higher sentence would have been favourable for the court.

If I may, I would like to give another horrific example of where the judge explicitly told the court that he would have imposed a longer sentence if the guidelines had allowed. In November 2016 a man gave a dog painkillers and then beat her to death with a shovel. The man was sentenced to four months in prison and was disqualified from keeping all animals for life. That sentence was clearly not appropriate for such a dreadful act, and we need to change that, and we will now.

This Bill relates closely to the warmly received Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019, commonly known as Finn's law, which prevents those who attack or injure

[David Rutley]

service animals from claiming self-defence. It received Royal Assent on 8 April 2019, and I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), who is also in his place, for steering the Bill so skilfully through this House.

When this Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill is enacted, those who cause harm to a service animal in the course of the animal's duty could be subject to a maximum sentence of five years. The intention of Finn's law was to increase the maximum penalty for animal cruelty as well as improving the protection of service animals. We are now completing the increased protection of service animals with this Bill, and as a result achieving what the Committee and campaigners have worked so hard for.

The Bill is due to commence two months after Royal Assent and has a limited impact on costs to the criminal justice system. The increase in maximum penalties will not result in an increase in the number of offenders being sent to prison; it will result only in the potential length of time that might be served by the most serious offenders. We have been in discussion with the Ministry of Justice on this matter, and the Government consider that this may lead to some marginal extra costs to the criminal justice system which are unlikely to be more than £500,000 per annum. DEFRA has agreed with the Ministry of Justice to take on the costs, as set out in the explanatory notes.

While some offences committed under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 may be more minor incidents, there are unfortunately cases of serious or systematic cruelty. For example, some forms of animal cruelty, such as dog fighting, can be linked to organised crime and are carried out for financial gain through betting and prize money.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): The Minister talked about the extra cost involved. If a case has to go to the Crown court, very often animals will have to be kept in custody or in care in kennels, so that will cost more. We also need to make sure we have proper kennelling so that the whole court system can cope. We very much welcome the extra sentencing, but that knock-on effect needs to be dealt with as well.

David Rutley: Once again, my hon. Friend speaks with authority on the subject, and he can be assured that we are working through all those details. I just want to underline that costs will be covered through the arrangements put in place.

As I was saying, dog fighting inflicts a high level of suffering on the animals involved. We believe that in such cases, where the level of cruelty and culpability is so high, a higher sentence is clearly justified, and I am sure that the House agrees.

The Bill is a simple measure, amounting to just two clauses, but with a very positive outcome. Clause 1 is the Bill's main clause; it outlines the mode of trial and maximum penalty for certain animal welfare offences. As I previously outlined, under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 the maximum penalty in practice is currently six months and/or an unlimited fine. The clause changes the maximum custodial sentence available for five key offences: causing unnecessary suffering to a protected

animal; carrying out a non-exempted mutilation; docking the tail of a dog, except where permitted; administering a poison to an animal; and involvement in an animal fight.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): The Bill is hugely welcome. However, I am concerned about the narrowness of its scope, and my investigations have not been able to satisfy me that there are no potential areas of obscurity in it. Given that the Bill applies to domestic animals and not to wild animals, what is the situation in regard to, say, feral cats? Would somebody who did harm to their neighbour's cat be subject to a different maximum sentence from somebody who did harm to a cat that was effectively feral and unattached?

David Rutley: We can talk about that in more detail in Committee, but it is clear that this is about animals that are under the control of man. So in a situation where a feral cat was under the control of a man or woman and was experiencing unnecessary harm, the Bill would apply.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I apologise for coming in a bit late. The Minister might have covered this earlier, but will the courts have discretion in relation to the maximum sentence? Am I right in thinking that there will be a scale?

David Rutley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. Just to clarify, we are discussing the maximum penalty; there will be other gradations that the courts will see fit to use. It is important to highlight, as I have done with a couple of case studies, that the courts felt they did not have the right sentencing available, given the horrific nature of some of the crimes they had been looking at. The Bill is about providing a maximum. The hon. Gentleman must be psychic, because I was about to come to that point. Under clause 1, the existing maximum penalty of six months will be retained if the offender is summarily convicted. However, offenders may now receive a higher penalty of up to five years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine if they are convicted on trial by indictment.

Clause 2 outlines that the Bill will come into force two months after Royal Assent. The application of revised maximum penalties is not retrospective and does not apply to offences committed before the Bill comes into force. The clause also specifies the short title of the Bill, and provides for the Bill to extend to England and Wales. Animal welfare is a fully devolved matter, as many Members know. However, in this case the Welsh Government have confirmed that the maximum penalty should also apply in Wales, and the Bill is drafted on that basis. The Welsh Government are preparing a legislative consent motion so that the Bill can be extended and applied in Wales.

It is the Government's view that the subject matter of this Bill is considered to be within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. I have commended Northern Ireland for having already set the maximum penalty for animal cruelty offences at five years' imprisonment in August 2016, and I am pleased that the Scottish Government have announced their intention to do so as well. This country has some of the highest animal welfare standards in the

world, but our maximum penalties are currently among the lowest. An increase to five years' imprisonment should be introduced to enable the courts to have more appropriate sentences at their disposal for the most serious crimes of animal cruelty, and to reinforce our position as a world leader on animal welfare.

The Government are pleased to be taking forward this positive step on animal welfare. Just a month ago, we introduced a ban on third-party sales of puppies and kittens, and we have introduced mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses. The Bill follows the previously mentioned passing of Finn's law and we are also demonstrating the importance of the value of wild animals with the Wild Animals in Circuses Bill progressing well through the other place. The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill is a fundamental step in ensuring that we have an appropriate response to those who inflict deliberate suffering on innocent animals and, for the reasons I have set out, I commend the Bill to the House.

1.54 pm

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): Today has been a long time coming. We welcome the Government bringing forward this vital piece of legislation, although we regret that it has taken this long, considering that it has widespread support across the House and with the general public. I hope the Bill manages to make it through both Houses and on to the statute book in a timely fashion. It is imperative that it should receive Royal Assent and come into force as soon as possible so that our courts can start handing out appropriate sentences to those people convicted of inflicting terrible harm on innocent animals.

Neil Parish: I want to thank the hon. Lady for the cross-party support that she has given to get this legislation on the statute book. I agree that that must be done quickly. The Bill has had cross-party support not only in the Select Committee but across Parliament, so let us try to get Royal Assent as soon as possible. Too many lenient sentences are being handed down for horrific welfare crimes at the moment.

Sue Hayman: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his well-made point, which I think we can all support.

It is absolutely right that we should seek to increase the maximum penalty for animal welfare offences from six months to five years. Britain can be proud of having some of the best animal welfare practices and legislation in the world, and the Bill does what it needs to do to enhance that reputation. The landmark Animal Welfare Act 2006 is something that, as a Labour Member, I am very proud of, because our Government brought it forward. Now, delivering maximum sentencing through the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill will ensure that our high standard is maintained and builds on those original foundations.

I am aware that many Members right across the House have campaigned for this issue and for this Bill to come forward, but I would like to make a couple of particular mentions. First my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) has made a huge contribution in this House, working with Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, to put forward her private Member's Bill. That campaign was supported when it first came to the House by many hon. Members from both sides, and I am pleased that we are making such good progress now.

I would also like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) for her hard work on this issue. I also thank the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and its Chair, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish).

The last time I spoke on this matter on the Floor of the House was in spring 2017, following the publication of the Select Committee's excellent report covering third-party puppy sales and maximum sentencing. We then had the short-lived draft Bill that would have covered sentencing and the recognition of animal sentience. From that, however, Ministers went back to the drawing board, which is why, to some extent, it has taken so long to get to this stage. After two years' delay, it is really good that the Government have finally brought forward this Bill, because it is important that sentences for animal cruelty should act as a deterrent. I welcome this.

We are supporting the Bill today, but we will seek to improve it in Committee. We have concerns, which are shared by a number of stakeholders, about the scope of the Bill. This has already been mentioned in an intervention. The proposals apply only to the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and therefore do not apply to wild animals in the way that they apply to domestic animals. Our concern is that this creates a two-tier system, even if by oversight as opposed to intentionally. The same sentences should be available to judges for similar or identical crimes, regardless of whether the animal is domesticated or wild.

Bill Wiggin: I took the Animal Welfare Bill through, and I disagree with the hon. Lady's understanding. It is possible to commit acts of cruelty only when we as human beings have power over an animal. We must deliver the animal's five freedoms, and it does not matter whether the animal is domesticated or wild. It is our power over the creature that determines an act of cruelty. I do not think that her accusation of a two-tier system is a fair one.

Sue Hayman: That is an interesting consideration, and one that will be explored within the legal system. I am sure that we can look into it further in Committee. To give an example, the RSPCA reports that a man was jailed for just 22 weeks after he was convicted of setting his dogs on a pet cat and a fox. It is important that harming the fox can carry the same sentence as harming the family pet in those circumstances, and the law must reflect that.

Bill Wiggin: I thought I was clear. In the case the hon. Lady just referred to, it was the dog that did the harm to the fox or the neighbour's cat, not the human being. That is where the distinction arises. Had he been torturing any of the animals, he would immediately have fallen foul of this Bill.

Sue Hayman: But if any person directs an animal to do such appalling harm, should not that person bear some responsibility?

The Sentencing Council recommends that if a defendant pleads guilty at the first reasonable opportunity, the sentence may be cut by a third, so someone who commits the most serious crime against animals and pleads guilty could end up serving only four months in prison. I think we would all agree that that is an incredibly inadequate sentence for some of the crimes we have heard about.

[Sue Hayman]

The Minister mentioned that many people have campaigned for the increase, and I would like to mention groups such as the League Against Cruel Sports, the Dogs Trust, Blue Cross, the RSPCA and Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, all of which have campaigned strongly for the measure, having previously expressed concern about the leniency of sentencing.

Mr Jim Cunningham: We should pay tribute to those organisations for all they have done over many years. Battersea Dogs & Cats Home has done an excellent job—in fact, my hon. Friend probably met its representatives when they came here last week.

Sue Hayman: I agree absolutely. There has been huge support for increasing the sentences for animal cruelty, and Battersea Dogs & Cats Home has been particularly keen to get the law changed.

I support the Minister absolutely in his view that we need to crack down on dog fighting and hand down the sentences that are appropriate for that crime. The Dogs Trust says that the woefully inadequate sentences currently available are cause for serious concern—as the Minister said, we have some of the shortest sentences worldwide. I am pleased to hear that Wales is also to take forward these measures.

There is no parity in the law—for example, if someone harms a service dog, the penalties are much higher than if they harm a pet or a farm animal. We believe that wild animals too should be covered. There is also no consistency in sentencing: a person can be sent to prison for three years if their dog injures a guide dog, but if they beat a dog to death the maximum sentence is six months. In Northern Ireland, five-year maximum sentences are already in place. It is important that we achieve consistency across the UK. Hopefully, the recent consultation in Scotland will enable us to harmonise the law right across the UK.

The Minister mentioned the connection between animal cruelty and criminal behaviour. We know that people convicted of animal cruelty are five times more likely to have a violent crime record, and that animal abuse is 11 times more likely in domestic violence situations. That is another reason why we need to act now. The legislation will protect not only our beloved animals but people, too. In addition, the Government need to place a statutory duty on local authorities to enforce the Animal Welfare Act, so that it has proper teeth, and to give local authorities adequate resources with which to enforce the regulations under the Act.

If the Government are serious about animal welfare, they must introduce the measures in the other half of the original Bill to enshrine animal sentience in law after we leave the EU. Even better, they could get behind the private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East.

Animals have the same welfare needs and any attack on them has the same impact on their welfare, regardless of whether they are a domestic pet, a police dog or a wild animal. They all feel pain; they all suffer. The people who harm them all need to feel the full force of the law.

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): Do the hon. Lady's comments about the welfare of animals also apply to animals that are bred for slaughter?

Sue Hayman: All animals need to be looked after to the best of human ability and should not be abused. We need the highest standards possible in slaughterhouses and abattoirs.

The Opposition welcome the Bill and will support it today.

2.5 pm

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman). I agree with many of her comments about the importance of the sentencing increase applying generally to cases of animal cruelty and various other offences under the Animal Welfare Act, and how there should be no distinction between particular offences. I welcome the Bill because as well as increasing sentences for animal welfare offences in respect of all animals, it has a special relevance for me and those of us who supported Finn's law, the Bill that became the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019.

When I first met my constituent PC Dave Wardell and Finn, who live in Buntingford, and heard their story, I knew we had to try to change the law. Finn had been badly injured in October 2016, saving Dave's life in an attack by a knife-wielding suspect, yet there was no separate penalty at court for the attack on this service animal, and the charge was criminal damage, treating Finn as though he was just a piece of kit. Because a seven-year-old police dog is not worth much money and criminal damage is judged by the value of the damage, no separate penalty was imposed at court for the harm done to Finn, despite the fact that the dog was almost killed in the attack, faced a four-hour operation, and had saved his handler's life. Solicitor Sarah Dixon started a national campaign for Finn's law that has united press, public and politicians. Both the *Daily Mirror* and *The Sun* have supported Finn's law, and a petition raised over 125,000 signatures.

I first drafted a Bill based on Qanto's law—a Canadian law named after another brave dog—and was given permission by the House to bring it in as a ten-minute rule Bill in December 2017. I discovered that Ministers had reservations. After many discussions and lots of pressure from supporters, I decided that a different approach was needed—one based on measures in Western Australia. Ministers were worried that, were we to have only an offence of attacking a police dog carry a sentence of five years' imprisonment, it would not reflect properly the point made by the hon. Member for Workington that the same maximum sentence should be available for ill treatment of all animals. Ministers agreed to go with the Western Australian approach and I presented the replacement Bill, which became the 2019 Act.

The original Bill was drafted with a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment for an attack on a service animal, but Ministers made it clear to me that my new Bill should make it straightforward to prosecute under the Animal Welfare Act for causing unnecessary suffering to a service animal and they would bring in this Bill to increase the sentence for Animal Welfare Act offences

against any animal. I have therefore always regarded this measure as Finn's law part two—putting in a proper maximum sentence.

I had great support for my Bill from Members of all political parties, including the author of the original Animal Welfare Act, the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw). It took many months, but we made progress. Lord Trenchard took the Bill through the House of Lords, and Royal Assent was given on 8 April, as has been mentioned. The Act is now in force. Importantly, Finn attended Parliament on all occasions and helped to get the support we needed. When the Bill finally got through in the other place, Finn let out a loud bark in the Public Gallery, to the amusement of many noble Lords and Baronesses. Very few ten-minute-rule Bills become law, so it was a great moment.

The Finn's law campaign has maintained the social media pressure, and holds a twice-weekly twitterstorm called "Finn hour" which has been directed very effectively to help change the law. Every mayor and all the police and crime commissioners in our country have supported Finn's campaign. It has been a privilege to work with the team and to see the part two Bill introduced.

Let me just read out some of the comments I have received from Finn's law campaigners about this Bill. I have received hundreds of messages of support during "Finn hour". People have said things such as:

"There are far too many instances of animal cruelty reported every day. The increased sentences are needed urgently";

"Here's wishing the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill a speedy and successful passage";

and:

"Hopefully, a speedy passage. Finn 'barks' for...the country".

It is also important that, in time, this should cover Scotland and Northern Ireland. My colleague Liam Kerr MSP has been pressing in Scotland, and we have met Nicola Sturgeon, with Dave and Finn, and there is now a consultation in Scotland. That shows that Finn is a very effective dog. We are also in touch with Northern Ireland MPs.

Finally, the House may be interested to hear that since the passing of the Bill, Finn, already the most decorated police dog, has continued to collect awards: he won at Crufts; he has been given the freedom of the town of Buntingford; and he was recently a finalist on "Britain's Got Talent", where his story and Dave's pitch for this Bill to become law brought the great Simon Cowell to tears. So, I welcome the Bill; Finn's law part two takes a big step forward today.

2.11 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Ind): I strongly welcome the measures in this short, simple Bill. I emphasise "simple", because that is how it needs to stay in order to get it implemented quickly. The changes are long promised, long needed and long overdue.

There is a perception among many people, including, importantly, members of the judiciary, that the sentences available to the courts at the moment to deal with serious offences of cruelty are inadequate, despite the UK having some of the most progressive animal welfare legislation in the world. As we have heard, the maximum penalty for the most serious cases of animal cruelty is still only a maximum of six months in prison, an unlimited fine and/or a ban on keeping animals. Given the level

of serious animal neglect, cruelty and violence against animals every day, that does not seem to be acting as a deterrent.

The Minister gave the example of the man who received only a 26-week jail term after he was found guilty of kicking a four-month-old puppy to death. We heard from the shadow Secretary of State about another example, that of the Lancashire man who received only a 22-week sentence and was disqualified from keeping animals for life after the RSPCA obtained a video of him setting his dogs on a pet cat and a fox.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for making such an important speech. Does she agree that cruelty and a lack of empathy towards animals often translates into cruelty and a lack of empathy towards people? As a psychologist, I know that part of the psychopathy checklist we used to do with patients to measure sociopathy was animal cruelty.

Angela Smith: I completely agree with the hon. Lady. Indeed, that was a point I made in the Second Reading debate on the Bill that became the 2006 Act, and I will say more about that later.

When we compare ourselves with every other European country, we see that the maximum sentence for cruelty to animals in England and Wales is woeful. A substantial number of European countries have already legislated for a maximum sentence of between two and three years, and in some cases it is up to five years, as the Minister pointed out. Further afield, Canada, Australia and New Zealand already offer a maximum of five years' imprisonment. Even within the United Kingdom, the maximum sentences in England and Wales pale in comparison with Scotland's one-year sentencing power and, even more so, with Northern Ireland's sentencing power of up to five years. I pay tribute to Northern Ireland for having made progress on this before any other devolved Administration or indeed the UK Parliament. I also recognise that Scotland has announced a consultation on proposals to increase sentences to five years, and I hope the Scottish Parliament sees that consultation through and implements stronger powers, so that we can all be in line and be in the same place as a United Kingdom.

There are several reasons why sentences for animal cruelty need to be increased, not the least of which is that public attitudes have no doubt changed in the 10 years since the passing of the 2006 Act. I served on its Bill Committee and I recall the contribution of the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggins), who led for the shadow team. I remember those sittings clearly. It is now becoming more obvious that the courts, too, want to be given the option to pass tougher sentences for extreme forms of cruelty, with many magistrates and judges asking for an increase in the punishments they have at their disposal. Without this increase in sentencing powers we could also be in the invidious position of facing the prospect of no prison terms for animal cruelty or for fighting with animals being available to the courts, if the Ministry of Justice's proposal to abolish sentences of six months or less is taken forward and implemented. We need to bear that in mind, and it is another reason why this legislation is so important.

[Angela Smith]

I also want to draw attention to the link with domestic abuse. Blue Cross has pointed out that research clearly suggests a link between animal abuse, domestic abuse and other serious crimes. It found that women in domestic violence shelters were 11 times more likely to report that a partner had hurt or killed pets in the home, as the shadow Secretary of State pointed out. The research also shows a direct correlation between cases of animal abuse and cases of child abuse, with children at risk in 83% of families with a history of animal abuse. It should not surprise any of us to hear that. We need to do more as a society to join up the investigative powers of social services, the education system and the animal welfare charities, which work so hard to identify cases of animal abuse in homes up and down the country. We could do more to encourage joint working between these different agencies and charities to raise awareness of where the risk lies to animals, children and women, and to people generally.

Before I draw my comments to a conclusion, I want to pay tribute to the Chair of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, of which I am a member, for his leadership of our inquiry—the pre-legislative scrutiny we carried out on the original Bill, which put animal sentence provisions and animal sentencing powers together in the one Bill. It was a very good inquiry, and the recommendation we clearly made was that the two sets of provisions needed to be separated and that we needed to implement the sentencing powers provisions quickly. I am only sorry that it has taken so long to get to this point. A number of Opposition Members have asked the Secretary of State repeatedly when we were finally going to see this Bill on the Floor of the House. We have got here now, so I will leave that there, and just say that I am thankful to be able, at last, to get this on to the statute book.

I hope that the Bill will quickly pass its legislative hurdles and gain Royal Assent later this year, because we need to see these measures enacted. I take the point that there are various other issues that could be addressed in these provisions, such as extending the powers to cover cases involving wild animals, but I think we just need to get on and get this Bill through Parliament and on to the statute book. I know that the animal welfare charities are keen that that should be the case. I have been contacted and asked, “Please keep it simple.” So I understand the debate about other areas of animal welfare policy, but let us just get on with this. It is long overdue and we need to get on with it.

Sir Oliver Heald: I very much agree with what the hon. Lady is saying. Does she agree that as we are towards the end of the Session and have a limited window in which to do this, we really need to get it done?

Angela Smith: I take that point entirely, although it is not the fault of Opposition Members that we are up against it in the way that we are, with, I hope, the Session due to end at some point soon and the Queen’s Speech on its way. We do need to get on with this, and we should keep it simple.

The measure is supported by all the major animal welfare charities. I pay tribute to the work on this issue by Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, Blue Cross, the Dogs Trust and the RSPCA, all of which are worthy charities

that I have worked with over a significant number of years. I also wish to mention World Horse Welfare, which of course feels strongly about this issue and needs to be included in any list of tributes to the animal welfare sector for the campaign to increase the sentencing powers.

It is right that the situation in England and Wales comes into line with that in the rest of the UK and in other western countries. I repeat that the current limit of six months, which is often reduced by a third if the defendant pleads guilty, is clearly not adequate and does not act as a deterrent, as shown by the fact that many of the associations that deal with animal cruelty have reported increases in cruelty, especially of the most serious types, despite the Animal Welfare Act being on the statute book.

I conclude by saying again: can we please just get on with this and get it implemented? Let us give the courts the powers that they need.

2.20 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), who has been a consistent champion of animal welfare since the moment she was elected to this House.

Hooray—Parliament is doing something! At long last we are making it worth while to come here. Colleagues should recognise that this is a broken Parliament. Why is it broken? Because we had an ill-advised general election, which my party obviously decided to hold. It was a disastrous result from my party’s point of view. We lost our majority and cobbled together some sort of alliance with the Democratic Unionist party. It has taken the business managers, who have come and gone over the past two years, a long time to get a grip on what to do in this sort of Parliament. At long last, they seem to have realised that there are things we can do. The Chief Whip has just disappeared, but one of his colleagues is on the Treasury Bench. I say to the business managers: if my party is struggling with a legislative programme for the new Queen’s Speech, why not consult the hon. Member for Southend West? I have a whole range of measures on which I think we could get some sort of cross-party support. Our constituents are very frustrated about the situation. If we are not going to have a general election, we cannot just keep on discussing meaningless motions. We have to get on and do something, and we could do a whole raft of things that could improve the quality of life in this country.

There is no point in our legislating on anything unless we enforce the legislation, so I was puzzled by the exchange earlier when my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) challenged my hon. Friend the Minister about cruelty to tethered horses. I listened to an Adjournment debate led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) on that very same issue. It is a puzzle to me, because in 1988, through a ten-minute rule Bill that became an Act of Parliament—the noble Lord Hogg was the Minister at the time—we got on to the statute book an Act to stop horses, ponies and donkeys being cruelly tethered and to make sure that they were properly watered and fed. For goodness’ sake, what has happened to that Act of Parliament? I realise that the longer we are here—I will come to the point made by my hon. Friend the

Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) in a moment—the more we are forgotten, but that is an Act of Parliament. If we have the law already, it is no good people jumping up with suggestions; we need to do something. We need to enforce the law that already exists, so I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will do something about that.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Does this measure not try to address that very point? We are all extremely frustrated that a good law is not being properly enforced; this measure might help.

Sir David Amess: My right hon. Friend, who has years of wisdom and experience, is yet again absolutely right. My hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) mentioned the fact that had he been listened to in 2006, the measure we are discussing would have already happened.

I am not going to fall out with the Opposition, but the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) has heard me say before that when the new Labour leader became Prime Minister in 1997, he and his team consulted a huge range of animal charities, and there was, over Labour's 13 years in government, some disappointment about the failure to deliver. That is except for one issue, on which I might fall out with one or two colleagues, and that is foxhunting. I have always felt—in those days, there were just four or five of us—that the Labour party did a good thing on foxhunting. However, I absolutely empathise with my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire in respect of those 13 years.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I just want to add to the debate something that has not really been discussed. The most recent Labour Government introduced the Animal Welfare Act 2006, under which provision was made to increase sentencing to imprisonment of up to 51 weeks and a fine not exceeding £20,000. We did amend the law, but it never got enacted, which was bizarre. It is important to recognise that we did try to take steps. I do not know why that was not enacted.

Bill Wiggin *rose*—

Sir David Amess: I do not think we can have an intervention on an intervention, but the hon. Lady makes a good and valid point that it seems my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire is going to deny.

Bill Wiggin: I am afraid I am. I urge the House also to consider the case of lost dogs, which are now returned to councils rather than to the police. The criminal justice legislation that would have changed sentencing in the way the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) just mentioned was never brought forward by that Labour Government, so I am afraid the buck stopped very much with the Labour Government of the time. Indeed, the Minister concerned subsequently served at Her Majesty's pleasure himself.

Sir David Amess: Madam Deputy Speaker, I have already been speaking for six minutes and I have not even started my speech, so I need to move on quickly. We want to get this legislation on to the statute book quickly, and people will be frustrated.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) mentioned Finn's law. Given that you are a fellow Essex Member of Parliament, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) was interested in the matter, I should say that I was privileged to be at the event at which Paul Nicholls, together with the chief of police, unveiled the monument to police dogs. I met Finn and the whole thing was just a tear-jerker. My right hon. and learned Friend spoke about the dog barking when the legislation went through the House of Lords, and I can testify to that.

Now to my brief speech. It is true that a dog is a man's best friend but, as we have heard already, there are too many examples of cruelty. There is a danger that we will talk about more and more horrific things, such as dogs being forced to fight against each other and the latest thing, which is sport trophy hunting. How is it that companies can be trying to attract Brits to go abroad, where these magnificent animals are enclosed, so that they can cut off their tusks and heads and so on? It is absolutely barbaric. Shame on anyone who goes on one of those holidays.

I am told that 26% of households in the United Kingdom own a dog and 18% own a cat. The vast majority of British people look after their pets well. We have one or two farmers present; introducing children to animals at an early age is a good way to get them to treat animals well. I know that not all children can necessarily empathise with animals, but I think that that would help. I join others in saying I am so glad that, as a developed country renowned for its historical championing of animal welfare, we are to have this legislation.

In 2017, the RSPCA investigated 141,760 complaints. That is a huge number. In 2018, the RSPCA phone line received 1.1 million calls. I am sure that none of them was made from the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), but an awful lot were certainly made in Essex. The way in which the animals are protected is the first vital part of the Bill. The second important part is that it will act as a deterrent. The Bill recognises that the root of the problem is really with animal abusers, and although it may take a few months to kick in, all the literature that I have read agrees that this legislation will act as a meaningful deterrent.

There are too many examples of animal cruelty. Recently, in a national newspaper, we heard about a French bulldog that had just had puppies. How could someone have chained that dog to a car—we all saw it—and dragged it along the road? That is just horrendous, and the person responsible has still not been caught. I am glad to say that the RSPCA is on the case.

Just last week, *The Independent* reported that a driver in Somerset was luring birds on to a road with chips before mowing them down. That is sick behaviour beyond belief. In another shocking example, which took place at the end of last year, a man in the UK hit a dog with a hammer and strangled it with a washing line just because it was getting on his nerves—perhaps he had mental health problems. None the less, these are absolutely despicable incidents, and they are happening in our country.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned dogs. He will recall that, seven years ago, he and I helped to co-open the Dogs

[Mr Mark Francois]

Trust Rehoming Centre at Nevendon in my constituency. I visited it again last week. Will he join me in commending the superb work that it does, rehoming nearly 900 dogs a year? If he wants to talk about compassionate, loving and focused animal welfare, the Dogs Trust is about as good as it gets, and Lisa Cooper and all her staff there are a living embodiment of that.

Sir David Amess: And the Dogs Trust will be very pleased with that plug that my right hon. Friend has given it. I was there. It is a magnificent Dogs Trust, and my own family has had two rescue pugs from it over the years. It is absolutely fantastic.

My right hon. Friend has just reminded me that, when I entered this place for the first time, animal welfare did not have the high priority that it does today. That is not criticising the background of colleagues; it is just saying that we did not give the matter as high a profile as we do today. I do remember, though, that when my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire had a wonderful debate on monkeys, the House was absolutely packed—but that was quite a rarity.

Sir Greg Knight: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for all the work that he has done on this subject during his parliamentary career; he is really committed to the issue of animal welfare. I hope, therefore, that he will be prepared to volunteer to be a member of the Committee on this Bill, to see that the Minister does indeed look at the important issue of enforcement.

Sir David Amess: Embarrassingly, my right hon. Friend recognises that I am susceptible to flattery, but as I am on the Panel of Chairs, I do not think that I can also serve on the Committee, much as I would like to.

Let me go back to the Protection Against Cruel Tethering Act 1988. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford was a councillor in Basildon, we opened the horse and pony sanctuary in Pitsea. It is tragic that this big event has been completely whitewashed and here we have legislation and it is not even being enforced. That is very disappointing.

Controversial lady though my good friend Ann Widdecombe is, she and I introduced a ten-minute rule Bill for endangered species some time ago. I am very glad that the Animal Welfare Act 2006—she was still here then—has been as effective as it has.

In 2017, the RSPCA investigated all these complaints. My final point is that there have been only 1,492 prosecutions, so we have a huge number of complaints—more than 1 million phone calls—but very few prosecutions. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will address that. It is very good that we are increasing sentences from six months to over two years, but is there a problem with resources? Do we not have the enforcement officers with local authorities? I am told that the cost of everything that we are putting in place today is about £500,000, which I realise is an awful lot of money.

Bill Wiggin: I think that my hon. Friend is suggesting that he would like to see the number of convictions going up. Actually, I would like to see the number of convictions going down, because people who are committing acts of hideous cruelty are going to prison

for a lot longer and are therefore less likely to do the same thing again and are less likely to involve an animal. We should judge this not by the number of convictions, but by the success with which the Bill delivers proper justice for those creatures.

Sir David Amess: My hon. Friend articulates the point that, hopefully, this sentencing will be an effective deterrent, so we will not have the same number of complaints.

On 23 May, I asked a question in this House about the lack of animal welfare officers in local authorities. I hope that the Minister might have some news on that, because, possibly, 440 RSPCA inspectors and 50 welfare officers are not enough to tackle this problem.

I repeat: this is a broken Parliament; but in a perverse way, I am glad that animals have benefited from the legislative opportunity that has arisen because it is broken. May we, in the weeks and months ahead, pass much more legislation such as this.

2.36 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess). There is a rare outbreak of consensual agreement across the Benches today, which I am proud to be part of.

All of us who are speaking in the Chamber today are speaking on behalf of those who do not have a voice. We are speaking on behalf of those whom it is our human duty to protect, to feed, to care for and to love. In particular, I speak today on behalf of Baby the bulldog and of Scamp the dog and, of course, of so many other animals who have met their sad end at the hands of humans. They should have been nurtured, stroked and loved, but instead they were ultimately abused and then killed.

I am very glad finally to have the opportunity to speak to this Bill, which has, as has been said, been a long time coming. I was proud to spend the night in Parliament in July 2016, as I queued for a private Member's Bill that was pretty much, word for word, the Bill that we have here today, and I am so pleased to see it here in paper. That Bill sought to increase the maximum sentencing for animal cruelty from six months to five years, building on a lot of work that had been done in the past, but sadly, that Bill was objected to by the Government Whips and never made it to Second Reading, and then ultimately fell with the onset of the 2017 general election. Of course, I am delighted that it is here, and I will not hold what happened against the Government. A few months later, I am delighted to say, they saw sense and announced support for the policy, and here we are today.

The change in law has been a long time coming. For too long animal abusers have been getting away with a slap on the wrist, and this Bill will finally, I hope, bring justice for the thousands of animals who have suffered human cruelty. Like the hon. Member for Southend West, I did not come to Parliament expecting to champion animal cruelty. It was an incident of the most horrific cruelty in my constituency that caused me to understand the scale of what is happening around the country, and made me determined to make a difference and to change things. I apologise for some of the graphic details that I

am about to share, but it is really important that we understand the reality of what is happening, and has happened, in the country and what has driven us to bring about this change in law today.

Baby was a small bulldog who was cruelly abused by Andrew Daniel Frankish in Redcar. Baby was held aloft by Andrew Frankish at the top of some wooden stairs before he repeatedly threw her down them, laughing as his brother filmed it. Baby was completely submissive throughout the episode, not even making a noise as she landed on the stairs, bouncing to the foot them and crashing through a baby gate to the floor. Her neck was stamped on and she was thrown to the floor with force over and over again. Her small chest was jumped on with the full body weight of one of the Frankish brothers.

One of the men said, “See if we can make it scream any more. We should throw it down the stairs by its ears,” before picking her up, throwing her against the wall, headbutting her twice and throwing her down the stairs again. Baby was tortured and beaten by those who were supposed to care for her. The whole horrible ordeal was filmed by the brothers for their entertainment, and they are heard laughing on the mobile phone. Baby should not have had to suffer that horrific abuse, but she did, and sadly was put down shortly afterwards. The evidence was found two years later on a mobile phone that happened to have been dropped on a supermarket floor; but for that, those two young men would never have been brought to justice.

We would hope that Baby would have seen justice after what she had been through, but sadly not. Despite the hard work of the police, the RSPCA and all those who gave evidence, the brothers were convicted of causing unnecessary suffering to her by subjecting her to unnecessary physical violence—an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. But she was let down because the two brothers received a suspended sentence, just six months’ tagged curfew and £300 in costs. No one in this Chamber or the country can possibly feel that the justice system did its job that day.

That was when I decided to try to amend the law to ensure that sentences fit the crime in horrific cases such as this, and I was pleased to present my Animal Cruelty (Sentencing) Bill two years ago. During the progress of that Bill, another horrific incident in my constituency made the case for a change in the sentencing law even more pressing. A small dog named Scamp was found buried alive in woods near Redcar with a nail hammered into its head. The perpetrators pleaded guilty to offences under the Animal Welfare Act and were sentenced to just four months—not enough time for reflection, punishment or rehabilitation.

John Redwood: I thank the hon. Lady for bringing these horrendous stories to the attention of the House; they are very powerful in making the case that we all want to make. I thank her for what she is doing.

Anna Turley: I really appreciate that sentiment; that was very decent of the right hon. Gentleman. So often these cases bubble up in the media but then disappear. If this place is for anything, it is for responding to situations such as this and acting. I am proud that we are all here today to do that.

Scamp, as I said, was found buried alive. The people of my constituency were horrified by the two cases I have mentioned. I pay tribute to their response. Vigils were held in my community for those animals. Hundreds of people came to lay flowers and candles and to send out the message, loudly and defiantly, that the perpetrators do not represent our community. They do not represent the people of Redcar, who are decent and kind and love animals. But the people are angry: they feel that the criminal justice system has let them down, as do the majority of people across our nation of animal lovers.

On researching how these crimes could have resulted in such impossibly lenient sentences, I was astonished to find that the maximum sentence for any form of animal abuse is just six months’ custody. Incredibly, that has not changed since the Protection of Animals Act 1911, which was introduced, essentially, to make it an offence to override or overload animals pulling loads on the street or in pits. The law is lagging a century behind. If we are to continue declaring ourselves to be a nation of animal lovers, this Bill is necessary to send a loud and clear message that we take animal cruelty seriously.

I join others in paying tribute to the animal welfare organisations that have supported this campaign and for their efforts—day in, day out—in saving and protecting animals and investigating crimes. Specifically, I would like to thank the RSPCA, the Dogs Trust, Battersea Dogs & Home and the League Against Cruel Sports. I also thank the wider public for their contribution to the progress that the Bill represents. Colleagues across the House will have been lobbied by many of their constituents who have passionately held views on the need to protect animals and ensure that sentencing is a proportionate punishment.

Mr Francois: I entirely endorse the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) about the powerful contribution that the hon. Lady has made. I pay tribute to her powerful track record on this issue. We are often called a nation of animal lovers. Does the hon. Lady agree that love is not enough? We also need protection. This Bill will now help to protect the animals that we all love.

Anna Turley: The right hon. Gentleman is right. As I said in my introductory comments, as human beings we have a duty of care, love and protection towards animals who have been bred alongside us for thousands of years and that we have cared for, protected and nurtured. That is our responsibility to them. I hope that this legislation will send out the message and that anyone who cannot understand it will be dealt with severely.

I also thank my community in Redcar and Teesside who have shown their compassion and given the Bill so much support—signing petitions and responding to the terrible acts with a determination to help change the law.

I take on board everything that has been said about getting the Bill through as quickly as possible and I have no wish to slow its progress, but before I finish I want to bring an issue to the Minister’s attention, as I will throughout the Bill’s progress, to make the most of the opportunity. It concerns the trend of filming animal cruelty with the aim of sharing and uploading videos to social media. As I said, Baby’s aggressors deliberately filmed their despicable acts for entertainment. There are

[Anna Turley]

many examples on social media of video clips of cruelty going viral—people kicking cats or tormenting small animals. The perpetrators are not content simply with inflicting injury on animals; they are motivated by the prospect of the films going viral, getting hits and being shared. That is grotesque and demonstrates a greater level of malicious intent, which possibly requires a specific deterrent. I urge the Government to consider the possibility of an aggravated sentence for those who film themselves undertaking such acts. I will table an amendment in Committee and ask the Government to support it.

Finally, I want to say a word about Baby and Scamp, because it is in their names that I sought to change the law. We will probably never know the full level of cruelty and torture that those silent and defenceless animals endured. We can only begin to imagine the pain experienced and the fear that they felt. We cannot undo the suffering caused to them, but we can show each other that such cruelty has no place in our communities, and that such depraved behaviour will face the punishment that it deserves. I wholeheartedly welcome this Bill—Baby's Bill—and I thank the Minister for bringing it forward. I look forward to voting it through, to put right the injustice and send a message that our society will not tolerate cruelty to our best friends.

2.45 pm

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): It is a great honour to follow the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), whose stories of Baby and Scamp were very moving. They do not have a voice—we are their voice, and we must shout as loud as we can. I am grateful to be appearing in my first sequel—“Finn's law: the sequel”. I will not take up too much of the House's time this afternoon.

To put my position simply, I am in favour of this Bill and the changes that it will introduce, as are my constituents in Clacton, many of whom keep animals and have contacted me to ask that I support the Bill. I am pleased to do exactly that today, because an increase to the paltry maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment for animal welfare offences, some of which we have heard about today, is so long overdue. As the Dogs Trust put it, the current sentences are woefully inadequate and far too low to deter offenders. I agree with that depressing conclusion and know that this Bill will go some way to correcting the shortcomings in the current legislation.

Moreover, as has been mentioned, the Bill will bring us into line with the legislation in other countries and parts of the United Kingdom and restore parity to the law, which, curiously, currently affords some animals stronger protections through higher sentences for abuse.

Perhaps most crucially, the Bill will shift punishment away from fines and on to serious prison sentences. That is an important change, as the courts may not currently impose large fines unless the offender can repay them in a reasonable time. That leaves us with too many abusers evading proper justice through short custodial sentences or paltry fines. To my mind, that is not an effective deterrent and I believe that that is why cases of abuse remain stubbornly high; the RSPCA investigated nearly 140,000 cruelty complaints last year, with 1,678 convictions.

As a keen advocate of animal welfare, I have heard too many harrowing stories of animal abuse. I have some first-hand experience of the aftermath: I went out on patrol with our dedicated local RSPCA officer Sam Garvey. We came across an animal close to death—not because of deliberate cruelty, but due to ignorance and neglect. That is another issue that we must pick up and run with, to make sure people know what is happening. The Bill will go some way towards bringing that into focus.

Many years ago, as I have mentioned here before, I took part in breaking up a puppy farming ring in Wales, where I saw dogs and puppies kept in the most appalling conditions. However, it was like a game of whack-a-mole: once we had broken one up, another came up straight away. I know too much about animal abuse in this country—for me, any case of abuse is one too many. I will do all I can to stop this cruelty occurring. I am the owner of three wonderful, extremely noisy dogs, so this is a personal issue for me. I promise my dogs, when I get them, “I am going to give you the best life possible—I will look after you, and when that moment comes when I have to be firm, I will also do that too, and give you as good an end as possible.”

This Bill will introduce a strong deterrent. We are a nation of animal lovers, and we want to see the punishment fit the crime. The Bill will also, as the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) mentioned, give judges the option of a higher custodial penalty, which they have been asking for for some time. I am therefore grateful to the Government for bringing forward this Bill, which is another example of our positive record on animal welfare, having already secured key changes such as the ban on third-party puppy and kitten sales, the prohibition of wild animals in circuses, CCTV in slaughterhouses, and the new—rather complicated—regulations that came into force last October to protect animal welfare.

However, while I truly celebrate our past achievements, I still want us to go further and cement our status as a global leader in animal welfare by continuing to raise the bar. We can do that only by relentlessly moving forward on animal welfare. That needs to include a ban on live animal exports when we leave the EU, a proper recognition of animal sentience when we leave the EU, and better labelling of meat products to de-incentivise the overproduction of religiously slaughtered meat that is then brought inadvertently on to the mainstream market. We must also do all we can to stop the unbelievable cruelty to cats and dogs around the world by setting an example in introducing a ban on consumption of their meat here in the UK. Certainly, those are conversations for another day—perhaps when considering a comprehensive animal welfare Bill, which I look forward to seeing in this place soon.

However, there are also ways in which we can maintain the positive trend of animal welfare developments that we have seen under this Government. This Bill is another positive example, which is why I will vote for it today and hope that it makes speedy progress through Parliament. In doing so, though, I would like to raise a concern brought to my attention by the Dogs Trust, which set out—this has been touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish)—that although the increased penalties are welcome, they will inevitably see some cases taken to the High Court, with potentially lengthy proceedings to follow. That means

that dogs seized during proceedings will spend protracted time in kennels while the cases go through the courts. This has a potential impact on the dogs' and cats' welfare, and that seems to be counterproductive to the intention of this Bill. There are also capacity and cost issues involved in keeping a large number of dogs for such a long period. I assume that there will be a similar impact on other seized animals. Given that I have not yet been able to see an impact assessment for this Bill—I do not know whether one is planned—I do not yet know whether this has been considered by the Government. I therefore ask the Minister to say something about it in his closing remarks, or to me later, if possible.

I very much look forward to having the pleasure of voting for a piece of legislation that will do more to protect animals in the UK from abuse. As I have said many times before, it is a great honour to represent the constituents of Clacton. My mailbag is full of animal welfare concerns, and I know that today I am speaking for my constituents. For me personally, when I leave this place—in the hopefully very distant future—I will look back on debates and votes like this with pride at the positive action I was a part of taking, as Paul O'Grady so famously says, for the love of dogs.

2.53 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I start by paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley). I am not very good at doing the more emotional stuff—perhaps it is the former lawyer in me—but I must admit that when she was talking about what had happened to Baby the bulldog, I found that very difficult to listen to; I think we all did. That is particularly because when I was growing up our family had a bulldog called Buster, who was a very fine dog, much loved and spoilt by all of us. The idea that somebody could treat a bulldog, or indeed any living creature, in that way, film themselves doing it and relish that experience, is terrible. As my hon. Friend said, it was purely by chance that the perpetrators were ever apprehended and prosecuted. I was going to say “brought to justice”, but I think we can all agree that they were not really brought to justice, given the lenient sentence that the courts were forced to impose.

I very much welcome the fact that this Bill is being brought forward today. As we have heard, it has taken far too long. My hon. Friend brought forward her private Member's Bill in 2017. We have not had an adequate explanation as to why the Government objected to that legislation. We then had pre-legislative scrutiny on the EFRA Committee. It was clearly not the sort of legislation that had to go through pre-legislative scrutiny—it was a very simple Bill. The argument now being used is that, because it has taken so long and we are about to adjourn for the summer recess, it is important that this Bill goes through with very little scrutiny and without any amendments—that it should just be raced through.

If there has been a delay, that is the Government's fault. That cannot be used as a reason not to try to explore some broader issues, particularly my hon. Friend's suggestion that we should look at introducing a more severe penalty for those who have filmed themselves indulging in such cruelty, which betrays the particular mindset of the individuals involved. I hope that we can have a fully fleshed out discussion in Committee of the issues involved, but I am very keen to see this Bill on the statute book as soon as possible.

Possibly one of the reasons why the Bill went to pre-legislative scrutiny in the EFRA Committee is that it was at the time paired with the sentence issue. Again, that was a very short Bill; there was one paragraph on sentence. As my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) said, I have introduced a ten-minute rule Bill on sentence. When the Minister appeared in front of the Select Committee, he said that the Government were looking for a suitable vehicle to bring the sentence proposal forward. As the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) said, there has been so much time in which we could have done so. Yesterday, when I went into the Division Lobby to vote, I found myself not quite remembering what to do, because it had been so long since I had done it. I stood there looking at the Division Clerk and thought, “Oh yes, I am meant to give them my name!”

We have not been dealing with legislation and voting. Most of this type of legislative stuff could be dealt with in one day, yet the Government have almost had to be dragged kicking and screaming to bring forward measures such as those on wild animals in circuses, which took eight years to get to this place and is pretty much uncontroversial, as is this Bill. I do not see why that took so long. Finn's law is great, but that process went on for quite a long time, as did the legislation on third-party puppy sales and CCTV in slaughterhouses. If we did nothing else but simple animal welfare measures, as the hon. Member for Southend West said, we could come up with a whole list of them to keep us occupied while we were waiting for the Brexit impasse to be resolved. To buy off a rebellion on the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, this House was promised in late November or early December 2017 that sentence would be legislated for before we left the EU. If the amendment in question had been pushed to the vote, I think the Government would have been in serious difficulties. They are therefore under a moral responsibility to bring forward this legislation as soon as possible.

The debate so far has been mostly about dogs and domestic animals; there has not been much discussion of farm animals. I get quite impatient when I hear it so often stated that we are a nation of animal lovers. That seems to show a degree of complacency and self-congratulation, because there have been absolutely horrific exposés by undercover investigations of what is going on, even in high-welfare farms. For example, Animal Equality brought a case to court fairly recently after it had gone undercover and filmed workers at Fir Tree farm in Lincolnshire kicking pigs in the face, jabbing them with pitchforks and slamming gates on their heads. At the beginning of this year, they received an eight-week suspended sentence and 100 hours' community service. There does seem to be a bit of disconnect. Pigs are very intelligent animals. I can see why people perhaps feel more empathetic about cruelty to pets because there is a direct relationship, but if people are going to eat meat, we have a duty to respect the animals in the food chain. Those people should certainly have had much longer sentences, and it should not have been left to an organisation such as Animal Equality to do undercover investigations to reveal the case.

Animal Equality has also just revealed footage from a chicken farm that supplies Nando's, Lidl and Asda—it is very much part of our mainstream food chain. The chickens were kicked and abused on the farm. They were stepped on, which broke their necks. Again, this

[*Kerry McCarthy*]

was a red tractor farm. Whenever those responsible for the red tractor scheme are put on the spot, they say that it is a one-off, and the reason why animal welfare groups such as Viva! or Animal Equality went into those farms is that rumours had been heard about them, and these are the rogue guys; they are not indicative of what is happening across the piece. However, if we look at what Viva! discovered about the way that pigs were being treated on Hogwood farm, it seems that this is just the tip of the iceberg. If these are the higher welfare farms, what is going on at the farms that do not have a red tractor mark? We need to do far more to investigate standards on our farms and in slaughterhouses. I know that there is now CCTV in slaughterhouses, but there have been horrific stories.

I am keen for the Bill to go forward, and I do not want to delay it, but there is scope to look at some amendments. The Minister has said that there might be a larger piece of animal welfare legislation, or it might be tied into the environment Bill or the agriculture Bill—I have heard lots of different rumours about what might be coming forward. I urge him to look at issues such as live exports. I do not understand why a ban would only be on live exports for slaughter and not fattening. I do not see the difference, because the cruelty is in the journey that the animals have to take.

We need to look at vivisection. The number of animal experiments continues to rise. I am not opposed to genuine scientific advances or genetic research, but so many of these experiments are totally unnecessary. If we leave the EU and its chemicals testing regime, we could find that we are doing far more duplicate animal experiments, and we need to be more serious about reducing those numbers.

The final point that I want to make is about shooting. We heard recently, as a result of inquiries that I made with the League Against Cruel Sports, that 27 million game birds are being imported into the UK to be shot for so-called sport each year. They are raised on factory farms in France, Spain, Portugal and Poland with standards that we would not accept. Regardless of what we think about shooting birds for sport, we should be challenging the likes of Eurotunnel for bringing in so many of these birds to facilitate a very cruel pastime. We certainly ought to be looking at the conditions in which the animals are transported. If we are going to have a shooting industry, I do not see why we cannot insist that either the birds are raised in this country or eggs are imported, rather than live animals.

There is a lot more to do. I welcome the Bill, and I am hoping to serve on the Bill Committee. I hope that we can get it passed into law before too long. Once the Minister has got this out of the way, there are many other things on his to-do list to turn to.

3.2 pm

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): I would like to join the Minister in thanking all the Members who have brought us to this point over the years—13 years, according to the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin). I would like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) in particular, as well as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East

(Kerry McCarthy), who have pushed this forward over the last two years. It is good to see something that was promised to us two years ago finally come to the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) made a point about what the maximum sentence would apply to. It is worth saying that the Bill is not about inadvertent mistreatment; it is about serious and deliberate cruelty. Several Members have made the point that deliberate cruelty to animals is an indicator of likely cruelty to humans, and especially domestic violence.

I agree with the hon. Member for North Herefordshire that eventually, it will be possible to save money if the number of prosecutions falls. To achieve that, we need to create the expectation among people who are thinking of being cruel to animals that they will be prosecuted and, in extreme cases, face heavy sentences, which means we must ensure that the Bill is put into place properly and properly policed. If we can deter this sort of cruelty, it will help to deter domestic violence. Any law-abiding society that applies the law properly saves money. Even if it does not save money in the short term, due to imprisonment or court costs, it will save money in the long term through encouraging and forcing people to abide by the law. We should not be counting the cost when it comes to abiding by the law; we should be ensuring that we are a law-abiding society.

Much of the cruelty that takes place is part of serious criminal activity. We are not just talking about lone criminal acts. In some cases, we are talking about international dog-fighting rings, with serious money involved. To clamp down on these rings, we need serious sentences. Dog fighting is a good example of where I part company with the hon. Member for North Herefordshire. It is not a human being hurting a dog—it is a dog hurting a dog—but what happens to animals in most cruelty cases is a direct result of the attitude of the human beings who are responsible for those animals. We cannot say that we will not prosecute a case simply because another animal has created that violent situation. If a human being is meant to be responsible for that animal, they need to be responsible for what that animal is doing. I look forward to dog fighting becoming as much a part of the past as cock fighting and bear baiting.

There are serious issues about which animals should be covered by this legislation. The Opposition are not necessarily convinced that every animal that needs to be covered will be covered. Wild animals and farmed animals have been mentioned. Several campaigning organisations have contacted us—I am sure they have contacted other Members—to suggest all sorts of areas where the Bill could be improved. At some stage, we will need a comprehensive and effective animal welfare Bill, as the hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) said. I believe that a Labour animal welfare Bill will probably be more comprehensive and effective, but that is something for the future.

We do not want to allow our wish to improve the Bill to get in the way of passing it. We will put forward things that we think might improve it, but the most important thing is that we get a quick resolution of this specific issue and pass the Bill. I am proud and delighted to join my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) in commending the Bill to the House.

3.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):

I would like to thank the Members who have made valuable contributions to this important debate. As has been explained, one of the key purposes of the Bill is to ensure that there is a deterrent to animal cruelty by extending the maximum sentence possible. The many examples that have been given, particularly by the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), will reverberate among those for whom the welfare of animals is close to their heart. I am on to my fourth rescue dog, and it is noticeable that when a dog's history is not known, they often flinch when they see people of a certain character, which perhaps reflects the horrendous experience they have been through. They often require a lot of extra training and support to recover from that.

I genuinely hope that this legislation, which has good support, will make quick progress under the stewardship of the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley). I should point out that the Bill is just one element of the action that the Government intend to take to improve animal welfare. There have been a number of pieces of legislation, and I hope they will soon be joined by this Bill and the Wild Animals in Circuses (No.2) Bill, which is progressing well through the other place.

I now turn to the points made by individual Members. The hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) mentioned feral cats. It is important to state that the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which this Bill is modifying, covers protected animals. In its legal definition, a protected animal is a vertebrate animal of a kind commonly domesticated in the British Isles. This Bill ensures that stray dogs and feral cats will be covered.

Several Members, including my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), have referred to the issues of horse tethering. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 and these new maximum penalties will absolutely apply to horse tethering where that leads to unnecessary suffering. Horse tethering is fully covered in the equine welfare code made under the 2006 Act, which gives clear guidance on appropriate tethering. Anyone not tethering in line with the statutory code risks prosecution under the Act. My hon. Friend the Minister recently hosted a roundtable with local authorities and welfare bodies, and he agreed to share best practice on enforcement on this very specific issue.

The hon. Members for Workington (Sue Hayman) and for Ipswich (Sandy Martin) both mentioned wildlife, as did the hon. Member for Bristol West. The House will be aware that this Bill is specifically about amending the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Other legislation does apply to wildlife, with different levels of penalties that can be imposed, including unlimited fines. However, I am conscious, as they are, that the commitment was specifically made to amend this Act. Who knows whether there will be opportunities for further legislation in a new Session of Parliament, if—dare I say it?—we are ever allowed to prorogue so that we can move on to the next Queen's Speech. That is a matter for debate on another day.

It is important, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) said, that we consider Finn's law part two, or

the sequel, but this Bill does actually provide good strengthening. He referred to other parts of the United Kingdom, but it is important to say that this is a devolved matter and the Government take that seriously. I want to commend him and others for their national campaign and what they have been doing to take the case to other parts of the United Kingdom. As the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) said, Northern Ireland is already at that stage, and we will be joining it.

The hon. Lady mentioned the Lord Chancellor's proposals about custodial sentences. My right hon. Friend is considering the issues relating to more minor, short-term custodial sentences. He is on record as saying that there is a very strong case to abolish sentences of six months or less altogether, with some closely defined exceptions, but any such proposals do not affect this Bill, which is about increasing the maximum available penalty for animal cruelty to five years. It may apply to the more minor offences under the Animal Welfare Act, but those offences, such as in section 9, do not generally attract a custodial sentence now, and an unlimited fine will continue to apply.

We also have the issue of the sentencing guidelines. The Government have already been in contact with the independent Sentencing Council about the change to the maximum penalty, which we hope Parliament will introduce shortly. There is already an existing sentencing guideline in relation to animal cruelty offences under the Act. It was reviewed and updated by the Sentencing Council as recently as 2017. However, I am pleased to say that the council has confirmed that, once the Bill is passed, it will consider the need to revise the guidelines and any revision would involve a public consultation.

Angela Smith: I am grateful to the Minister for the clarification she has given, but let me be clear that, in my speech, I was absolutely defending the need for this Bill in the context of the potential change in the law in relation to six-month sentences, which I think strengthens the need for this legislation. That is all I will say.

Dr Coffey: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady's point, which is why I am sure the House welcomes what she has said and also the progress on the Bill.

The hon. Member for Redcar referred to filming and to making this an aggravating factor. I think this is a very useful point, and we will certainly raise it with the independent Sentencing Council. As I have said, it has already indicated that it will consider and revise the guidelines once this Bill has become legislation.

One of the things my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West mentioned was enforcement. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, it is for local authorities, the Animal and Plant Health Agency and indeed the police, which all have powers of entry, to inspect complaints of suspected animal cruelty and take out prosecutions, where necessary. It is for local authorities to make decisions about what they consider to be local priorities, rather than for the Government to decide. However, it is important that local authorities have the opportunity, as they do now, to continue to work in close partnership with others. We know that the RSPCA does investigate allegations of cruelty. It has successfully prosecuted between 800 and 1,000 people on average every year, and in doing that, it does a very valuable job.

[Dr Thérèse Coffey]

My hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) mentioned the impact of animals being held in kennels. I think it is fair to say that we do not necessarily expect a large number of cases to come before the Crown court, where the issue about the length of time may arise. At present, we estimate that about 25 cases that would previously have been held in the magistrates courts may well now be held in the Crown court. However, we consider that only a very small number of animals may need to be held in kennels for an extended period.

We cannot say from the Dispatch Box today precisely what decisions will be made about which animals would need to be taken away from the owner while somebody is awaiting sentencing, and such an action would not necessarily follow. However, it is also important to state that the Animal Welfare Act has provisions that allow a court to disqualify anyone from having animals, if necessary for life, if they have been convicted of an offence.

The court can also issue orders under section 3(6)(b) of the Bail Act 1976 to prevent the commission of further offences while on bail. The courts can make the sale of existing animals, and indeed a prohibition on owning animals, a condition of a defendant's bail. It is important to stress that courts already have the power not only to prevent people on trial for animal welfare offences from acquiring new animals, but to remove the animals they already have. I do not believe we need further legislation to bring that about.

On what was said by the hon. Member for Bristol West, this legislation does apply to farmed animals. It is about animals that are under the care and protection of humans. I am pleased that she recognises the things we have done on animal welfare.

Kerry McCarthy *rose—*

Dr Coffey: I appreciate that the hon. Lady wants to intervene, but if she will allow me to say a few more things—

Kerry McCarthy: Will the Minister give way on a point of clarification?

Dr Coffey: I am going to try to answer the points the hon. Lady made, and I have said that I would then give way.

We have made CCTV mandatory in slaughterhouses in England, as she has pointed out. As she is aware, we are considering carefully the export of live animals. The Farm Animal Welfare Committee has recently submitted its advice on the welfare of animals in transport, which includes advice on controlling live exports—not only to the Government, but to the devolved Administrations. We are considering that carefully, and we aim to publish it with a Government response in due course.

Kerry McCarthy: All I wanted to say was that the Minister has twice referred to me as the Member for Bristol West, and I am the Member for Bristol East.

I would have thought she would know that by now, because we do tend to go head-to-head rather a lot.

Dr Coffey: I do apologise. The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) was not here at the start of the debate, and I thought my hon. Friend the Minister had referred to her as the Member for Bristol West, but I do apologise.

On the other issues that have been raised, I was pleased to hear from the Members who made contributions today. A number of interventions were made by my hon. Friends the Members for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), and my right hon. Friends the Members for Wokingham (John Redwood) and for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), as well as by the SNP spokesperson on these matters, the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron). It is important that we continue to make good progress in Committee, so that we can bring this Bill swiftly back to the House and it can make its way to the other place. With that, I commend this Bill. The Bill represents the fact that we are a nation of animal lovers, and it certainly reinforces that.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

ANIMAL WELFARE (SENTENCING) BILL (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 25 July 2019.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—(Mike Freer.)

Question agreed to.

Climate Change, the Environment and Global Development

3.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Stephenson): I beg to move,

That this House has considered tackling climate change, protecting the environment and securing global development.

I welcome this timely debate and the work of the Select Committee on International Development, and of many hon. and right hon. Members on both sides of the House, to highlight the urgency of addressing the interlinked challenges of tackling climate change, protecting the environment and ensuring sustainable development.

The challenge has never been clearer and our will to act has never been stronger, as demonstrated by the resounding support from both sides of the House for committing the UK to a target of net zero emissions by 2050. The world faces the challenges of doubling global infrastructure to meet development and of feeding 1 billion more people, while simultaneously halving global greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 to keep pace with the Paris climate change targets.

Globally, we are not yet on track to meet the aspirations of the Paris climate agreement. On our current trajectory, we may hit 1.5° C above pre-industrial temperatures as early as 2030, and 3.5° C above by 2050. This risks 100 million people being pushed into poverty by climate change by 2030, making the sustainable development goals much harder to achieve.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): What has been the impact of the Americans withdrawing from the Paris agreement? Has there been any dialogue, for want of a better term, with the Americans to get them back into the agreement?

Andrew Stephenson: We have regular discussions with the American Government. Obviously we think the Paris climate change agreement is important, but we are seeing reductions in America's emissions because many states and many bodies across the country have decided to up their ambitions despite the actions of the federal Government. We are seeing some encouraging signs, even if we hope the US Administration would go further and faster.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Minister talks of the need for the US to go further, but will he acknowledge that the UK needs to go an awful lot further, too? He will be aware that the Committee on Climate Change reported just this morning that

"actions to date have fallen short of what is needed for the previous targets and well short of those required for the net-zero target".

If that is what the Government's own watchdog is saying, what will they do to make sure we have real action, not just warm words?

Andrew Stephenson: We are the best in the G20 in terms of our reductions. Between 1990 and 2017 we reduced our emissions by 42% while growing our economy by 72%. I will happily take some criticism from the

Committee on Climate Change, but we should acknowledge that this country is a global leader in our efforts to tackle climate change.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I congratulate the Government on leading the way as the first major industrial country to call for net zero carbon emissions by 2050. We lead the world on our international development commitments, and as a member of the International Development Committee—the Committee is meeting in a few minutes' time, which is why many members of the Committee are not here today—may I urge the Government to make sure we do so on the environment, too?

Andrew Stephenson: I thank my hon. Friend for what he says, and I pay tribute to him and to other members of the International Development Committee for their inquiry on this subject. I know the Committee heard many different pieces of evidence, and it made firm recommendations to the Government. I hope we will have the official response soon—hopefully next week—and then we can all reflect on how we can go further and faster, because we do need to go further and faster in all these areas.

Caroline Lucas: Will the Minister give way?

Andrew Stephenson: I am going to make some progress. I am about one minute into my speech, and I have already given way to the hon. Lady.

The International Development Committee described the impacts of climate change as "nightmarish," and it talked about increasing drought, flooding, displacement, hunger and disease, potentially reversing the hard-won development progress we have seen over the past few decades.

The International Development Committee's inquiry on UK aid for combating climate change, published in April, found that

"it will be the least developed countries and the most vulnerable people who will be hit the first and the hardest by climate change...Climate change cuts across everything. The effectiveness of all UK aid spending is dependent on whether the international community rapidly and effectively combats the causes and impacts of climate change."

As the scale of the challenge becomes ever clearer, we see a tipping point in public awareness and engagement.

I doubt whether any hon. Member here today does not have schools in their constituency that are going above and beyond in learning about the environment. I recently visited St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Barnoldswick, in my constituency, to present it with an Eco-Schools green flag award.

We have also seen children at schools around the world going on strike to call for urgent climate action. We have seen the success of London Climate Action Week, with 150 events showcasing a wide spectrum of climate action and solutions, and we have witnessed the strength of cross-party support for our bid to host COP 26 next year and for the UK leading the way with our net zero target.

There are many challenges ahead. We know we need to do more, and we do not have all the answers yet, but we should be proud of the UK's ambition and leadership to date on climate change. We have led the world in delivering clean growth, showing that action on climate change can be a win-win for the environment, for the economy and for quality of life.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): Is the Minister able to go into more detail on the radical change that is urgently needed across all levels of government and all Departments to make sure that change happens within the next 11 years? That is what the advice is telling us. Otherwise we face a climate emergency the likes of which we have never seen.

Andrew Stephenson: As the hon. Lady will be aware, the Government have published a number of strategies that are kept under constant review. In my own area—business and industry—“The Road to Zero” was published about a year ago, and it talks about phasing out all petrol and diesel cars by 2040, which is something we need to keep under review. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House think we should do it faster, and as we roll out charging points, invest in industry and take various other steps, we should always keep these things under review as we seek to decarbonise transport, home heating and all sectors of our economy.

Anna McMorris: Words are fantastic, but we need to see action and targets to meet them. The advice of the Committee on Climate Change is actually to move towards getting rid of diesel cars long before 2040. We need to take urgent action to cut those emissions, and to cut them now.

Andrew Stephenson: I have some sympathy with what the hon. Lady says, but the Government set the target in “The Road to Zero” after consultation with industry and different groups. We came to it as a sensible target. We now have more than 200,000 electric vehicles on our roads and more than 20,000 charging points.

One thing that is overlooked when people think about the charging infrastructure is that, over the past few months, we have been installing 1,000 additional public charging points every month. We are starting to see a significant ramping up of progress, following announcements of investment in this area over successive years. Over £1.5 billion is being invested in the decarbonisation of cars in this country. In the months ahead, in addition to further Government announcements, we will start to see progress in this area.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that what we have is a process in which the Committee on Climate Change is helping us by pointing out what we need to do next, and we are doing it? Recently, 80% by 2050 became 100%, so it is a process by which we are meeting our targets.

Andrew Stephenson: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that point. Most of the committee’s critique of the Government is fair, but we are about to publish updates on 80% of the actions. In many we have signalled a clear policy intent, for example on future home standards. A lot of progress is being made, and I agree with his point.

On 27 June, we set a legally binding target to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions from across the UK by 2050. That world-leading target will bring to an end our contribution to climate change, and makes the UK the first major economy to legislate for a net zero target. The UK also has a strong track record on international development, through our legal commitment to provide

0.7% of our gross national income as official development assistance. Alongside efforts to reduce our own emissions, we have committed to work with developing countries, including as part of our ODA, to enable them to pursue clean growth and climate-resilient development. We are on track to provide £5.8 billion of climate aid—our international climate finance—to help developing countries tackle the causes and impacts of climate change between 2016 and 2020.

That climate aid is delivering real results. Since 2011, we have helped more than 47 million people cope with the effects of climate change and natural disasters. We have provided 17 million people with access to clean energy. But it is still not enough. As the International Development Committee noted, it is not a problem that can be solved by Government action alone. We need businesses, communities and individuals to also act. It will be really challenging: real shifts in behaviour and global ambition will be needed, and there can be no more business as usual.

The next few years are critical. That is why tackling the crisis has become such a high priority for the UK, and it is why we have offered to preside over the major UN climate summit next year—COP 26—in partnership with Italy.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): On the point about business, what has also been said clearly this morning in the report back from the Committee on Climate Change is that the Government need to set out a road map so that business can understand in which direction they are going, and then the investment will follow. The first action has to lie with the Government.

Andrew Stephenson: To go back to the example I have just used of decarbonising transport in this country, “The Road to Zero” is a clear road map that was set out a year ago by the Government. It was not a kneejerk reaction: it was done in consultation with industry, other bodies and our international partners to come up with a credible track to reduce carbon emissions from road transport.

The UN climate action summit in September this year is a key staging post in our efforts. It will be a critical opportunity for world leaders to set out their ambitions ahead of COP 26, and to drive an unprecedented shift in the way we approach resilience and adaptation. Despite the scale of this challenge and the opportunities to be gained from acting, it is often seen as a problem for the future. That is why the United Kingdom and Egypt are co-leading the resilience and adaptation theme at the UN climate action summit in September. We want to drive a transformational change in the way different stakeholders around the world think about and invest in resilience and adaptation.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): The resilience point is well made and incredibly important. The Committee on Climate Change said today that some 9,000 properties a year need to be fitted with flood protection—up from 500 at the moment. Kirkstall in my constituency flooded in December 2015 and the Government still have not committed to the level of flood protection that the community needs. When the Government speak about resilience, is it not just more warm words and not enough action?

Andrew Stephenson: I disagree with the hon. Lady. We have seen billions of pounds spent on flood defences across the United Kingdom. There are areas where we want to go faster: the Environment Agency has just finished a £1 million project in Earby in my constituency, and I am lobbying for it to do even more in the area. I am aware that many right hon. and hon. Members would like us to go further and faster on flood defences. I will happily raise the issue with my colleagues in DEFRA, but we are investing in ensuring that we are resilient in the future. We can do more, and we need to do more, but we are making some good progress.

Let me turn to the issue of international climate finance. Many of the interventions so far have been about our domestic record, but I want to steer us back to our international obligations and what we are doing to help some of the poorest in the world.

Let me give the House a sense of the ways in which the UK is supporting developing countries with the climate challenge. The UK uses its international climate finance, a growing part of our UK aid budget, to support developing countries to move on from business as usual to: adapt and be more climate resilient; take up transformational low-carbon development; and tackle deforestation and unsustainable land use. The Department for International Development, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and DEFRA work together to deliver that support, which is making a difference in over 100 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Two quick points. At the launch of the “People and Nature” campaign in Parliament on Monday, we discussed the fact that there is not much point in DFID adopting these very admirable principles if UK Export Finance is supporting fossil fuel investment. Secondly, we have heard reports recently that in Brazil, parts of the Amazon the size of a football pitch are being deforested every minute. The current President’s approach suggests that he wants to continue that deforestation. Where does that fit? We hear that Government Ministers are going to Brazil to talk about fossil fuel exploration. There seems to be a lack of consistency between what DFID and other arms of Government are doing.

Andrew Stephenson: I thank the hon. Lady for those points. There has been a clear trend in UK Export Finance to move away from support for fossil fuels and towards significant additional resources going into funding renewables. Where fossil fuels have been supported they have been fuels such as gas, which is widely seen as a transition fossil fuel, and away from high-polluting fossil fuels such as coal, which UK Export Finance has not financed for well over a decade. I will touch on Brazil in my speech, so if she will allow me I will come on to that shortly.

Through programmes like the Climate Investment Funds, we are: climate-proofing road and canals in Zambia; mainstreaming climate resilience into Government planning in Malawi and Mozambique; supporting climate-vulnerable small island states to manage climate risks; and helping to drive investment in some of the largest solar power complexes in the world. Through programmes like the Renewable Energy Performance Platform, we are mobilising private sector investment in

solar homes systems and small-scale renewable energy in sub-Saharan Africa, bringing clean power to those who need it most.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I thank my good friend the Minister for allowing me to intervene. Ever since I was a boy, I have always been extremely concerned about jet fuel being injected directly into the upper atmosphere. I was told when I was young that it was clean. Of course it is not. One of the really big problems we have internationally is that jets go across our skies—some of them are not ours, obviously—and we cannot electrify a jet engine. It would be wonderful if someone could come up with a way of making an electric jet engine, so that we do not spew out exhaust into the upper atmosphere, which must have a direct effect on our climate.

Andrew Stephenson: I agree with most of what my hon. and gallant Friend says. I would just say that we do not have an electric jet engine—yet. Through the industrial strategy, a huge number of programmes are being run through my Department, including the Future Flight Challenge, which is looking at exactly these challenges so that we do not just electrify road transport, but move to lighter-weight and more efficient engines, and eventually on to electric engines flying our passenger aircrafts. Some of that work is running over a long period of time, but between Government and industry we are investing billions of pounds in exactly the kind of challenge he talks about.

We are a world leader in climate policy, green finance, and sustainable services and technologies. Through our climate aid programmes we are sharing our learning and expertise internationally, whether bilaterally or in multilateral forums, building on our pioneering Climate Change Act 2008, net zero legislation and standard-setting power sector reform, helping to build markets for clean growth technology and services worldwide. To give the House an example, in June, my Department hosted delegates from 12 developing countries for a week-long workshop to introduce them to British expertise in offshore wind and see it in action in the Tees Valley. We are now working with the World Bank to support those countries with their plans to develop their own offshore wind projects.

We are building bilateral partnerships to tackle these challenges. For example, the UK recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Colombia, signalling the start of a bold new partnership for sustainable growth. This first-of-its-kind partnership focuses on: clean growth; halting deforestation and environmental crime; preserving biodiversity; and promoting green finance to ensure the private sector can play its part in supporting Colombia’s transformation. About 200,000 square hectares of forest are lost each year in Colombia, putting its diverse ecosystems, indigenous communities and natural resources at risk, as well as driving greenhouse gas emissions. Our programmes address the structural development issues that lead to such deforestation, and in turn reduce carbon emissions.

One of our programmes works to restore degraded land, increase biodiversity and protect standing forests while at the same time increasing agricultural production by 17%, bringing income to the poorest farmers. That is sustainable development in action, benefiting the climate, the environment and people’s livelihoods. Working to

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mobilise private investment to address the climate challenges is a strong focus of our climate aid, and our innovative, market-driven approach ensures that we meet global climate and sustainable development needs hand in hand.

To give another example, growing demand for soy is driving agricultural expansion and deforestation in Brazil, particularly in the Cerrado savannah region, driving up emissions and causing environmental destruction. During London Climate Action Week, we announced a green bond that will help to prevent land conversion and restore natural habitats, while supporting farmers to grow their businesses. Launched the same week as the green finance strategy, it highlights our commitment to using our green finance expertise to support sustainable development in Brazil and other countries that will be most directly impacted by the effects of climate change.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): My hon. Friend makes an important point about sustainable development and preventing deforestation. Does he agree that we must reach out to countries that we currently have a difficult relationship with—for example, Russia, where we are seeing dramatic deforestation in Siberia that could create untold damage not only to the region, but to the climate?

Andrew Stephenson: I agree very strongly with what my hon. Friend says. We must work with all countries around the world. Obviously, most of our overseas work is focused on the poorest countries, but we must ensure that we engage with middle-income countries and all countries to ensure that they play their part, because it is the poorest in the world who will pay the price, and an ounce of carbon does not recognise national borders. We must work on this internationally; that is why I am really proud that we are bidding for the conference of the parties to be held here. We can never stop pushing on this globally to ensure that we are all doing everything that we can.

The scale of the challenge that we have talked about today is immense. Meeting our objectives and delivering the global transition to a low-carbon economy, while ensuring continued global development, will require action from Governments, business and communities. The UK is at the forefront of ambitious action to catalyse that transition. As announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the G20, we have committed to ensuring that all UK aid spend will be aligned with the Paris agreement. That will mean that every penny we spend on support for developing countries, whether for education, job creation or infrastructure, will be compatible with our shared climate change goals.

We will work collaboratively with partners around the globe, including the multilateral development banks, to develop appropriate and robust methodologies for enabling our aid to align with the objectives of the Paris agreement, and we will encourage others to follow suit. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has also set out his intention to double the spending in his Department on climate and environment between 2021 and 2025, and to put climate and environment at the centre of our aid strategy.

Government action alone will not be enough; the global transition to a low-carbon economy will require unprecedented investment in green and low-carbon technologies, services and infrastructure. That is why the green finance strategy that we launched on 2 July is such an important step. Building a financial system fit for net zero will mean fundamental changes to the way in which investment decisions are made.

The strategy will position the UK at the forefront of this global transition, catalysing the investment we need to transition to a net zero economy, while strengthening the competitiveness of the UK financial sector and the wider economy, and ensuring that the City of London is the go-to hub for green investment and that we seize the significant opportunities of clean growth for the UK economy. Only once we are shifting the global economy by trillions will we really start to see a gear change in the low-carbon transition. It is critical that we all work together to make this transition. Tackling climate change and pursuing clean growth are critical to continued global prosperity and meeting the sustainable development goals, and for our continued prosperity and security right here in the UK.

As well as challenges, the low-carbon transition will bring huge opportunities—for cleaner air, for conserving the environment, for creating economic opportunities that the UK is well placed to seize. There are almost 400,000 jobs in the UK's low-carbon sector and supply chains, and it is estimated that the UK low-carbon economy could grow by 11% per year until 2030. I am proud that UK companies such as Lightsources, which is developing solar in India, BBOX, which is enabling off-grid power in sub-Saharan Africa, and Faro Energy, which is investing in renewables in Brazil, are helping to drive the clean growth transition around the world.

Caroline Lucas: Will the Minister give way?

Andrew Stephenson: I am about to conclude my remarks, but I look forward to the hon. Lady's contribution.

The UK has a proud record in this area. We have committed to spend 0.7% of GDP on international development and are the first major economy to legislate for net zero. By working together—Government, business and individuals—we can be world leaders in this area. I look forward to the contributions of hon. Members from across the House, including that of the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin).

3.46 pm

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate, although I am surprised that the Secretary of State for International Development is not here, given we were told this would be a DFID debate. It was announced as such in last week's business statement, but then the business was changed again on Monday. I am glad that the debate itself has not been chopped from the Order Paper, but I am not sure why a Minister from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy opened it. This is a rather chaotic way to deal with such an important issue and a pretty shambolic way to deal with the Prime Minister's legacy.

It is just two months since Labour secured the support of this House for our becoming the first Parliament in the world to declare a climate emergency. We called

then on the Government to commit to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. It was a small but important step and a reminder that real change comes from below. What a testament it is to those young activists striking from school and to the extinction rebellion movements that they have changed the tone of debate in this country so irreversibly. What a testament it is to their moral leadership that Secretaries of State and prime ministerial contenders in the Conservative party are now scrambling to demonstrate their green credentials, albeit, I would say, not that convincingly. It is a testament to their activism that a Prime Minister whose first act in office was to shut down the Department for Energy and Climate Change is now trying to make it her last act to create a climate legacy that she desperately hopes she might be remembered for.

That said, sounding the alarm and setting out promises for 30 years away is not enough. Politicians have known about the impact of climate breakdown for decades but have continued to pour billions into fossil fuel industries while offering little more than thoughts and prayers to those in the global south being hit hardest by the consequences.

Sarah Newton: I gently say to the hon. Gentleman that he is rather letting down his side of the House. When the Climate Change Act was passed in 2008, a radical consensus had been forged in this House such that this issue was above party politics. Unlike in other countries where climate change is a party political issue, we are united in this House in wanting to tackle it. It is one thing to have a robust debate on the means to the ends, but we are all united around those ends.

Dan Carden: The hon. Lady should wait for my full contribution, but there are certainly differences between many Members and the Government, not least around support for fracking and other fossil fuel investments still being supported by the Government.

Wera Hobhouse: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if there were consensus on the need for us to stop using fossil fuels, the Government could ban fracking exploration tomorrow?

Dan Carden: I do agree with the hon. Lady, and that brings me to my next point.

The language that we use in this debate is important, and it is important that we are now calling this climate emergency what it is, but unless we as a House act faster to deliver action, these will be nothing more than warm words. It is clear that we must be far more ambitious about international climate action that serves the interests of the world's poorest, and not just its elites. We must act now, and go further and faster than ever before.

Caroline Lucas: Unfortunately, I am about to lead a debate in Westminster Hall, so I will not hear all of the hon. Gentleman's speech. I apologise for that, but it is an unavoidable clash.

On the issue of international action, does the hon. Gentleman agree that aviation and shipping emissions ought to be included in the Government's net zero strategy? The Committee on Climate Change has said that they should be included, but we have heard nothing from the Government to suggest that they are going to include them.

Dan Carden: I am happy to say that the Labour party is committed to exactly that. Dealing with the figures honestly is one of the first actions that we can take.

The shadow Chancellor recently spoke at length about the preparations that Labour is making to roll out a climate emergency programme should there be a general election this autumn. We are working on a range of ambitious new policy proposals that we think will turbocharge our effort. We want to be as ambitious as possible, and we are looking into how we can bring forward the target date for net zero emissions.

Let us examine the Government's international actions on fossil fuels, climate finance, and global climate justice. Take the Prosperity Fund, set up by this Government, plagued by scandal, and funded to the tune of £1.2 billion from the aid budget. In October 2018, it was found that 29% of its energy spending was on fossil fuel projects, including projects to expand the oil and gas sectors in Brazil and Mexico and support for fracking in China. Or take CDC Group, which is wholly owned by the Department for International Development: it, too, continues to invest directly in fossil fuels. Then—as has been mentioned—there is UK Export Finance, 97% of whose support for energy in developing countries is going to fossil fuels, with less than 1% going to renewable energy. The Minister was keen to give examples of support for renewables, but the statistics are stark and speak for themselves.

Let us take the Foreign Secretary and Conservative leadership contender. He talks a good game on the climate emergency, but in April this year, during his first official visit to Africa, he announced an agreement that will allow money from UK Export Finance to support the building of offshore oil and gas installations in Senegal by British companies BP and Cairn Energy. Or take the UK's failure to use its influence in the big multilateral development banks, such as the World Bank, to ensure that their investment strategies are aligned to help us hit the Paris agreement's target.

The Government must do much better on all those fronts. The International Development Committee has called on them to use their influence on the boards of the big multilateral banks to move them away from high carbon investments. Labour is committed to divesting fully our aid budget from the financing of fossil fuel projects, so I ask the Minister whether the Government will back up their warm words with action. They could announce today that they will stop funding fossil fuel expansion overseas, and encourage others to do the same.

Kerry McCarthy: I do not know whether my hon. Friend has had a chance to look at the Environmental Audit Committee's report on UK Export Finance, but does he agree that the Minister's assertion that we are significantly reducing our investment in fossil fuels through that organisation does not stack up? There does not seem to be any evidence that we have shifted our policy at all.

Dan Carden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and the Government need to report back to Parliament on that.

I want to say a few words about climate finance. The signatories to the Paris agreement have committed to finding at least \$100 billion just for mitigation and

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adaptation in developing countries, but even that number is extremely conservative; UN Environment estimates that the real number for mitigation and adaptation alone could in fact be as high as £500 billion by 2050. So why does the UK not have a serious climate finance strategy? In its most recent report in May the International Development Committee called again for one to be given to Parliament, and I urge the Minister today to set out exactly when that will happen.

I turn now to how the UK can tackle the root causes of climate emergency, rather than just manage the decline of our planet. It must not be the role of the British Government and the British taxpayer to throw money at clearing up the mess left behind by the world's biggest polluters simply so that they can carry on polluting. The truth is that our global economic model is fundamentally broken; it is a system that is driving us towards disaster in the quest to accumulate ever more wealth and extract ever more profit. Unless there is a UK Government who are serious about transitioning away from our current economic model, however ambitious our international action is it will only tackle the symptoms of climate change, never its root causes.

It is a tragedy that those least responsible for the climate crisis will be the first to suffer its consequences. It is not the world's billionaires who are suffering the worst effects of planetary breakdown, and we should be under no illusions: they are making plans not to fix our economic model, but to escape, survive and ride out the catastrophe.

I want to bring to the House's attention the writings of the technology writer Douglas Rushkoff, who last year recounted how he was brought in as an expert adviser to a room of billionaires to talk about climate change. He was flabbergasted when, instead of asking him about how to prevent the climate catastrophe or what role they could play, they asked him about how they could insulate themselves from the danger, including, amazingly, the use of disciplinary collars to maintain the loyalty of their private security forces to protect them when society finally broke down and when wages and money no longer held sway. That is quite remarkable.

The time for tinkering around the edges is over. To avert climate catastrophe we must radically restructure our economy here in the UK and globally so that it works for the many, not the few. We should consider this: if global growth continues at 3% each year the global economy will have doubled in size by 2043, and so too will material consumption unless we can de-link it from economic growth. For too long we have ignored the plain fact that we cannot sustain permanent growth on a planet of finite resources. That is exactly why we need the kind of systemic change that our shadow Chancellor has spoken about, and it is why we must use and harness every policy lever available to us and ensure that the state and the private sector invest in the infrastructure to bring about the next green industrial revolution. And that is why we must work with the City to reform and why we must use our influence on the global stage to promote a more democratic global economy.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): As part of the radical agenda that my hon. Friend rightly says is required if we are to deal with the climate emergency,

does he share my view that three things in particular are needed: radical decarbonising of our current energy set-up; an acceleration of investment in electric vehicle infrastructure; and a significant increase in tree cover in the UK?

Dan Carden: My hon. Friend makes three excellent points, all of which I hope to touch on later.

Under Labour, the Department for International Development will play a crucial role in global climate justice, and two of our five top international development priorities are to catalyse a global ecological transition and to help build a fairer global economy. We are hearing a lot about a global green new deal across countries, and Labour envisages a green industrial revolution right here in the UK, but we must be clear that the ultimate test of any such deal is whether it will solve the climate emergency, deliver decent green jobs, produce a better quality of life and, critically, bring about climate justice for the world's poorest, because that is exactly what we must bring about.

We are talking about nothing less than a great transition in how we structure our economies and societies, and that is why I want to end on a note of hope. We spend a lot of time talking about the catastrophe that is starting to unfold and the existential threat facing the planet. The vested interests are so strong that we must keep campaigning and fighting and, yes, the media barons are not always on our side on this one. They tell us that anyone who speaks up on the climate emergency is simply insisting that we all have to make terrible personal sacrifices such as cutting our holidays or our use of plastic straws. I understand why the narrative of fear can prevail, but what the climate emergency is really about is pointing the way to the better world that we all want to live in. This is about levelling things up and radically slashing inequality. It is about our children having clean air to breathe and greener public spaces to play in. It is about living on a planet with millions more trees, travelling on better public transport and having meaningful, decent green jobs in democratically owned companies that put people and planet before profit.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) wrote powerfully last week that, on the climate emergency, we need to "talk about the dream, not just the nightmare."

We have little more than a decade to save much of our environment as we know it from extinction, but the urgency of that threat has brought ideas to the surface on how we can bring about a sustainable alternative to the economic system that took us to the brink. Labour is preparing itself so that, when in government, we will not only prevent the nightmare but make that dream a reality. We on this side of the House stand ready to collaborate with our international partners and with other parties to do everything in our power and use every lever available to make the global transition to a new, greener and fairer society.

4.2 pm

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): I thought I agreed with some of what the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) was saying until he started to couch his remarks in what seemed to be a somewhat cynical grab of this issue by Labour. He talked about attempting to reintroduce state control of

industry and having a great deal more corporatism of the state kind at the heart of his policy. I became suspicious as the speech went on and suddenly realised that he was a great supporter of the shadow Chancellor, which made me even more suspicious. But anyway, enough of that. Although actually, it was a bit mean of him to criticise the Secretary of State when he is off in Africa visiting environmental projects—

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): He's just annoyed that he wasn't invited.

Sir Oliver Heald: I hear what my hon. Friend says. But anyway—enough of this.

I want to talk about transport and climate change. The Committee on Climate Change has correctly identified the transport sector as the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the UK and made a distinction with other sectors, such as power, heat and industrial, which have all seen year-on-year reductions in emissions, whereas transport has not decarbonised and its emissions are increasing. I am glad that the Government have come forward with proposals, but the UK's transport infrastructure in all communities, large and small, is vital to boosting our productivity and cutting emissions, and change is needed. As a member of the Conservative Environment Network, I agree with our manifesto, which was launched last week and which I hope the Government will consider seriously. It states that the UK should have low carbon communities and low carbon industrial clusters, and that our communities should be connected by low carbon transport. Meanwhile, poor air quality in our cities is leading to a move out of diesel vehicles into petrol and petrol hybrid vehicles, which improves air quality but increases CO₂ emissions, which is putting the fourth carbon budget at risk of not being achieved by 2027.

A total modernisation of our transport network is an economic, environmental and public health priority.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Wera Hobhouse: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Oliver Heald: I was just about to say how I would tackle the problem. Let me do that, then perhaps I will give way.

How do we tackle the problem? First, we have to bring forward the phase-out date for the sale of new petrol and diesel cars to at least 2035. Given the life cycle of a traditional car, the Committee on Climate Change is clear that ensuring that all cars and vans are electric by 2050, which is needed for net zero, will require all new vehicles to be electric by 2035, and I believe that is achievable. By 2025, new electric vehicles will have the same up-front cost as equivalent conventional models, and if we can get the infrastructure right by that point, there should be no reason for consumers not to buy an electric vehicle.

Stephen Kerr: My right hon. and learned Friend talks about air quality and electric vehicles. Should we have an ambitious target to eliminate internal combustion engine vehicles in our cities much sooner than the date he is suggesting?

Sir Oliver Heald: Certainly there is a key role for incentivising that. The advantage of electric vehicles is that they avoid those damaging types of pollution we are concerned about.

Wera Hobhouse: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for mentioning road surface transport and the fact that our emissions are still increasing. He is absolutely right that we need the right infrastructure. Does he agree that what does not work is, for example, Highways England, in its recent consultation not even considering that it is its responsibility to provide the electricity grid needed to power electric cars? It is important that Departments work together and that Highways England takes responsibility for ensuring that we have the right electricity infrastructure.

Sir Oliver Heald: I agree that co-ordination is crucial. The hon. Lady makes a good point about infrastructure.

To make that long-term target a reality, we need short-term policies to get us to the point where we can accelerate electrification of road transport. Important measures include providing Government-backed interest-free loans for electric vehicle purchase; creating incentives for the installation of ultra-rapid electric vehicle chargers at key strategic points, such as on the motorway network; a new tax on sales of non-electric vehicles after 2030; introducing the right as a tenant to request an electric vehicle charging point; and changing the sort of fuel we use in petrol or hybrid petrol cars. I support the campaign recently instigated by the all-party parliamentary group for British bioethanol, which has considerable support in the House, for a shift to 10% ethanol in standard petrol, which would deliver both emission reductions and UK jobs and which I see as part of the transition.

British bioethanol is created essentially from wheat in the north of England. The wheat would otherwise be used for animal feedstuff if, and only if, a high-protein additive such as soya were added to it. It cannot be used for human beings. The soya comes from South America, which touches on the point about the Brazilian rain forest, which makes these soya imports a subject of environmental concern. A by-product of making bioethanol from British wheat is a rich-in-protein animal feed, which displaces the soya. With total investment of £5 billion, two factories have been set up in the north of England, involving 5,000 jobs. One of them is mothballed and the other is running at half capacity as they wait for the Government to mandate E10 petrol—petrol with 10% ethanol. Forward-looking countries in Europe, Australia, Canada and the USA are already doing that; it is time we got on board. It is estimated that the reduction in carbon emissions from E10 being used as the UK's standard petrol would be equivalent to taking 700,000 cars off the road; it would also be less polluting and protect British jobs. I know the Department for Transport has already consulted on this, but it should move quickly to make this change, certainly for 2020.

Let me now talk about the tax situation and how we deal with the change from fuel duty to a world of electric vehicles. As we shift to electric vehicles, the amount of revenue the Exchequer takes from fuel duty will naturally shrink. We need, therefore, to change how we pay for roads. Road pricing is based on the principle that those making use of public roads should pay a sum

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commensurate with costs involved. Ideally, the total sum should include the costs of air pollution and greenhouse gases as well. Sophisticated schemes also use live data to factor in congestion, and charge people more to drive during peak times on busy roads. There are existing schemes, such as in Singapore, that show that this can be done. So the Government should be looking at that as a possible way forward. By working with the power of market price signals, road pricing incentivises individuals to use cleaner fuel and to travel at times that are less damaging.

I shall turn now to regional rail networks and bus, tram and cycling services. The lack of decent transport outside London is a handbrake on UK growth. Local transport networks in towns and cities are woefully undeveloped compared with those in similar sized places in other countries. For example, Leeds is the largest city in the European Union with no mass transport system. Its twin city, Lille, has two metro lines, two tram lines, and an international high-speed rail connection. Fixing this disparity is critical to UK growth and to easing the pressure on housing demand in London. To meet net zero, we need a switch of freight from road to rail, and for commuters and travellers to feel confident to use low carbon transport.

I wish to mention a few strategic transport investments at this point. Surely the time has come to modernise the rail network across the Pennines—

Andrew Stephenson: Hear, hear.

Sir Oliver Heald: The electrification of the rest of the midland main line is another that the Minister would probably agree with. What about the new super-tram network for Leeds? How long has Sheffield had its tram? As the Government engage in transformative infrastructure projects, it is important that they do not ignore local efforts to encourage active transport, such as cycling. I support cycling schemes, through Sustrans and the revamped cycle to work scheme.

In my North East Hertfordshire constituency, we have done a considerable amount to improve cycling facilities, but we want more. At a recent conference in Letchworth Garden City, the subject was “connectivity”. People were looking at how we can have connectivity in a low carbon way, and this involved new developments and how we fit them in with existing ones. Improving both the low carbon footprint of towns and industry, and the low carbon transport between them, was a key subject discussed.

Sarah Newton: My right hon. and learned Friend is making a fantastic speech. Does he agree that we should build on the success of the cycle ambition cities and make sure that that source of funding is available for towns, so that more people can walk and use bikes, including e-bikes, as part of an integrated public transport scheme in towns?

Sir Oliver Heald: Yes, exactly so. A place such as Letchworth Garden City was designed with transport in mind from the very start, with Ebenezer Howard ensuring that the railway station was in the middle of the town and that there were cycle ways. In recent times, the numbers of cycling racks at the station and

the green way have been enhanced; a lot has been done. My hon. Friend is right to say that if we want to meet our ambition of having proper connectivity, we need cycling, walking and low carbon public transport in order to effect the change.

Gareth Thomas: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is making an interesting speech. I have been trying to keep pace with all his asks of the Chancellor in terms of costs—it is a serious list of asks. Does he not think there is a need for a serious debate, costed out, about the cost of decarbonising our transport network in the future? I agree with his proposals for investment in Leeds, and for Letchworth Garden City and his constituency. Other things are also needed for London and the funding simply is not there within the DFT’s budget, so an urgent plan to change that is essential.

Sir Oliver Heald: Yes; of course, the purpose of the carbon budgets and some of the work of the Committee on Climate Change is exactly to tease out those effects. It is a good thing that the body that we set up to be independent, to give the Government advice and to hold their feet to the fire is doing just that—that is what it is there for. Yes, there are costs, but there are also gains. I just made the point about bioethanol; there is already investment in green jobs in the places where we want them, such as Teesside and the Humber. Those factories could generate more jobs and make money that could be taxed. At the moment, all that is being held back for want of a Government decision of an environmental kind. There is money to be had for the Government in terms of inputs, as well as just outputs, or debits. I agree with the hon. Gentleman to some extent, but we do have a process in hand.

Let me turn to light railway in the context of rural locations. I shall use the example of Buntingford, in my constituency, where housing numbers are being rapidly expanded—basically, planning is being allowed to double the size of the town—but there is no employment, or not much, because it is a rural community, and it does not have a train service. That means there will be many more car journeys, as the new homes go to commuters, who travel mainly to London and Cambridge. If we built a light rail link to Stevenage, people would have the option of going by public transport to the big town to shop or on the main line to work.

Of course, people think that light railway is bound to cost a fortune, because in a city it does—the land has to be bought, and it is incredibly expensive—but we need to look more at whether light railway can be done at a sensible price in a rural location. It would also have environmental and social benefits. I have asked Hertfordshire County Council, which is currently visioning its transport for 2050, to look into the idea, and also to look at whether there might be other possibilities for east-west routes in the county.

Rachel Reeves: Both the right hon. and learned Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) have mentioned my city of Leeds, so I feel I should stand up and say something. Three years ago we got the first new train station in Leeds for 30 years, and it has made a huge difference to Kirkstall in my constituency. Other new train stations could be opened on existing lines, including in Armley

in my constituency. As well as some sort of tram network or underground system, simple things can be done in cities like Leeds, such as reopening train stations and opening new ones on existing lines.

Sir Oliver Heald: I am glad that the hon. Lady and I agree on this. In the area near North East Hertfordshire, Cambridge North station was recently opened, and that has had a good effect in respect of building the high-tech businesses in that part of Cambridge. That is another example of using the existing railway system but putting in new facilities.

This might be a bit controversial, but we need to consider as a society where we are going with our shopping behaviour. Walking, cycling or using a low carbon means of transport to visit a bricks-and-mortar shop in a high street is surely more environmentally sound than more and more vans delivering to our doorsteps. We need to consider that in the context of the incentives and disincentives applied by Government.

My hon. Friend the Minister referred to improved environmental fuel for aviation and to electric planes, and such things will happen. This is an enormous subject, but I just wanted to make it clear in my speech that tackling transport emissions is key if we are to meet the net zero carbon target by 2050.

4.19 pm

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): First, I apologise for being a couple of minutes late at the start of this debate.

This is such an important debate, as it covers probably the three biggest areas that will affect our lives directly and the lives of our children and of the generations to come. I look forward to travelling to New York next week with other members of the International Development Committee for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. This serves as a central United Nations platform for the follow-up and review of the sustainable development goals—I was hoping to hear more about that in today's debate—which have been described as

“a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.”

Achieving those goals will be vital for securing global development. Looking at all 17 of them, it is clear that protecting the environment and tackling climate change will play a fundamental role. Let me give some examples. Goal 6, to provide clean water and sanitation, goal 7, to provide affordable and clean energy, and goals 14 and 15, to protect life below water and life on land, all require environmental protection in order to succeed. The fundamental question that we in this Chamber must ask is: how will we achieve goal 1, no poverty, goal 2, zero hunger, or goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities, among many others, when those goals are being put in jeopardy by the disastrous consequences of climate change?

Protecting the environment and tackling climate change must be a priority for all Departments of all Governments in these islands, with clear targets, policies and actions to ensure that that is delivered. As we know, Scotland has a rich and diverse natural environment, and the Scottish Government are determined to lead by example by protecting and enhancing our natural capital.

Studies suggest that the elements of Scotland's natural capital that can be given a monetary value are worth more than £20 billion each year to our economy, supporting more than 60,000 jobs. Furthermore, many of Scotland's growth sectors, such as tourism and food and drink, depend on high-quality air, land and water. That is why the Scottish Government are taking action to protect our environment to ensure that we have a thriving and sustainable economy. For example, the Scottish Government have an ambition for Scotland's air quality to be the best in Europe and have established an air quality strategy called “Cleaner air for Scotland: the road to a healthier future”, with 40 aims to realise this goal. To support this, £10.8 million has been provided to support the introduction of low emission zones—something on which I will touch later and, given what was said by the previous speaker, something that is important for all of us here as well.

Moreover, figures from June have shown that the Scottish Government have met their target of 11,200 hectares of new tree planting and now plan to increase the target further in 2024 to 15,000 hectares. To put that into context, that is 22 million trees. I have to say that, sadly, England has barely managed to make 10% of that, so I am looking to hear more about that later. These actions will not only protect the environment, lead to healthier lives and offer fantastic opportunities for our economy, but play a fundamental role in tackling climate change.

Last month, I spoke in this Chamber and welcomed the UK Government's decision to legislate for a net zero carbon emissions target by 2050, following the advice of the UK Committee on Climate Change. However, simply setting targets will not solve climate change, and I think we have heard that from across the Chamber. What we need is a clear plan setting out how to transition to a net zero economy. Today, the UK Committee on Climate Change has reported that action to cut greenhouse gas emissions is lagging far behind what is needed, and that the UK's credibility rests on Government action over the next very short 18 months. There is no time to dither or delay. The Committee has called for a net zero policy to be embedded across all levels and Departments of Government and for the new Prime Minister to lead the UK's zero carbon transition from day one, working closely with Northern Ireland and the First Ministers of Wales and Scotland.

The Scottish Government's “Climate Change Plan 2018-2032”, which sets out the actions needed to make Scotland carbon neutral by 2045, is due to be updated within six months of the Climate Change Bill receiving Royal Assent. Work is already under way to meet the enhanced target. Scotland's energy strategy sets a target for the equivalent of 50% of energy for Scotland's heat, transport and electricity consumption to be supplied from renewable sources by 2030. In order to help achieve net zero emissions, a publicly owned not-for-profit energy company will be established to deliver renewable energy to Scottish customers. This is not a party political debate about the left or the right, but a debate about how we can combat not only climate change but fuel poverty. The reason for setting up that company is that it will endeavour to ensure that the price is as close to cost price as possible. I urge the UK Government to do that for the rest of the UK, as well as to achieve their recently set targets.

[Chris Law]

Furthermore, with transport accounting for just over one third of total energy demand, Scotland already has the most ambitious agenda in the UK for decarbonising transport. The Scottish Government have already announced the change in policy on air departure tax and committed to phasing out the need for new petrol and diesel cars by 2032—eight years ahead of the rest of the UK. The plan is to implement low emission zones in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and my wonderful city of Dundee by the end of 2020.

To help achieve all that and send a clear signal that Scotland is a place for innovation and low carbon technology, the Scottish Government will establish an innovation fund to invest a further £60 million in delivering wider low carbon energy infrastructure solutions across Scotland, such as electricity battery storage, sustainable heating systems and electric vehicle charging. The expansion of the charging network will raise awareness and uptake of ultra low emission vehicles among private motorists and accelerate their procurement in the public and private sectors. I am disappointed that the UK Government withdrew the tax incentive from electric vehicles last December; I hope that they will consider putting it back, so that more people move towards electric vehicles again.

Rachel Reeves: Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that the most recent data shows that the number of electric vehicles sold has actually fallen? That suggests that the cut in grant and the failure to deliver the charging infrastructure is deterring people from buying the cars that all of us in the Chamber believe people should be buying to help reduce our carbon emissions.

Chris Law: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. This is fundamental: if we want to change public behaviour, we have to put the carrots and sticks in place. Things have happened since 2015. For example, the cancellation of the carbon capture and storage project at Peterhead and the removal of tariffs for on-land wind generation are two other factors that should be reconsidered.

I am pleased to say that my own city of Dundee has the highest proportion of electric vehicles in its council fleet in Scotland and one of the largest electric taxi fleets in the UK. As a result, people now feel that the electric charging points across the city are not novel but normal to use.

I have to correct something. I keep hearing that the UK was the first country to declare a climate emergency, but in fact Scotland was. We understand that we will need to go even further. Progress to date has been achieved with little impact on most people; few of us have had to make any real radical lifestyle changes.

Stephen Kerr: The hon. Gentleman is moving on to discuss the broader issue of the environment, I think. A report last week from Zero Waste Scotland suggested that Scottish households spend £600 million a year just on packaging. We can do a lot in that direction. The Scottish Government have rightly taken a lead with the deposit return scheme. However, would it not be more sensible if all parts of the United Kingdom got together with a co-ordinated approach to a deposit return scheme that covered the length and breadth of these islands?

Chris Law: The hon. Gentleman makes a valuable point. I lived in the Netherlands in the early '90s, and deposit return schemes were the norm there. That is 25 years ago. I feel like an old man standing here and talking about this as if introducing them in Scotland was a novelty. We should be sharing all best practice across these islands, as I shall touch on later. The hon. Gentleman and I have no disagreement on that.

I turn to radical lifestyle changes. Only yesterday, Sir David Attenborough said to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee:

“We cannot be radical enough”.

I look forward to hearing about what radical plans there may be. It is imperative to take action, as climate change threatens us all and will result in a world that will be less safe, where resources will be scarce, and where ecological and demographic crises will become unmanageable. Natural disasters, civil unrest, disease, displacement and mass migration caused by climate change could push 100 million more people into poverty throughout the world, so it needs to be tackled globally as well as domestically.

I welcome what the Secretary of State for International Development has himself said:

“There should be no distinction at all between the work that we do on international development and the work that we do on climate and the emergency.”—[*Official Report*, 6 June 2019; Vol. 661, c. 256.]

Indeed, the International Development Committee's recent report on climate change was similarly clear that climate change must be placed at the centre of aid strategy and funding. It urged a minimum spend of £1.76 billion and a halt to funding fossil fuel projects in developing countries unless they can be fundamentally proven to support the transition to zero emissions by 2050.

As one of the UN's five focus goals for 2019, climate action is an urgent priority that needs to become a central focus of all aspects of DFID's work, and its funding needs to be protected. With this in mind, I was interested to hear the comments by the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth that, regardless of who the next Prime Minister will be, there would be “absolutely no rowing back” from the UK's legal commitment to hit net zero carbon emissions by 2050. She added that she would like the next Prime Minister to persuade Donald Trump of the business case for acting on climate change. The Minister made two very important and valid points. Any reversal of the 2050 net zero target would be disastrous. I hope that she is correct in her assessment that there is no chance of that happening. I, too, hope that any future Prime Minister will convince President Trump that climate change is both very real and very much an emergency, though I am less optimistic about this given that the leading candidate for that role would not even defend the UK ambassador to the US last night.

I also have grave concerns that the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) is more likely to mimic inward-looking, “America first” Trump with regard to aid and international development. He has previously called for DFID to be closed and rolled back into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with aid spending to be spent

“in line with Britain's political, commercial and diplomatic interests.”

He has said:

“We can’t keep spending huge sums of British taxpayers’ money”—

let us remember that this is 70p in every £100—

“as though we were some independent Scandinavian NGO...The present system is leading to inevitable waste as money is shoved out of the door in order to meet the 0.7 per cent target.”

That is ridiculous. Of course, as I said in a debate this morning, the UK is not “some independent Scandinavian NGO”—it is one of the largest economies in the world, and it has both a legal and a moral duty to commit to 0.7% on aid spending and securing global development. If we are truly serious about taking the unique opportunity to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, combat catastrophic climate change and protect our natural environment by 2030, as set out in the sustainable development goals, it is vital to have a well-resourced, stand-alone Department committed to international development and the 0.7% aid target.

We therefore now need detailed plans on how this Government will face up to the challenges of protecting our environment, tackling climate change and securing global development. It is up to this generation, not the next one, to find the answers to these great global challenges. Those plans need to be bold, ambitious and unafraid of criticism. SNP Members would rather see plans come forward that were radical and visionary—that allow for real debate, without which we will ultimately fail everyone in our responsibility to meet the urgent targets that have been set. There is nothing to fear in scrutinising bold proposals in this Chamber and debating whether they are fit for purpose. The real fear is prevarication, lack of planning and piecemeal policies that will fail not only the UK but our partners in the rest of the world.

To support these efforts, regardless of who is Prime Minister, it is imperative that the targets that have already been set are not rolled back or undermined and that the Department for International Development is maintained as a stand-alone Department to lead work in tackling these issues globally. Fundamentally, given the breadth of the debate today, it is essential that there is policy coherence across Departments and that the next Prime Minister understands and is committed to this. We cannot have one Department undoing the good work of another. May I suggest that the Cabinet Office is seriously considered to oversee this?

No one Government has all the answers, and it is important that Governments across these islands share best practice and learn from each other. Of course, I look forward to the time when Scotland is an independent nation, but we will always share our responsibilities as an outward-looking, internationalist nation, and share our world-leading policies on issues like climate change and making the world a better place. To do anything less will only leave the world a more divided and more dangerous place to inhabit, with a much darker future ahead.

4.33 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) and hear about examples of best practice in Scotland, that fantastic member of the United Kingdom.

There is no doubt that our actions are changing the planet. Our relentless consumption of the earth’s resources over centuries has consequences, and today we are

starting to see them. Many of our once abundant coral reefs are bleached white and left lifeless. Vast expanses of land where rain forests once stood are stripped bare for farming. Even in Europe, some reports suggest that deserts will expand across the southern Mediterranean. We are destroying the earth’s natural carbon sinks, and with them, the wider biosphere—so much so that our planet is now in the midst of its sixth mass extinction. Not since the extinction of the dinosaurs have we seen such a loss of plant and animal species. According to one study, current extinction rates are 1,000 times higher than they would be if humans were not around. The International Union for Conservation of Nature’s red list found that more than 27% of all assessed species on the planet are threatened with extinction.

We have the facts about what is happening to our world today, and we know why these changes are occurring, so in theory the solution should be simple. In one sense, it is—we need to stop producing carbon dioxide and implement strict protections for vulnerable ecosystems. But to do that, we need both the political will and a sense of economic realism. We need to take the people of the country with us, which is why this must not be a party political issue.

I have heard the calls for putting the UK on to a war-like footing, immediately banning combustion engines, limiting flights and turning off the taps to traditional fossil fuels. It can be tempting to get swept away on this wave of emotion and the calls for drastic change. There is a serious risk of gesture politics overtaking pragmatic, sensible policy making. Setting goals without a plan is wishful thinking. We need a plan, but it must be carefully constructed to avoid the mistakes of the past. We all remember diesel cars—we were all convinced that we had to buy them. As a result, the market share went from 14% to 65%, and look what happened next.

We need to ensure that these actions are complementary. I co-chair the all-party parliamentary group on the United Nations global goals for sustainable development. We need to check that the policies we put in place are coherent, because some policies to pursue one goal may impact negatively on another goal. This is the whole world’s ecosystem we are talking about, and we need to take account of that.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): My hon. Friend is right that we need to take people with us and ensure that this works for them. Does she agree that if we provide enough charging points for electric vehicles and support people to purchase them, we can help to clean up our environment and significantly reduce the cost of living, because electric vehicles are so much cheaper to run?

Gillian Keegan: Yes. Last year I went to the Nucleus conference at Goodwood and saw one of the world’s leading electric car manufacturers, NIO—a Chinese company—which is solving the problem in a different way. Instead of creating lots of charging points, they had changeable units that people could pick up and drop off in a garage, like we do with Calor gas on the continent. We need to consider all the best practice, because we do not want to get policy wrong again.

Wera Hobhouse: The hon. Lady is right; we need to get this right and take people with us. Is it not also true that we are up against some strong vested interests?

[*Wera Hobhouse*]

We should not underestimate how much those with strong vested interests in the fossil fuel industry and the car industry would like to continue as before, because that would be easiest for them. They are going to push back, and that is the challenge we face in this House.

Gillian Keegan: As politicians, we are very used to strong vested interests; in fact, most of us can spot them a mile off. I worked in car manufacturing for eight years before coming to this place. Those companies have made radical changes to their manufacturing processes and designs, and all of them are moving to electric vehicles. We must be generous to those businesses and industries. There is sometimes a little bit of anti-business rhetoric in this place, and we ought to remember that those businesses do most of the investment in most technology innovation in this country.

Wera Hobhouse: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way again; she is being very generous. I am not anti-business. My family runs businesses, and I understand how business works. They need to have the right incentives. When I talk to those in the car industry, they say that the Government need to send a strong message out to the industry and investors about where they are going, and currently they are failing to do that.

Gillian Keegan: Having spent 30 years in business, I can tell the hon. Lady that no business waits for politicians to give them the answer. They do not; they innovate, they invest in innovation and they invest in where the market is going. In fact, they often create the market.

We need to take drastic action, but we need to do it in a way that is not drastic. This became apparent to me during the Extinction Rebellion protest. When it came here, I spent an hour listening to, learning from and debating the points raised by one group. One of the suggestions made by some in the group was the introduction of a one child policy here in the UK. That would be a rather totalitarian response, and it is unnecessary given our already declining total fertility rate of just 1.76 in 2017.

That said, there were plenty of sensible ideas as well, such as installing solar panels on all new builds, putting in alternative fuel boilers and ensuring we are insulating homes properly, which is one of the simplest things that can have a massive impact. We should all be doing it, and I hope to see some action on that. Obviously, we should also be moving to greener modes of transport, reusing and recycling, and restoring peat land and planting millions more trees a year. All of these offer many financial and environmental benefits.

It is fundamental to remember that to become a carbon neutral country, we will need to invest in technological development and to incentivise, with incentive schemes, green infrastructure and much more. However, I believe we must be cautious about policies and ideas that negatively impact on growth; for example, calls that limit people to one long-haul flight, which was another Extinction Rebellion idea—it did confirm that it meant return flights—and one short-haul flight per year. As someone who has worked internationally for 30 years, I would clearly be out of a job, because I used to take 200 flights a year. It was my job to grow business and to grow jobs, and such flights are sometimes part of what needs to happen in a globalised world.

Sir Oliver Heald: Does my hon. Friend agree that, as Britain is a leader and is looked to internationally on how to tackle this, if we were to crash the economy, were able to take only one long-haul flight a year and to have only one child, and so on and so forth, we would be seen as a country that had failed and nobody would follow our example? Does she agree that we have to be realistic?

Gillian Keegan: I absolutely agree with my right hon. and learned Friend. It is absolutely key to be realistic. Again, technology does offer a lot of benefits that will help us to sustain our environment and to reduce the need for business travel—for example, by keeping in touch by other means.

The Government have shown that we can grow the economy and reduce the national carbon footprint. Since 2010, we have deployed 99% of the UK's solar panels. We are now home to the world's largest offshore wind capacity. In total, we have quadrupled our renewable output. It is not surprising that, last year, we produced over 37% of our energy from renewables, all while growing our economy.

Local authorities need to act, too. I am proud to say that Chichester District Council has voted that there is a climate emergency. Importantly, as Councillor Susan Taylor recently said, it will deliver action, not just words. The council is already seeking to employ a climate emergency officer, who will ensure that a plan is developed to reduce our carbon footprint.

We must not be complacent: we must do more locally, nationally, internationally and individually to grow a truly global green economy. Looking at the big picture, Britain has always been a world leader, and we must continue to build on our target-led, technology-driven approach. We were the innovators of the steam power that drove global industrial development, and we now owe it to the world to lead the renewable green revolution.

4.43 pm

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan).

The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, which I chair, working with five other Select Committees, will in the autumn be setting up a series of citizens' assemblies to address exactly the challenges and issues that the hon. Lady has mentioned. If we are going to achieve net zero, it will of course require Government policies and Government action, but it will also require all of us to do things differently in our own lives—whether that is the number of times a year we fly, the cars we buy, our diet or how we heat our homes. All of these things will require trade-offs, but I believe they will also create huge opportunities.

The hon. Lady spoke about some of the negative changes in our lives but, over the past few years and decades, reducing our carbon emissions has created better cars and more jobs, and I believe that moving towards a net zero economy and a net zero society will create more jobs and more opportunities. If we are at the forefront and lead this new industrial revolution, we stand to benefit the most from it—we will not stand to lose the most, as some hon. Members seem to suggest—because we will create jobs, skills and technologies that we can export to other countries. That will grow our economy in a way that does not destroy our planet.

Derek Thomas: I thank the hon. Lady for her enthusiasm and for the opportunity to intervene. She will be aware that the Committee on Climate Change has said that this is about upscaling and making sure that we have the skills we need right across the country. In places like Cornwall, which I represent, the skills are not there and low-paid jobs are the norm. Does she agree that this gives us the opportunity to create wealth and spread it across every corner of the United Kingdom?

Rachel Reeves: I absolutely agree. Some of those coastal towns, cities and regions stand to benefit the most. In my own region, Yorkshire and the Humber, the job opportunities from offshore wind have helped to transform previously deprived communities. There will be huge opportunities in Cornwall, with battery technologies giving huge potential for growth and jobs in an area that desperately needs them.

Gareth Thomas: I endorse the remarks of my hon. Friend and of the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) on the huge potential for offshore wind to create new jobs in this country. Does she agree that the solar industry also offers significant potential for new jobs, and that it would be good to hear the Government's plans to accelerate the requirement to put solar panels on new buildings?

Rachel Reeves: I very much agree with my hon. Friend, and I would also add the opportunities from onshore wind, which the Government disappointingly continue to block, and from tidal power. The experience of offshore wind is that, after initial Government support and investment, the industry and the energy it produces can become cheaper than those it replaces, which again provides big opportunities for jobs and investment.

Sir David Attenborough gave evidence to the BEIS Committee yesterday. Right at the beginning, he said that the environment around us is essential for every breath we take and everything we eat, as well as for our sanity and our sense of proportion. How we treat our natural environment and what we put into it is incredibly important.

As you can imagine, Madam Deputy Speaker, the BEIS Committee always has huge audiences for every inquiry and every evidence session, but our audience yesterday was particularly large, and the attendance was pretty impressive, too. The audience was also very young.

The Minister said at the beginning of this debate that when he goes into schools in his constituency they often talk about these issues, which is inspiring and gives us all hope for the future. The next generation, who listened to our evidence session yesterday, and the generation after that, who are at Castleton Primary School in Armley and Beecroft Primary School in Burley in my constituency, know what a priority this is, and I hope they will continue to press us to make it our priority in this place, too.

I am proud that this was the first Parliament to pass a climate change Act in 2008, and that the current Parliament has set a target of achieving net zero by 2050 but, as Lord Deben said on the publication of the report of the Committee on Climate Change today, international ambition does not deliver domestic action. That is an important point for us to dwell on. I welcome the bid to host COP 26 next year, and I welcome the fact that we

are the first country to legislate for net zero, but we will achieve it in 2050—I hope we achieve it sooner—only if we put policies in place today to make it happen.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, and I entirely agree with her. Enfield Council will pass its climate change plan tonight but, on her point about the need for action, does she agree that one action the Government could take is not to subsidise fossil fuels? Fossil fuels have caused so much damage over the years, particularly in developing countries.

Rachel Reeves: We have made huge progress in just the last decade in terms of our reliance on fossil fuels, and we can now get through a week or two without using coal. By 2025, we will not be using coal to generate energy in this country, and that is fantastic. But as the shadow Secretary of State for International Development said in his speech earlier, we are still funding and investing in the development of fossil fuels overseas. Climate change and the emission of carbon is not something that we can just tackle here at home. It is no good reducing our carbon emissions in the UK if we fund investment in them overseas. That is why international action matters, but so do the investment decisions that British companies and the British Government make. Like Enfield, Leeds City Council has declared a climate emergency and is putting in place policies to address it, which is very welcome in our city.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Ind): Has the hon. Lady's Committee looked at the issue of three-phase electricity supply to homes? One of my constituents is keen to invest in solar and Tesla-style wall plugs so that they can recharge vehicles and so on, but the cost of installing the necessary three-phase electricity supply is a problem. Does she feel that that would be a better area for the Government to invest in and allow us to expand renewables?

Rachel Reeves: Electric vehicles have been discussed quite a bit already today, and much more could be done to encourage people to buy them and to make it easier for people to charge them, as well as to get the charging infrastructure in all communities, including more rural ones.

Our Committee has produced several reports over the last few years on practical things that the Government could do. It has been disappointing at times that our recommendations and suggestions are often rejected by Ministers, when if they had accepted them, we might be a little closer to meeting some of our objectives. On electric vehicles, our Committee recommended that the target of 2040 be brought forward to 2032, and that was before the Government committed to net zero.

The Committee on Climate Change today said:

“The ‘Road to Zero’ ambition”—

which the Minister is obviously proud of—

“for a phase-out of petrol and diesel cars by 2040 is too late and plans to deliver it are too vague. A date closer to 2030 would save motorists money, cut air and noise pollution and align to the net-zero challenge.”

I urge the Minister to look at the evidence from the Committee on Climate Change, and the evidence that our Committee took, which points resolutely to the need to bring forward the date for phasing out the internal combustion engine.

[Rachel Reeves]

While we welcome decisions by companies such as Jaguar Land Rover to invest in a new fleet of electric vehicles, we need to do more to work with our car manufacturing industry to turn the Faraday Institution's ideas and research into practical applications that can revive our British car industry and keep more jobs here, while not polluting the planet in the way that the car industry has in the past.

Everybody who gave evidence to our Committee said that there is no way that we would meet even our previous targets without the roll-out of carbon capture and storage. But we are still waiting for Government decisions on investment in that industry, so that we are not just doing the research and development in labs, but are trialling it and piloting it in some of our communities. That goes back to the point that the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) made earlier about communities all over the country. The communities that stand to benefit most from carbon capture and storage are in the north-east, Humber, Merseyside, south Wales and Fife, for example—all areas that desperately need jobs and investment. If the Government unlocked the funding, which they have previously cut, they could ensure more good-quality jobs all over the country while contributing to reducing our carbon emissions.

Our Committee has also just concluded a report on energy efficiency, which we will publish soon. Without giving away the findings—my Clerk might be watching—we heard a lot of evidence that the homes we are building today will need to be retrofitted in years to come because they are not of a high enough energy efficiency standard. It seems nonsensical that we know we are building homes today that will have to be retrofitted in future. Those who got planning permission on a development five or 10 years ago only have to meet the energy efficiency rules and regulations from when they got that planning permission, not those in place today. If we just fixed those things, we would be building homes that do not contribute to global warming in the way that they do today.

The Committee also heard evidence that since the Government scrapped the green new deal, improvements to existing housing stock are just not happening. They are not happening in social housing, the private rented sector or the owner-occupied sector. Unless that happens, we have no chance of meeting the net zero commitments. I urge the Government to look at that when our report is published, and not reject our conclusions and recommendations, which happens far too often, but engage with them, adopt them and put them in place. Only by doing that do we have any chance of meeting the targets that we all say we want to achieve.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): I have been following the hon. Lady's Committee inquiry into energy efficiency with great interest. The evidence she has received has been compelling and I look forward to the report. Does she agree that the need to focus on energy efficiency is unarguable, because if we are going to pass on to consumers the inevitable cost as we transition our energy system, doing that alongside the savings that come with a focus on energy efficiency seems to me to be a fair contract with the consumer?

Rachel Reeves: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. We often debate the cost of living in this Chamber. One of the big contributors to the cost of living is the cost of gas and electricity. This Parliament legislated for a cap on energy prices—I welcome that and our Select Committee conducted important pre-legislative scrutiny work—but the cheapest sort of energy is that which we do not use at all. If we improved the energy efficiency of our homes, we would have lower bills. A Government investment strategy through the National Infrastructure Commission that retrofitted homes, particularly for people on lower incomes, would therefore help to reduce our carbon footprint and put money back in the pockets of some of our poorest constituents. That would be a double win and we should all work together to achieve that.

Stephen Kerr: I am grateful to the Chairman of the Select Committee that I have the privilege of serving on for giving way. There is a triple win here. A lot of ill health stems from poor-quality housing stock. If we were to have a national mission to upgrade our housing stock, one key benefit would be an improvement in the nation's health. That would save us a lot in health costs.

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman—I was going to call him my hon. Friend, because he is very much my friend and an excellent member of my Select Committee. He makes a really important point. I do not think any Member in this Chamber has not had a constituent come to their surgery because of problems with a damp or poorly insulated home, while also paying astronomical gas and electricity bills. Would it not be wonderful if we could fix that, particularly for our poorest consumers?

I would like to finish where I started—with what Sir David Attenborough said at our Select Committee yesterday. He said that we “cannot be radical enough” when addressing climate change. If we listened to the young people who have been on strike, the protesters, the people who came to listen to that evidence session and all the people who tune into programmes about our natural environment, this would be a national emergency. We would be taking steps commensurate with the scale of the challenge. I very much welcome the Government's commitment to net zero by 2050, but it is now imperative that we put in place the policies that will help to achieve that, so that our generation can pass on to our children and grandchildren a better world and a better planet.

4.58 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is a privilege to follow my friend, the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves). I am very proud to serve on her Select Committee, because I think we do a lot of really good work. Certainly, my pride as a Member of Parliament is augmented by the experiences I have as part of that Committee.

I was among those who were in the House just a few days ago, in relative terms, when we had a debate on amending the law to set a net zero carbon target by 2050. The damage that humankind is doing to the earth and the resulting climate emergency represent a call to action for the whole world. Britain, with its historic role in shaping the industrial age, accepts its unique responsibility to assume a global leadership role in tackling climate change, but we cause only 1% of the world's emissions,

so we must use all the soft power at our disposal to influence the nations of the world to approach the challenge of climate change with the serious intent that the times we are living in demand.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. He rightly mentions the challenge of climate change, but does he also recognise some of the opportunities in that transition to the low carbon economy—not least in Scotland, where we both come from, with our renewables potential?

Stephen Kerr: Indeed. I am grateful for that intervention and I will come on to talk about some of those issues, some of the lessons that we can learn and some of the opportunities that we can take advantage of, particularly from a Scottish point of view.

It is each generation's responsibility to preserve and sustain our planet for those who will follow. I believe that this generation accepts the seriousness of that responsibility, but we politicians owe it to the people of our country to hold an honest conversation about what the change in law we made just a few days ago amounts to. Setting targets in law, holding debates, setting up committees and publishing reports are clearly not going to do the job in themselves.

This is the most difficult transitional change we will ever go through as a country, and we should not minimise the challenge. We do ourselves no favours by minimising the nature of the challenge that we face. I too will refer to the evidence that we received yesterday from Sir David Attenborough—appropriately enough, I would say, in the Thatcher Room. We should never forget that Margaret Thatcher was the first politician of stature to highlight the issue of climate change and the dangers that it posed to the whole world, most especially the poorest people on the planet. She did that 30 years ago this coming November, at the United Nations.

It was in the Thatcher Room that we took evidence from Sir David Attenborough. I doubt that anyone has done more to raise public consciousness of humankind's wanton abuse and neglect of the planet and the impact of climate change than Sir David. As the Chair of the Select Committee has already mentioned, Sir David was indeed a star witness; the Public Gallery was packed—significantly, I would have said, almost exclusively with young people. At one point, he turned in his chair to face them and he applauded them. He told us:

"It is their world that we are playing with. It is their futures that are in our hands. If the faces around here do not inspire us to do that, I don't know what will."

It was an inspirational moment.

I had the opportunity to ask Sir David whether he was optimistic about our ability to meet the challenge of climate change, and he said:

"I see no future in being pessimistic, because that leads you to say, 'To hell with it. Why should I care?' I believe that way, disaster lies. I feel an obligation, because the only way you can get up in the morning is to believe that actually, we can do something about it, and I suppose I think we can."

He went on:

"Whether that is optimistic or not, I do not know, and whether in fact it is going to produce a result or not, I do not know, but that is the only way I can operate. I have to get up in the morning and say, 'Something has to be done, and I will do my best to bring that about.'"

The House will not be surprised to learn that, in the time I have been a member of the Select Committee, Sir David has been the only witness who, at the conclusion of his testimony, elicited a standing ovation from both the members of the Committee and the people in the Public Gallery. In fact, he is the only witness that the Committee has ever asked for a photograph with.

The young people of the United Kingdom are ahead of the curve on this issue, and it is for us in this House to take up the baton to build a new cross-party consensus. I agree with what was said earlier about the need for this to rise above the cut and thrust of party politics.

James Heappey: I am envious of my hon. Friend for having been able to hear such amazing evidence in person yesterday. Does he agree that perhaps the edge that young people have over older generations is that they understand the existential nature of the climate change threat? They genuinely see it as a challenge to their ability to live the life that they want to lead in the future. The sooner we can convey that existential threat to older generations, the sooner we will gain the public consent necessary to close meaningfully with these huge challenges of addressing climate change.

Stephen Kerr: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Now is the time to unite the generations and the nation itself to tackle the challenge that lies before us. Yes, we have filled columns and columns in *Hansard* discussing Brexit—it is the national obsession at the moment—but the issues in this debate transcend any of the matters relating to Brexit, which will very soon, I hope, be a chapter in the story of our nation. This is about the future of our planet, and young people absolutely get that.

It is essential that we build a cross-party consensus by dealing with the issues as they arise on an evidence-led basis. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said in its most recent overview of climate science:

"Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, and sea level has risen."

I repeat: it is vital that we have an honest conversation between ourselves as political representatives and the people we represent in our deliberations in the House.

The Committee on Climate Change has said there is currently no Government strategy to engage the public in the transition to a low carbon economy and adds that that will need to change. That warning—that very strong nudge—needs to be accepted by us all on the Government Benches. There needs to be a shared determination to address the need for a national conversation. My constituents, of all ages, reach out to me to discuss climate change because it concerns them. Sir David Attenborough yesterday mentioned how a 90-second, two-minute clip in one of his documentary series on the damage that plastics were doing to the ecology of the oceans of the world had galvanised a whole body of opinion not just in this country but across world.

That feeling was reflected in a meeting I attended the Sunday before last with the green team at Stirling Methodist church. They wanted to talk to me about their ideas and suggestions, which they wanted to share more widely, for how people could choose to act and

[Stephen Kerr]

even the mental attitude they could adopt to establish our own net zero carbon target. I could not help but think about that when I was listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan). In addition to sending a first-class Member of Parliament to this House, her constituents have done the planet a power of good by reducing the number of times she flies from 200 to something a little bit more manageable.

We have an individual responsibility in terms of our own lifestyles. In that meeting with the Methodists, we shared together as Christians our sense of having a covenant responsibility to be keenly aware of our responsibility as stewards of the earth. We all agree that we owed it to each other, to our children and to our children's children to bring about a wider conversation in Stirling and beyond about what these new net zero targets would mean for our lifestyle expectations and how we behaved as individuals, not least in terms of diet. We must be under no illusions as to the real change that will be required of our country and of us as individuals if we are to meet the challenge we have set ourselves of net zero by 2050.

I will make a short list of some of the areas where we need action this day—to borrow a phrase from Winston Churchill—and I will start with single-use plastics. Pragmatically speaking, we need to address this issue. There will always be a place for plastics, even single-use plastics—for medical purposes, food hygiene and other specific purposes—but we must adopt the default position that plastic should not be used as a single-use material. I intervened earlier on the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) to highlight a report that appeared in the Scottish press a few days ago and which mentioned that Scottish households alone were spending £600 million just on the packaging of the goods they were buying, which they were then either recycling or otherwise disposing of.

Derek Thomas: I have been visiting schools for a long time now, and everyone I have spoken to wants a plastic-free school, but the pupils tell me that many of the items that are supplied to the canteens—over which they have no control—are wrapped in single-use plastic. Those children are at their wits' end, because they feel that they do not have the power to bring about change. What does my hon. Friend think we should be doing about that?

Stephen Kerr: We need to do something, and I think we need to have a discussion about what that means, because I think the House has a part to play in that something that we need to do. I have become personally aware—much more than I have ever been—of the extent and volume of single-use plastic in my life. I know that during Lent some of my hon. Friends, and indeed some Opposition Members, engaged in a fast to clear their lives of single-use plastic. That was exemplary in setting the pace for all of us in the House and for the whole country, but we really need to apply some fresh thinking to the urgent need to deal with single-use plastic.

For instance, as I said earlier to the hon. Member for Dundee West, we need action on the proposed deposit return scheme. I know that it takes time for these things to be put together, and I know that it is important for there to be as much discussion as possible in Parliament,

in Whitehall and, of course, with the business community, especially the retailers who will have to manage much of the scheme. I also appreciate that the Scottish Parliament, on an all-party basis, has done some pioneering work in this regard. I must say to the Minister, however, that it is surely not beyond the realms of possibility for all the Governments on these islands, at all levels, to work together to create a single UK-wide scheme for the return of plastic bottles in particular. That would remove any danger of geographical or cost anomalies. By working together, we could help to cement the idea of deposit return with the public. The sooner we do that, the better.

The second point that I want to make concerns transport. I do not want to repeat some of the things that have been said earlier, but it is important for us to understand that 15% of global man-made carbon emissions come from cars. We have a huge opportunity to move to lower emission vehicles, but we need many more electric charging points. The infrastructure is patchy to non-existent, and it does not give confidence to potential purchasers of low emission or electric vehicles. The planning laws throughout these islands should be changed to insist that car-charging points are installed in all new private houses and commercial properties as part of their initial construction. We also need a single system for using car chargers: expecting drivers to have several cards in their wallets and separate registrations for different charging points is absurd if we wish to make it easy for people to make the transition to electric vehicle use. Governments need to do what Governments, and only Governments, can do, and bring together every party so that a sense of co-ordination and working together is at the heart of this national infrastructure project.

Let me ask the Minister a question that I asked during a debate just a few days ago. Where is the promised competition for a standard charging point design—the so-called Hayes hook-ups? I think that that could capture the imagination of the wider public. [*Interruption.*] Yes—the Hayes hook-ups are named after our right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes).

With better infrastructure will come greater consumer confidence, but the Government should restore the incentives for buyers of electric vehicles that they reduced last year, because they have had some impact. We must be ambitious, and set new targets to eliminate the use of internal combustion engines from our cities by the middle of the next decade. I think that that is realistic. I also agree with something that was said by an Opposition Member earlier: it is important for the Government to give a clear signal to manufacturers, because investment decisions are made within the framework of public policy.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman shares my excitement about the potential for wave and tidal energy. Will he join me in calling on the Government to step up and offer the kind of support for the sector that could enable it to shift up a gear or two, start commercialising its projects that are so tantalisingly close to realisation, and then not only contribute to the environment changes that we seek but offer our economy many more jobs?

Stephen Kerr: I agree that no technology should be off the table; all the new technologies and all the existing technologies should be part of the Government's consideration.

I was talking about the support that I wish to give to the hon. Member for Leeds West in relation to our Committee's finding that we need to set a clearer and bolder ambition on the discontinuation of the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans, the date for which is currently 2040; it needs to be something nearer 2030 or 2032.

The third point I wish to make is about housing, which has already been mentioned by previous speakers. Let me say this as a Scottish Conservative: I know that other Members of the House must sometimes wonder what is going on at this end of the Chamber where my colleagues and I have occasional ding-dongs with SNP Members—all for good reasons I am sure—but the UK Government should follow the lead of the Scottish Parliament. With cross-party support, the Scottish Government have set out a package of measures to upgrade the energy efficiency of homes and commercial properties, including a detailed plan and milestones. Detailed plans and milestones are often lacking in the plans created in Whitehall.

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point about the Scottish Parliament. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 was passed in the Scottish Parliament—its ambitions are in excess of what was aimed for in this Parliament—because all the parties sitting in that Parliament came together. It was during a period of minority Government, but when we work together, cross-party, and have meaningful conversations, especially on critical issues such as climate change, minority Government can work.

Stephen Kerr: There is sometimes a very strong case for minority Governments, in the sense that we do then have to depend more on reaching out across the Floor of the House. It is true that all the measures that we are discussing on the environment and climate change have pretty much the unanimous support of the Scottish Parliament, and that is a strength. It is a political strength, because when the time comes to change the Scottish Government in 2021 to a Conservative Scottish Government led by Ruth Davidson, we can be sure that those policies will continue.

Upgrading the housing stock should become a national mission; it should become a national infrastructure priority. The Government should now set out their response to the National Infrastructure Commission recommendations in relation to social housing and should come forward with their own proposals to unlock the able-to-pay residential sector.

We need to consider incentives for the adoption of new technologies in heating, insulation and energy generation, and we need to do that across all types of houses. In King's Park, in my constituency of Stirling, many of my constituents tell me that they spend a fortune on heating their homes because the heat disappears through the single-glazed windows and old-fashioned roofs that they are required to have in the conservation area that they live in. I am a Conservative so I am all for conserving, but it is equally important that we conserve with consideration to the environment. Improving the insulation of our homes and upgrading the housing stock is an investment with a return, as was mentioned earlier, in lower energy consumption and lower energy bills and, as I have said, better physical and mental health. Pound for pound this is a sound national investment from every aspect.

Chris Law: The hon. Gentleman is making a lot of very valuable points here. I wonder if he would support the UK Government setting up a national energy company with all its energy coming from renewables, as the Scottish Government are doing. Not only will that company take energy from renewables and boost the renewable energy sector, but it will also tackle fuel poverty head-on if it is done as close to cost as possible.

Stephen Kerr: I understand the motivation, but, in good Scots tongue, "I hae ma doots" about whether that is a workable solution. I know the hon. Gentleman says that the Scottish Government are going to do it, but we will see what happens, and I do have concerns about that as there are other ways to get to where we want to get to without setting up some kind of state retailer for energy.

I am nearing the end of my remarks, but I want to mention the fact that we need to consider new electrical infrastructure. We need to consider whether the national wiring has the capabilities it is going to need. I really do not see, any time soon, there being a plethora of charge points around the country where we can recharge our electric vehicle in a few minutes, because we just do not have the wiring to support that kind of recharging network. Also, I know the Minister will be disappointed if I do not mention smart meters. A lot of money is being spent on advertising smart meters. This is an individual step to be taken by households across the country to attack the issue of climate change. I support that, because smart meters are a vital component of the creation of a smart grid, but I really think that the Government should explain to the House how we are getting on with our target of rolling out smart meters to all premises by 2020. From what I know of the facts as they stand, that target seems a long way off.

James Heappey: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the pace of the smart meter roll-out. I also wonder whether that technology has now been overtaken by all the internet of things-enabled functionality that is going into people's homes. Moreover, does he agree that the slow pace of deployment for smart meters does not fill one with hope for the 1 million homes a year that we will have to retrofit with zero carbon heating systems in order to hit our net zero targets?

Stephen Kerr: That was a good intervention from my hon. Friend, and I do have a lot of those concerns. For example, I have concerns about the status of the SMETS 2 meter installation, particularly in Scotland and the north of the country. There are technological reasons why the pace there is slower than in the rest of the United Kingdom. I am also concerned about where we are in general with SMETS 2 meter installation. And what about SMETS 1 meters? How are we getting on with having Smart DCC adopt them? The answers to those questions might be difficult for Ministers to bring to the House, because there is no shortage of challenges relating to smart meter roll-out, but we really should face up to those challenges. We have an opportunity now to properly review where we have got to. A fundamental question is how many SMETS 1 meters that have been installed will need to be replaced because they cannot be adopted by DCC. I hope the Government will make note of the need to update us on this, whether in a written statement or by some other means.

[Stephen Kerr]

The generation of energy is important. I have already mentioned that no technologies should be off the table and that we should consider all possibilities. One of the final points I wish to make is about carbon capture and storage. A point that was made about carbon capture and storage in our Select Committee report was that there is need for a collaborative—[*Interruption.*] I am getting the signal, and I will conclude, Madam Deputy Speaker. Carbon capture and storage. Yes, this is very interesting point, or it is to me anyway. We have the opportunity of a first mover advantage, and we need to start removing carbon from the atmosphere. Otherwise, there is no hope of our becoming a net zero emitter by 2050. We should be prepared to take bold initiatives and risks with the roll-out of the technology. Finally, we need to plant more trees. They are nature's carbon capture and storage specialists, and the current targets in England are frankly modest to the point of embarrassing and really not appropriate to a net zero target. Because of the rich offering of devolution in our wonderful Union, there are lessons to be offered to the UK Government from Scotland, which I hope they will be wise and examine closely.

In closing, I shall return to Sir David Attenborough's evidence. We must remain hopeful. The challenges we are facing and discussing today are surmountable. We must play to our strengths as a nation. We need joined-up government across these islands—the United Kingdom at its best, working in partnership with our world-class university sector and the broadest possible coalition of industries and business interests. Our global reputation as inventors, creators, innovators and renovators must now be put to the ultimate test. We must find new ways to leverage old technologies, and we need to be bold and take risks with new technologies as never before. Then, we must take those solutions and our expertise to the wider world, where the UK can properly take its responsibilities as the leading developed nation in the arena to the next level. With proper investment, the new businesses that will grow and develop from this economic revolution will provide the quality of work and the valuable employment of the future. If we are wise enough, if we are honest enough, if we are brave enough, the opportunities may be limitless, and we will be able to sustain our planet—our blue planet, teeming with life—for generations to come.

5.25 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr). We were talking about batteries earlier, and before the hon. Gentleman made his speech my hearing aid battery was working; it has now run out. [*Laughter.*]

There has never been a truer saying than “Out of the mouths of babes”. As the effects of global warming and pollution become alarmingly evident, wise young voices in our communities are calling for us to take urgent action to take care of our common home, all united by the same concerns and by the threats that we ourselves—we human beings—are posing to our planet. Children in Scotland and across the globe believe that adults in power have not been doing enough to address environmental issues. Some positive steps to cut down on plastics and attempts to reduce carbon emissions are seen as too little, too late.

The young Swedish national Greta Thunberg went on strike, refusing to go to school until Sweden's general election in September, to draw attention to the climate crisis. Her protest has captured the imagination of her country, which has recently been plagued with wildfires during its hottest summer since records began. Greta has made her message global; she even came to Westminster to spread the word in the UK. She has shown us that the actions of just one person can make a difference.

I have visited schools in my area, including St Bernadette's RC Primary School and Denny High School, and the local Baptist church. I have furnished the schools with Greta's book and had fantastic conversations with the children about deforestation in the Amazon rain forests, the loss of orangutans and the use of palm oil in providing us with probably cheap food. They were so aware—they knew everything that was going on. They even had a mural of Greta up in the classroom. It was so impressive. Greta's message was not lost. Those children care, and many of us in this House—most of us, I think—care and are taking some action.

Over the years, I have fought to highlight issues of pollution. I have made a stand against fracking to protect the purity and the worldwide reputation of Scotland's water and land. Like others, I have voiced my anger at the plastic pollution all around us, from nurdles found in our waterways to the plastics that make up our clothes and are present in toiletries and cosmetics. I thank the local charities and voluntary groups I work with for keeping up the pressure and raising the profile of the detestable waste that those products cause in our natural world.

As the hon. Member for Stirling and others mentioned, the natural historian Sir David Attenborough has apologised to younger generations for the damage that we have done to their planet. We are so fortunate and privileged to have that great man speaking out and, we surely hope, being listened to by the decision makers. On the sustainable development goals, he said:

“Over the next two years there will be United Nations decisions on climate change, sustainable development and a new deal for nature. Together these will form our species' plan for a route through the Anthropocene.”

This crucial time presents an opportunity to reach an agreement on the political will and the resources needed to address the crisis together and to make certain that no one is left behind.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman, a fellow member of the Environmental Audit Committee, is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that the COP process is vital? We expect to hear that the UK will host the 26th COP next year, 2020. Does it not need to be a zero carbon COP, when we get global agreement on this, so that we can pursue our own international development goals and ensure that everyone shares the burden globally?

John Mc Nally: I absolutely agree with what the hon. Gentleman says. We serve on the Environmental Audit Committee, where we have received invaluable evidence in the past two or three years. I agree that we cannot just set a target; it has to be achievable at a very early stage. We simply do not have the time, and I will speak more about that as we go on.

We have been put to shame by the urgency demanded by the new breed of young environmentalists. They have had enough of taking baby steps. They know that

time is running out, and I agree with them. In October 2018, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned us that we have only 12 years to make the unprecedented and unparalleled changes needed to prevent a rise in global temperatures of more than 1.5° C. Mike Thompson, the head of carbon budgets at the Committee on Climate Change, told the EAC that it is now or never on that. Exceeding this by even half a degree risks global catastrophe, with flooding, fires and famines, which other hon. Members have mentioned. Those are clear and challenging messages that we simply cannot fail on.

A decade ago, in 2009, Scotland set itself the world's most ambitious greenhouse gas reduction target, when the Scottish Parliament voted unanimously to cut the country's emissions by 42% by 2020—next year. The latest statistics show that we remain on track to achieve that. In her recent speech at the Scottish National party conference, our leader, Nicola Sturgeon, acknowledged the situation's urgency. Her speech was inspiring, strengthening my resolve and that of many others, from all parts of the community, not just politics, to do what we can to make this a dominant issue.

How are we helping? Thanks to a green initiative, I and fellow MPs are forming climate youth ambassadors groups to generate public interest in initiatives we can help with locally. As with the SERES education for sustainable development youth ambassadors programme in South America, we aim to build a cohort of facilitators to inspire, mobilise and grow community resilience to climate change. UNESCO is recruiting youth ambassadors, again with the aim of developing organisers and future leaders to build this resilience to climate change. We in Scotland certainly want to be part of the environmental ambitions. This is very much about, "If you can change the world, get busy in your own little corner."

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making an amazing speech, talking about young ambassadors. Will he join me in paying tribute to the children at Sunnyside Primary School in Craigend, who have led the way with their NaeStrawAtAw campaign? It is important to place on record our thanks to these young people, who have realised that generations before them have let them down. Even at the local level they are having a massive influence. Will he pay tribute to them?

John Mc Nally: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend, and what he says just exemplifies what we need to do as politicians to make their voices heard. We cannot just have empty voices in this place—we need to take action.

On 26 June, most of us here met up with "The Time Is Now" mass lobby. Thousands of people from nearly every constituency in the UK came to Westminster to meet us. Like others, I was inspired by constituents of mine who had travelled here to meet up with each other and with MPs. I sincerely hope that our constituents went away feeling that they were being listened to and that their message and concerns had been made clear. What united the firefighters, schoolchildren, doctors, church groups and many others who came to Parliament? It was, quite simply that they care. They care about our warming climate and they care that our natural world is in decline.

In Scotland, we have already been leading the way with our public rejection of fracking, our strides forward in investigating alternative energy sources and our consultancy on climate change, and our programme of change within the Scottish Government is working really well. We are consulting and we speak to people; we do not just take it for granted that people are not listening.

In Scotland, the purity of our water and land is integral to the quality produce we sell and trade to other countries. As a publicly owned body, Scottish Water is a company that brings many admiring looks from elsewhere in the UK and globally; I was delighted to attend an event this morning, where we heard how it, too, is looking to own its own water system. The people at this morning's meeting looked on at us enviously, thinking, "Why can people not run a utility properly? It is all part of us and it is all part of a community. Why should we not own these things?" I take this opportunity to congratulate the staff of Scottish Water, who protect the reputation that we enjoy.

But that is not enough. Nothing happens in isolation. Around the globe, toxic air affects many towns and cities; plastic-strewn rivers and seas are commonplace; sea levels are rising; and millions are being displaced. Closer to home, as the Environmental Audit Committee has heard, some of our best-loved species, such as hedgehogs, puffins and red squirrels, are now hard to find or threatened by climate change and/or invasive species in their natural habitat. Although biodiversity is declining across the planet, the UK as a whole is one of the worst offenders, ranking 189th out of 218 countries for biodiversity intactness. We are well below our neighbours Germany and France, and only slightly above the USA. Our joint bid with Italy to host the next major climate summit in 2020 will be another opportunity for Scotland and the rest of the UK to show global leadership. The next step will be to put in place the policies that get us to net zero as soon as possible.

Let me finish—and I will finish; I know the hon. Member for Stirling appreciates some good humour—by taking this opportunity to wish the ethical stock exchange in Edinburgh the very best for a successful future venture. It is an idea whose time has come. Investors who care about our common world can be reassured that due diligence is being carried out on the companies to be listed. Project Heather, the group setting up the new exchange in George Street, adds some "magic dust" to the uniqueness of the stock exchange, because it, too, wants to make a difference to the world we live in, now and for the long term. The stock exchange promises to list only companies that have a positive impact on society and the environment. I hope that some, or all, of Scotland's famous investment trusts, as well as, for example, the National Trust and church organisations, take the opportunity to put their money where their mouth is and invest in the courageous step taken by the people leading the company. The stock exchange will meet the ever growing demand for ethical investments, and offer a clear pathway and peace of mind for investors.

Ideas such as the ethical stock exchange can clearly demonstrate that companies have a capital and a social conscience. For example, the famous ice cream producer Mackie's has produced an all-electric ice cream van. This is probably the best day to talk about ice cream, although it might be the worst day to talk about ice

[John Mc Nally]

cream, because everything is so dry. That ethical step shows how a company is looking to the future and giving out a message. The most important message is that Mackie's is aware of what is going on in the world. I think kids who are going to buy an ice cream will flock to that van. Perhaps that is an advert for the company—I do not know, but I certainly hope it is.

David Linden: Other brands are available.

John Mc Nally: Maybe they will get a pokey hat ice cream—I don't know.

Citizens and our youth are rightly demanding action, and as politicians we are duty-bound to listen and respond. Like many people throughout the UK, people in my Falkirk constituency are participating in active travel and using the last mile. We have active bikes. I recently visited Stockholm, where I was amazed at the stand-on and sit-on electric scooters. It was quite hazardous, I have to say—they did not seem to have any control, so it was quite chaotic—but nevertheless the demand was there. I would like to see that happening more. We must support youngsters in their efforts to develop a decent, modern planet to live on.

5.38 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is always a pleasure to speak last, because one can follow all the interesting comments and contributions.

I absolutely agreed with the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) when she said so passionately that there are wonderful opportunities. We should not be all gloomy, because there absolutely are opportunities. We should look forward positively, rather than thinking only that we do not really know how to do it. We do know how to do it.

We should of course work together across party lines, but I am a bit baffled that some behave as if this was a new subject and we have suddenly seen the light and understood what is going on. This is not a new subject. I have grown up with it and I have been thinking environmentally for as long as I can remember. The fact that we have been destroying our planet is not news. Certainly since we heard from Al Gore in 2006, we have known the inconvenient truth that we are warming up this planet in a very, very dangerous way, and that we are heading for extinction unless we do something. So, what have we been doing in the past decade? It is really disappointing to see, particularly over the past four years with this Government, that we have actually gone backwards. I feel very angry about that, and it is normal for the young generation to feel angry about it, too. I am not surprised. We really need to look at ourselves and ask, what have we done when we knew that this was coming our way?

I really hope that this is a new beginning, that we are all going to work together, and that we understand that some difficult decisions need to be made. We will probably have party political ding-dongs about that, because there are so many different ways of achieving what we need to achieve. We all know that we need to get to net zero by 2050, but how we get there is obviously the big question.

I do welcome the fact that we want to work cross-party on this matter. I am looking forward to that and, as I said earlier, one starting point for me would be to stop fracking. There are some simple things that we can do, but obviously there are political differences to overcome. Mention was made, for example, of nationalising the grid in Scotland. Is that a proposal? There are different ways of addressing this issue. We need to have a rational discussion about it and be honest about the difficulties, but we also need to understand where our political differences lie and, hopefully, overcome them. We need to do something; we owe it to the younger generation.

The climate crisis is the most pressing challenge of our time. We are already seeing its disastrous effects across the globe. The UK has a moral responsibility to take the lead in tackling the crisis. First, as a pioneer of the industrial revolution, we have been among the greatest producers of historical emissions, so I do not take the point that we are responsible for only 1% of global emissions. We have a much greater responsibility than for just 1% of current global emissions. We need to take our share of responsibility for the emissions that we have produced over many decades, and even over centuries. Secondly, we are a rich country. We have the means to decarbonise more quickly than poorer countries.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): The hon. Lady has made a very important point. One of the challenges that we will have to meet as a world is how we bring billions upon billions of people out of poverty in a way that does not damage the environment. If we are not careful, we will be seen as saying, "We're okay," and as pulling the ladder up after us with our comfortable standard of living. It is a real challenge for us to tackle climate change both here and across the globe in a way that is fair and equitable to those people who are currently living in poverty.

Wera Hobhouse: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. Social justice absolutely must be at the heart of tackling this issue internationally and in this country. We cannot afford to allow such action to become the burden of the poorer communities. We need to work internationally and collaboratively, which is why the whole debate in this country about separating from Europe through Brexit—I will touch on that later—is so damaging, because it sends out a message that we want to say goodbye to international collaboration.

Thirdly, as Lord Deben, the chair of the Committee on Climate Change, said this morning, when we know, we have a responsibility to act. We know now how to get to net zero, so we have a responsibility to do it. This is a very important point. It is not that we do not know how to go about it; we do know what to do, and therefore we have a moral responsibility to do it, and do it quickly.

I welcome the fact that this House and the Government have now said in legal terms that we should get to net zero by 2050, but I wonder whether that is only a desperate effort to build a legacy for the current Prime Minister. The hypocrisy of it is striking, given that her Government have relentlessly undermined the climate progress achieved by the Liberal Democrats in the coalition Government. Distant targets such as 2050 are meaningless unless backed up by concrete short-term action. The Committee on Climate Change has reported

that of its 25 headline policy actions for the past year, this Government have only fully delivered on one—one out of 25.

Complacency—[*Interruption.*] Complacency, which I am hearing from the Government Benches, is not in order. The Liberal Democrats are committed to achieving a net zero target by 2045, but we recognise that that will be achieved only if vital steps are taken immediately. For example, we need to ban fracking now. It is unacceptable that the Government support the development of new fossil fuels when all our efforts should go into developing renewables as sources of power. The Government blocked the Swansea tidal lagoon, even though it would have allowed us to become world leaders in tidal power. They privatised the green investment bank and stopped the growing solar power industry in its tracks. They have all but banned onshore wind, although that is now the cheapest form of renewable energy. They are also failing to lay out a clear road map that would allow industries to make long-term green investments.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I apologise for not having been in the Chamber earlier; I had to attend a Westminster Hall debate. The hon. Lady mentioned the privatisation of the green investment bank. Will she inform the House of how much money is being lent by that bank post privatisation in comparison with when it was under Government ownership?

Wera Hobhouse: The hon. Gentleman wants to make a political point—that the private bank works better. This will be the big debate about climate change. Who will take the lead—the private or the public sector? I am not convinced that the private sector will deliver what we need to achieve the net zero target in 2050. I do not believe it will. Those will be our big political differences. I do not mean that everything needs to be nationalised, but we need a clear debate about what will be carried by the public sector and by the private sector. I believe that, to make the transition socially just, the public sector will have a very important role to play.

I am going to say something else that the Government side of the House will not like. If we are serious about the climate emergency, the most immediate thing we can do is stop Brexit. Climate change is a global problem and the fight against it requires co-ordinated international action. As our closest geographical neighbour, the EU is a good place to start. It has been a force for good in meeting the challenge of climate change. Through its institutions, we have learned how to negotiate and bring together separate national interests under a commonly shared vision.

The process is not easy and not perfect, but it is far preferable to going it alone. The EU has taken the lead on international climate change action: it has, for example, introduced projects such as emissions trading schemes and interconnectors between national grids. One initiative important for local councils was that of the European directives on biodegradable waste, without which this country would have done nothing about recycling.

This is why the European Union actually works: it makes national Governments take action when they would not do so on their own. EU directives have required member states to take decisive action even when national Governments would not have done. It has built environmental protections into its dealings

with the rest of the world, putting key protections at the heart of its trade deals. Outside the EU, we will be weaker. We will have less clout, for example, against the United States, which might impose environmentally harmful terms on us as a condition of any new trade deal. While we are desperately looking for new trade deals, we might be victims of all that.

Luke Graham: The hon. Lady mentioned the impact of Brexit. I am not trying to rehash the Brexit debate here, although we probably would have been on the same side. The Paris climate accord obviously includes countries outside the EU. We can show leadership and try to bring countries together from both inside and outside the EU once we leave.

Secondly, does the hon. Lady agree that a number of Members in this House are nationalists who want not only to break out of the EU but break up our own United Kingdom? Surely breaking up the component parts of the United Kingdom would not help us to tackle climate change in any way.

Wera Hobhouse: It is absolutely true that we should not be getting into the Brexit debate, but I believe in co-operation at every level, and the environment that has been created in this House in the past two years against the European Union is very damaging to international co-operation.

Our closest geographical neighbour is the European Union, and we should work very closely with it. That is why the best thing we can do if we are serious about climate action is to stop Brexit. History will not look kindly on us for leaving the European Union just at the moment when our moral responsibility is to protect our planet and work together. We should be placing ourselves at the heart of the European project, because the climate emergency demands it.

5.50 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to close this debate on behalf of the Opposition. We have heard excellent contributions from across the House. It has been heartening to hear the common theme that tackling the climate emergency is of the highest priority. Indeed, the Minister said that the will to act has never been stronger. It was very heartening to hear that. However, there will be a lot of changes on the Treasury Bench over the next couple of weeks, and we hope that those who really care about this will continue to make sure that it is pushed to the very top of the agenda. We can afford nothing else.

There were excellent contributions from colleagues across the House, and I want to reflect on a few of them. The right hon. and learned Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) put forward an excellent manifesto on behalf of electric vehicles. His speech was very well made. Indeed, he made my heart leap, as a Nottinghamian, when he talked about electrification of the midland main line. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) would say the same: we think that that is a priority project. When there is a change of Prime Minister, I will again, humbly but very sincerely, ask Ministers to prioritise that project. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman might join me in that, because the current approach is fundamentally wrong.

[Alex Norris]

The hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) prioritised talking about economic benefits. That is important, because there is a danger that we discuss this issue in too many negative terms and it turns people off. We need to grasp that opportunity. I very much agree with what he said about making it a priority for each Department to report on its individual target. It is that kind of aggregate action that will make an impact.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) began by talking in very sobering terms about mass extinction and loss of species. Again, if that does not act as a call to action to us, I really do not know what will. I did slightly depart from her argument when she talked about not being swept away by major promises on a grand scale. Pragmatism can indeed be very important in the difficult choices ahead, but I would say that we have to be really ambitious. There will have to be a step change in our approach in order to do this. I do not think that slogans are necessarily any use either, but that is certainly not what Labour Members are endorsing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) talked about citizens' assemblies. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on deliberative democracy, I was very interested to hear that. I wonder if she might come and talk to our group about what her Select Committee is up to, because we are very interested in this sort of work. She echoed the comments of the hon. Member for Dundee West in saying that we have an awful lot to gain from a green industrial revolution. In my community, we have had four decades of deindustrialisation. That has absolutely scarred our community, and this is the route back from that. The tens of thousands of skilled, sustainable jobs in these industries are our future, so there is an awful lot to gain.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) relayed lots of what David Attenborough had said to the Select Committee, which was a stand-still moment for all of us in Parliament. The hon. Gentleman is dead right to say that young people are ahead of us on this issue—a theme I will return to shortly. I echo his comments about the importance of faith. I really feel that faith communities can act as conveners within our local communities, because these are important places where people come together and are willing to be vulnerable and generous with each other. He talked about the individual actions we are going to take to change our lives, and faith communities have a really strong role to play in that.

The hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) said that when he talks to young people, there is a sense that adults have not done enough. That message has been loudly heard, and we now have to catch up. I was interested in his idea about local climate youth ambassadors. There is a lot of energy among young people. The two things I get asked when I go to my local schools are, "What are you doing about it, Mr Norris?" and, "What more can I do about it?" That would be a good avenue. Finally, the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) talked about the inconvenient truth; I agree. I would be interested to hear the response from those on the Treasury Bench to her strongly made point on fracking.

The shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden), set out clearly the Labour party's programme for tackling the

climate emergency and getting to grips with the root causes, and I want to build on that for a couple of minutes. One element is addressing our aid budget. The new and possibly outgoing Secretary of State for International Development says that he wants to spend more of the 0.7% set aside for aid on tackling the climate emergency. That level of ambition is great, and we all recognise how urgent the emergency is, but it should not be a zero-sum game.

I would like to be very clear that, for the Opposition, tackling the climate emergency must not come at the expense of tackling poverty and inequality abroad. That goes back to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling—how do we lift billions out of poverty in a sustainable way? It cannot not be at the expense of aid spending on health, education and sexual violence against women and girls. I am sure the Minister agrees with that, and I would be interested to hear more on that.

UK aid spent on tackling the climate emergency must go towards climate-compatible development and climate justice. It must continue measurably and demonstrably to reduce poverty. It cannot be another excuse to repurpose the aid budget and take some money we would have spent somewhere else and badge it up as aid. That would really miss the point. Will the Government commit to finding additional funds for climate finance, rather than relying on incremental increases from the existing official development assistance budget? Will the Minister restate that all ODA-funded climate spending will directly and measurably help the world's poorest, in line with current UK law?

Global climate justice also means that we must ensure that our transition in this country towards a better, greener future is not at the expense of the global south. The Opposition reject any new green colonialism, which is becoming too real a risk. We must not export our climate emergency overseas. We must solve the problem, not brush it under the carpet. That fundamental principle of global climate justice must be at the root of all the actions we take.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that the exporting of our climate problems is part of what we need to address in this House? I fear that, in trying to clean up our own act, we might be merely pushing the problem overseas to countries that are less well equipped and morally should not have to take responsibility for ensuring that what we do here is properly contributing to net zero carbon.

Alex Norris: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. That is a really inconvenient truth. We might think, "We're only 1% of the world's emissions. We'll sort ourselves out," but we must understand what we have exported. I talked about the deindustrialisation in my community. Those jobs and functions are happening elsewhere in the world, as are those emissions. We have to be very careful that we are not dishonest about that.

We must manage our waste properly rather than export it, filling the seas around south-east Asia with plastic. The principle of global climate justice must guide us to secure labour rights and fair supply chains when Britain pays for the raw materials to build millions of solar panels. It must guide us to net zero by reducing

our emissions, not by simply supporting carbon offsetting and carbon markets that we know can generate enormous problems in the global south. It must guide us, as the shadow Chancellor has argued, to make our new green technologies available to the global south. Labour is clear: urgent action by the UK on the climate emergency must bring about justice and a new, fairer world, rather than a repeat of history.

I want to take a moment, with a little bit of self-indulgence, to talk about Nottingham. I was very proud today when I read in *The Guardian* that our council and city are arguably the most ambitious in the country, with our target of net zero carbon by 2028, our green transit, our trees and our bees. Indeed, I have beaten the hon. Member for Dundee West to it, as we have our own not-for-profit, locally run energy supplier. I would be interested in talking privately with him about his plans and how we might be able to work together on that.

As an Opposition, we have set out our plans. Earlier this year, my colleagues the shadow BEIS Secretary and the shadow DEFRA Secretary set out Labour's ambitious environmental plan for a green transformation. The shadow Chancellor has spoken at great length about how we will green the City. We, the shadow DFID team, have set out in great detail our plans on entering government to ensure that our aid budget brings about climate justice. Shadow departmental teams across Labour's Front Bench are now bringing forward policy plans to tackle the climate emergency. Across Government, we will recommit to the Paris agreement, explore bringing forward the date by which we can achieve the net zero target, and fight in the global financial institutions for a fairer global local economy that puts people and planet before profit. This is our promise as the next Labour Government, and that is what we will deliver.

6 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): It is great privilege to reply to this debate. In this Parliament over the last few months, a 93-year-old man, Sir David Attenborough, has spoken powerfully of the need for us to act, and a 16-year-old girl, Greta Thunberg, has come here and told us of the need to act. In the last week, many of our constituents have come to say that the time is now for all of us to act. I am proud to be speaking at the Dispatch Box representing the greenest Government ever of the country that has gone faster than any other major industrialised country to decarbonise, and which is indeed decarbonising faster than any other country in the G20.

Millions of women will have got up this morning in Africa and walked for miles to cut down a tree, turn it into charcoal and cook using it in their own home in a way that poisons them and their family. This is one of the biggest killers in our world today. What came through loud and clear in today's debate is that this is a global challenge and a global problem. Yes, we have to do our bit here in the UK, but we must also keep at the front and centre of our work the very poorest, who are likely to be the most affected by climate change.

I welcome the spirit of today's debate. There has been a huge amount of cross-party support. That is important because passing the legislation to go to net zero without a vote in this Chamber, as we did last week, sends out

the most powerful signal that we can send to the UK private sector that, whatever happens in our politics, everyone is on the same page on this agenda. Of course, there may be differences about what we do and how fast we go, and a range of different points of view were expressed on that today, but what was most powerful overall was that everyone agreed, cross-party, that this is something we need to tackle.

We should also welcome the fact that, although I am responding to this debate as an International Development Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson) opened it as a Minister in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. That also sends a very strong signal about how we are working on this across Government.

We are all agreed that climate change remains one of the biggest global threats to sustained development and, indeed, to our own way of life. No country on this planet is projected to be spared from further temperature increases, and the world is already facing serious challenges to the natural environment, food production and water resources. The challenges posed by change to our climate are systemic. Much more needs to be done and greater global ambition is needed. That is why the UK is jointly bidding with Italy to host next year's COP 26.

We have had an excellent debate, full of a range of very strong contributions. Although the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) objected to a Business Minister opening the debate, he will be interested to know that 34% of all our climate finance is spent by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. He will also be interested to know that the multilateral development banks agreed at last year's COP to align their \$200 billion of climate finance with the Paris agreement—that is a point he specifically requested.

As we send out these strong cross-party messages, we need to think carefully about the attacks I heard from Opposition Members against the oil and gas sector. I am sure that Labour voters in Scotland would be alarmed if they felt that the hon. Gentleman would be as harsh on the oil and gas sector in Scotland as he appears to be on the sector elsewhere in the world.

This is the only political point I will make from the Dispatch Box today, but we need to think about actions that will lead the world and about actions that will lead to businesses moving from this country to other parts of the world. I would put in that second category the shadow Chancellor's aspiration to remove the UK listings of many perfectly good, British companies, which will simply move their listings elsewhere.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The Minister is talking about future investment. Will she commit her Government to taking real action on carbon capture, utilisation and storage? The project in Peterhead was shamefully abandoned by George Osborne a few years ago, and we need to get projects such as St Fergus up and running. If we could do that by 2023, it would do an awful lot to help this issue. Can the Minister get behind that?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we are spending £45 million on supporting this technology, and we published an action plan last November, but of course we need to do more.

[Harriett Baldwin]

In a strong speech, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) talked about transport and the importance of changing behaviour in the sector, which is such a big emitter of carbon. I highlight the £1.5 billion that goes with the “Road to Zero” strategy, which was published last year, and the private sector is rapidly responding to the signals sent out from this place.

All the UK car companies have now developed electric models, including today’s welcome news about the Mini in Oxford and the wonderful news about Jaguar Land Rover in the midlands. Even in my constituency, Morgan Motor Company, known for its traditional cars, will have an electric model. My right hon. and learned Friend will be interested to know that 1,000 charging points a month are now being installed across the UK, which exceeds our expectations. The sector is rapidly responding to the signals we have sent out from this place.

The hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) made an excellent speech about what Scotland is doing, and he made the valid point that the minority SNP Government may have examples of best practice from which England and other parts of the UK can learn.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) made an amazing speech, and I salute her work as co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the United Nations global goals for sustainable development. With her experience of the car industry, she made some powerful points about how we are bringing people with us.

The hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), who is Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, made a powerful speech about how this is an opportunity for the UK to lead the next industrial revolution, and she highlighted some of the Committee’s excellent work in this area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) spoke at some length—I am now looking at the time to make sure I am not also going over—and he highlighted the importance of our moving beyond single-use plastics. As a member of the Select Committee, he spoke with great knowledge of trees, electric vehicles and a range of other important areas. He also spoke of the importance of cross-party work in Scotland.

I am glad that the hearing aid of the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) did not cause any faltering in his excellent speech as a member of the Environmental Audit Committee. The hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) highlighted that this is not a new issue. I am old enough to remember the slogan “Plant a tree in ‘73”. I will not embarrass the House by asking other hon. Members to acknowledge that they remember that, but it is something that we have been doing for a while. We need to act faster and go further. I diverged from her only on her feeling that we would be helped in doing that by being a member of the European Union. We are going further and faster than the European Union which was not able to reach consensus on the issue recently.

The shadow Minister talked about the importance of climate finance. The UK has led the world in green finance. We published a further green finance strategy

last week, and the leadership of Mark Carney at the Bank of England has been strong in this area, including on disclosure in annual reports. The City of London has shown itself able to attract a lot of listings, and we have more than \$25 billion of funding going into green developments, which has happened as a result of the UK’s leadership in this area. We need to carry on with that because such investments can often be very capital intensive.

Looking to the future, I am confident that the UK can lead from the front in helping the world to drive the change necessary. That is why debates like today’s are important, timely and effective. I thank everyone who has generated the strong amount of consensus in this important debate today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered tackling climate change, protecting the environment and securing global development.

PETITIONS

Rights of British National (Overseas) Passport Holders

6.12 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of a group of over 3,000 British national overseas passport holders living in Hong Kong and the UK. Those British nationals still feel proud of their historical ties with the UK and share our values. In view of the deteriorating state of human rights and democracy in Hong Kong, the petitioners therefore request:

That the House of Commons urges the Government to carry out an urgent review of the rights of British National (Overseas) passport holders, addressing the need for these passport holders in Hong Kong and China to access British consular assistance and request diplomatic protection in view of the ongoing political situation in Hong Kong, and allowing BN(O) passport holders with Tiers 4 and 5 visas to be given routes to residency in the UK.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of Residents of the UK of Hong Kong origins,

Declares that the rights of British National (Overseas) passport holders should be reviewed; notes that over 150,000 BN(O) passport holders in Hong Kong and China are unable to access British consular assistance and request diplomatic protection despite the deteriorating state of human rights and rule of law in Hong Kong; further that citizens of British Hong Kong were issued the BN(O) passport without the right of abode in the UK as a political compromise with the Chinese government prior to the 1997 handover, instead of being given British citizenship as is the case for citizens of other former British colonies; further that these British nationals still feel proud of their ties with the UK and share British values; further that many highly educated and skilled BN(O) passport holders studying and working in the UK under Tiers 4 and 5 visas are unable to remain and contribute the UK economy and society; and further that a petition on behalf of a group of 240 BNO passport holders and their families have received over 3000 signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to carry out an urgent review of the rights of British National (Overseas) passport holders, addressing the need for these passport holders in Hong Kong and China to access British consular assistance and request diplomatic protection in view of the ongoing political situation in Hong Kong, and allowing BN(O) passport holders with Tiers 4 and 5 visas to be given routes to residency in the UK.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

Postmasters' Pay

6.13 pm

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): This is a petition on behalf of the 375 residents of Chilton in my constituency, who are concerned about the future of the local post office. It is an issue that affects not only Chilton but the rest of the post office network, and it is to do with the payments made to sub-postmasters which on occasions can lead to them being paid less than the minimum wage.

The petition states:

The petition of Residents of Chilton,

Declares that no postmaster should be paid below the minimum wage; further that a related petition on this matter has received significant local support.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to call on the Post Office Ltd to review postmasters' pay to prevent postmasters being paid below the minimum wage.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002490]

St Rollox Railway Works

6.14 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents in my constituency and the wider city of Glasgow. It declares that the permanent closure of St Rollox Railway Works, affectionately known as the Caley in my constituency, would lose hundreds of well-paid jobs; further that the restoration of the Garratt steam locomotive Springbok, which was originally built in Springburn in the 1950s, exported to South Africa and brought back to Scotland in the 1980s, and has unfortunately been lying derelict for some 30 years, would provide a proper opportunity to maintain the workforce until a new operator for the site could be found; further that the restoration of a steam engine for heritage purposes would not trigger

the state-aid restrictions that the Government have otherwise claimed would restrict their ability to save the site; further that there is a need for the UK and Scottish Governments to collaborate on finding a sustainable railway engineering use for the St Rollox Railway Works site to extend the current 160 years of industrial excellence and railway engineering in Springburn; and further notes that over 100 signatures have been collected on an associated Labour party petition to save the St Rollox Railway Works.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to work with the Scottish Government to jointly financially support the restoration of the Garratt steam locomotive Springbok and to use the time thus provided to identify a new operator to guarantee the future of the St Rollox Railway Works.

The petition states:

The petition of Residents of Glasgow,

Declares that the permanent closure of St Rollox Railway Works would lose hundreds of well-paid jobs; further that the restoration of Garratt steam locomotive 'Springbok' which was originally built in Springburn and is currently decaying in the Summerlee Heritage Park, Coatbridge would provide an excellent project to maintain the workforce until a new operator for the site could be found; further that the restoration of a steam engine for heritage purposes would not engage state-aid restriction; further that there is a need for the UK and Scottish Governments to collaborate on finding a sustainable railway engineering use for the St Rollox Railway Works site to extend the current one hundred and sixty years of industrial excellence and railway engineering in Springburn; further notes that signatures have been collected on another petition to save the St Rollox Railway Works.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to work with the Scottish Government to jointly financially support the restoration of the Garratt steam locomotive 'Springbok' and to use the time thus provided to identify a new operator to guarantee the future of the St Rollox Railway Works.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002492]

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services: North-east

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

6.16 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): As hon. Members know, it is very difficult sometimes to secure an Adjournment debate—the last one took me over a year to obtain—so I was very pleased when this one was granted, especially as it is on such an important matter, as I will outline in some detail tonight. It is especially welcome that business has fallen early tonight, so I do not need to rush or curtail my remarks to leave time for the Minister. This is such an important matter and I know we will both have plenty of time to deal with this issue.

I would first like to thank my constituents for bringing their case to me, and for waiving their anonymity in the hope that their story can help other families and ensure that something like this does not happen again, as it could so easily have had a tragic ending. Going public like this is a very brave thing to do and I sincerely hope that their story, and today's debate, will spark a change.

In March this year my constituent, Mr Thomas, wrote to me about his daughter Jane, and the

“deplorable treatment when attempting to access CAMHS support”.

Jane, aged 16 at the time—she is now 17—tragically lost her mother as a result of alcohol abuse. Everyone will appreciate the grief that this will have caused Jane and her family, and the lasting impact of that grief after years of watching a parent decline due to alcohol abuse. Many hon Members, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), have spoken growing up with similar experiences. I pay tribute to them, and to Jane, today.

Having experienced such loss on top of what she would have seen her mum go through over the years, Jane was understandably struggling with her mental health. Mr Thomas therefore felt that Jane needed professional intervention. Having consulted Jane's GP, Jane was referred to North Durham child and adolescent mental health services at Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys Foundation NHS Trust. This is where Mr Thomas's frustration begins.

Jane waited weeks for a CAMHS appointment following the referral, but it was not forthcoming. Mr Thomas went back and forth with the GP to ensure that the referral had been made, and was assured that it had. He was even shown the email confirming that. He then contacted the CAMHS team directly over the phone. As you can imagine, he was surprised to hear that they had no record of any referral regarding Jane. Mr Thomas says that this

“set the pattern of misinformation and incompetence that Jane and I were to encounter.”

Mr Thomas contacted CAMHS again to enquire whether an appointment would be made for Jane, and was told that Jane would not be seen as her need had already been assessed and her case was closed. That exasperated him further, as it referred to an earlier

episode and a case from several years earlier, not the most recent case following the death of Jane's mother. Therefore, it did nothing to inspire confidence.

Jane finally saw a CAMHS practitioner at the end of last year and was making positive progress, but her last appointment was on 4 January 2019. It is now July, and Jane has not had another appointment on the national health service in the past seven months. The initial reason for the delay was that Jane's counsellor had left to start her maternity leave—something that, of course, she is absolutely entitled to do—but the trust will have been well aware for some time that the counsellor's maternity leave would need to be covered. There also should have been a period of handover so that the service could continue its work smoothly. That did not happen.

Maternity cover was found after a gap of more than two months. However, just days after starting, that person resigned their position, leaving the trust unexpectedly without any cover. I am told that that was for personal reasons. It was at that point that the trust wrote to Jane Thomas, on 8 March, apologising for the delay in her treatment and suggesting that, if she had any inquiries, she should contact the team at North End House or, if she was in crisis, she could call the CAMHS crisis team. It was then three months since her last treatment.

It was upon receiving that letter that Mr Thomas contacted me to bring all this to my attention. There was nothing in the letter to Jane—I have seen a copy of it—to suggest that she should contact the trust to arrange an appointment or alternative provision; it just said to call if she was in crisis. I therefore wrote to the trust on 18 March, asking them to examine this matter further and advise Jane and Mr Thomas.

On 29 March, I received a reply that said that the trust had

“looked at interim solutions, such as part time staff working additional hours.”

It did not say whether that was actually happening, or whether that would include an offer of support to Jane, only that they were looking at it. That was just one of the many opportunities that the trust had to take another look at Jane's case, to see what interim solutions were in place for her and to make contact with her directly, perhaps by calling her, as they did yesterday—I will come to that in a moment. But that did not happen.

Yesterday, I spoke to Mr Levi Buckley, director of operations at the trust, in advance of this debate. We had been trying to arrange a call for some time and could not get the dates to match, but obviously that changed once I secured this debate. I was told yesterday that alternative arrangements had been put in place for the majority of patients. He told me that when Jane's counsellor went on maternity leave in January, all those patients should have had their cases reviewed and reassigned to another counsellor or another support network. However, for whatever reason, that did not happen for Jane, although I am told that it did for all the others. Jane had obviously, and shamefully, just slipped through the net. The trust realised that, no doubt prompted by Mr Thomas, and in March, when the new counsellor started and then left after two days, they contacted Jane to apologise with the letter dated 8 March that I mentioned earlier.

There was no concerted effort at any point by the trust to re-establish contact with Jane, who for all they knew was getting no support at all with her mental health.

There was just that one letter. Even after I contacted the trust on 18 March to begin this dialogue, they still made no further contact with Jane until yesterday, when she was called within two hours of my conversation with Mr Buckley, prior to this debate. I understand that Jane spoke to the head of the CAMHS service, who apologised and offered her transitional provision to move her into adult services, as she is 18 later this month. It is, of course, entirely up to Jane what she decides to do.

Having spoken to the trust, they agree that they could have done more to make contact with Jane, who obviously was easily contactable, as they spoke to her without delay yesterday. There have been many opportunities available, since March when I first contacted the trust on behalf of Mr Thomas and Jane, to make that direct contact and arrange counselling provision for Jane, but that did not happen. That means that a vulnerable young person had fallen through the gaps because of incompetence, and even when it had been brought to their attention in March, nothing was done to rectify the situation until yesterday.

It does not need me to point out that this could have been fatal, had Mr Thomas not sought and paid privately for mental health provision for Jane. I understand from my call with Mr Buckley yesterday that the situation at the trust was made more difficult because, after advertising the job twice and getting no applicants, they had to lower the grade of the position—meaning that the person would require more supervision—in order to attract someone they could employ. This person is due to start in September—nine months after the counsellor on maternity leave left. Mr Thomas emailed me earlier today to say that the

“analogy of too many Generals and no Soldiers would suggest itself”.

I agree.

In April, when I met Mr Thomas in my constituency surgery, he was very clear that this was about incompetence and bad management within the trust that had allowed his daughter to slip through the cracks. What has most frustrated him about this ordeal is the lack of accountability for what he calls the

“appalling management of the service”.

He went on:

“This CAMHS organisation is poorly led, poorly administered and managed with incompetence.”

Can the Minister please inform the House who should be accountable for these failures?

A freedom of information request made in 2018 to the Care Quality Commission by a concerned parent inquiring into numbers of complaints made against CAMHS went unanswered, with the CQC stating that it did not have full oversight of this organisation and therefore could not provide the requested information. Who does oversee CAMHS? Who should be taking responsibility for the vacancy gap and the real problems that the trust has had in filling the vacancy, and for the impact it has had on vulnerable young people who need access to support? What advice can the Minister give to my constituent, who just wants to help his daughter get the professional treatment she needs, when she needs it, on the NHS? Does the Minister think that trusts should not be able to mark their own homework on such cases? They must surely be held accountable when there are failures and recognise the need for change. I hope that this debate brings about some change.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this debate to the Chamber, and for explaining the importance of mental health services in the north-east. In Scotland in the last five years, there has been a 50% increase in the number of suicides among 15 to 24-year-olds. We need to do something about this national crisis.

Mrs Hodgson: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I would encourage him to apply for a debate with the same title, only with “Scotland” at the end instead of “North-east” so that he can explore that 50% increase in greater detail. If he is lucky, he might get a nice long session like me, but I know the Minister will have heard his comments.

Throughout all this incompetence it is Jane who has suffered. If this is an issue of recruitment and retention, which it seems to be, what will the Minister do to ensure that CAMHS staff are both recruited and retained nationally, and specifically in the north-east? Nationally, the number of consultant child and adolescent psychiatrists fell by 4.5% between October 2013 and October 2018, which might account for why it was so hard for the trust to recruit someone, while the Government are on track to miss their mental health workforce target by 15,000 staff. Labour research in January found that the total number of mental health nurses had fallen in every month the previous year. I should be grateful if, in her remarks, the Minister would address the issues that led to this decline in the number of mental health nurses and evaluate the impact that it is having on young people such as Jane.

If an A&E just closed its doors because of a lack of staff and stopped treating people, there would be an outcry—we would not stand for it—so why do we allow it to happen when it comes to mental health? The Prime Minister said she wanted mental health to be a priority, but the Government are nowhere near achieving that goal. Mental health awareness is one thing, but it must be matched by mental health support and treatment services, and that is where the Government are failing, especially with regard to staffing.

According to research carried out by the Children’s Society, more than 110,000 children a year are unable to access mental health support from a CAMHS service, despite being referred for support. Three out of four children with a diagnosable mental health condition do not receive the support that they need, according to similar research conducted by YoungMinds. This is therefore not a problem exclusive to the north-east—or even Scotland, as we have just heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney)—which is why the Government must take action.

I wrote to Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, which informed me that it did not operate a waiting list in County Durham and Darlington CAMHS. However, Jane and other young people, across the north-east and the whole country, are still waiting. It beggars belief that the trust could say that, but it is in the letter that it sent to me.

As I have said, Mr Thomas was left with no choice but to engage a private practitioner. That came at a huge cost to him and his family, but as a loving parent he felt that he had no other option. No parent should be

[Mrs Hodgson]

put in that position, and not all parents have the means to step in when the services let them down so badly, as was the case for Jane.

According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, mental health trusts have less money to spend on patient care in real terms than they had in 2012. Of course, lack of funding means that trusts are strained and unable to provide vital services. Is that what led to the staffing problems in this trust? Was its inability to fill the vacancies down to the salaries being offered, or was the workload that was being demanded of staff too high? Why did that new person leave after only two days? Will the Minister support Labour's calls for the ring-fencing of NHS mental health budgets and an increase in the proportion of those budgets that is spent on support for children and young people? Increased funding will relax some of the pressure on services, and will ensure that they can be sufficiently staffed and resourced to improve patient experiences.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, Mr Thomas and Jane were very brave to allow me to share their story with the House in so much detail today. However, it should not have come to this. Jane, having mental health problems, should have been referred to CAMHS, been assessed and then been given therapy appointments as necessary to support her recovery—unbroken, with no seven-month gaps in provision. Instead, she and Mr Thomas have been back and forth and have had to fight, and even pay, for the support that she needs and to which she is entitled.

Mr Buckley, from the trust, informed me that North Durham CAMHS had seen an 18% rise in referrals over the last year. It follows that as the number of referrals rises, the funding must also increase to meet that need. The Government must increase the proportion of mental health budgets spent on support for children and young people: they must make mental health a priority, with actions and not just warm words.

While the staffing crisis and mismanagement at Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust rages on, Jane still has no access to treatment and support on the NHS, although I have been told that she received a call yesterday suggesting that the problem might be resolved shortly. I therefore ask the Minister what she will do for Jane, and young people like her, to ensure that situations like this do not occur in future.

6.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): I thank the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) for the sensitive way in which she has outlined the case of her constituent Jane. We often debate NHS issues in this place, and it is often a case of trading statistics and numbers, but the hon. Lady has reminded us all that there are vulnerable people needing help who are potentially at risk of more harm when the NHS fails them. I will write to her in more detail answering some of the questions that she has posed to me today, but for the moment I will address some of the issues with which I am able to deal.

We have articulated clear ambitions for improving children's mental health services, but, as the hon. Lady outlined extremely well, this follows decades of under-

investment in those services, and there is a way to go from where we are now to where we need to be. The waiting times that Jane has experienced, which the hon. Lady outlined, really are not acceptable.

We will be very clear about our ambitions, but the hon. Lady is also right to highlight that we are very dependent on the performance of individual trusts in terms of delivering that. She set out the challenge as regards the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust very well. The Care Quality Commission is giving quite a lot of attention to that trust for one reason or another, and the trust will be made much more accountable. I always say that sunlight is the best disinfectant, and one of the issues that we collectively face is that because mental health has for so long been something we have not talked about enough and has been stigmatised, mental health services have been a bit out of sight, out of mind, and have not had the scrutiny that they should have had.

The comparison the hon. Lady draws with an A&E, saying if it was turning away patients like this there would be an absolute scandal, is right, and part and parcel of achieving parity of esteem is that we must expect the same high performance and standards of our mental health services as we do of our physical health services. I know that the hon. Lady will not let me get away with not taking that as seriously as I possibly can.

We have made some progress, but, as the hon. Lady has heard me say before, I am in no way complacent about where we are. It is not just that we need overall improvement; there is great disparity between various regions and areas across the country, and the hon. Lady represents an area that is particularly challenged. She made some points about waiting time standards, and I am getting quite an inconsistent picture as regards the performance of that trust, which suggests to me that there is something wrong with the data and how things are being measured. Again, we need to hold everyone to account so we can be sure that our waiting list and waiting time data are accurate.

Mrs Hodgson: When I spoke to Mr Buckley about the sentence in the letter that said a waiting list was not operated, he explained that that probably was not very accurate, because when everyone is seen and triaged, if they need an appointment to see a therapist they are given one in, say, six weeks, eight weeks or 12 weeks. He said that the fact that they are given an appointment explains why there is no waiting list. So as the Minister rightly pointed out, we will have to drill down on that, because I do not think we are measuring the same thing across all trusts if they are all using different forms of words.

Jackie Doyle-Price: There might be something we can do on standardising the approach, but that brings us to another challenge. We apply these targets to try to achieve a standardised service and to ensure that people get treated when they need it, but that encourages some perverse behaviours, and the hon. Lady has just outlined one of them. The challenge for us is how we apply standards of behaviour and targets without driving perverse outcomes and bad outcomes for patients. I still think we have a lot to do on that, and probably a lot of learning. We need to identify those areas that really are doing it well so that we can spread good practice throughout the system.

But there is obviously a good reason why we must make sure we get child and adolescent mental health services much better: because we know that people who suffer from mental health issues tend to develop those conditions when they are children—when they are young. We all know that early intervention is the best way, not least for the individual concerned, because they will suffer less harm, but it is also good for the taxpayer because it costs less money to help people sooner. So we must make sure that we continue to give children's mental health much more priority than it has had hitherto, and central to that will be greater provision of services in the community.

I am really concerned about the story the hon. Lady has just told. The process that Jane has been taken through appears to have completely failed, and the communication with her and her father appears to be extremely poor. Again, I think we can go away and look at how we communicate with patients and their families, and particularly at the tone that is used. We are dealing with people who are in a very vulnerable position, and to put it bluntly, it should not be “take what you're given”, should it? Ultimately, our NHS is there to serve all of us, and it needs to do so with sensitivity and tact.

The hon. Lady rightly challenged me about money and the need to ensure that it delivers extra appointments. We are ambitious to see many more children, through the investment we are making, but unfortunately I do not have a magic wand and I cannot roll it all out overnight. As she points out, we need to ensure that we are investing in the appropriate workforce to deliver these services.

I would like to make another point about NHS commissioners. While we are delivering this real step change in mental health provision for children, there are other things that can be done by local health commissioners—and by local authorities, for that matter—while people are waiting for referrals and appointments. There is still additional support that can be given by organisations doing good voluntary work to give wraparound support and take some of the pain out of the experience. I often say that good mental health care is not all about clinical interventions; it is about the wider support that can be given in the community as well.

Our reforms to mental health in schools have that kind of support very much in mind. We are rolling out a new workforce, which is going to be based on people who are trained in psychology and therapies, but the ethos will be very much that they are working with voluntary sector organisations that will be able to provide that additional support to people who are going through periods of mental ill health. We want to ensure that many more children who are going through mental ill health are seen, not least because we are seeing increased prevalence and it will take substantial extra effort to ensure that we are providing that service.

I turn specifically to waiting times. We have introduced new standards for mental health services, and in particular, we have introduced targets with regard to eating disorders and to a first episode of psychosis. We are making good progress on those, but as the hon. Lady says, Jane had clearly gone through significant trauma and it would not be unanticipated that that would impact on her mental wellbeing. Our targets for psychosis and eating disorders would perhaps not capture someone with that level of need, but it is still important that she has access

to that support. Sunderland clearly has longer waiting times than many other areas of the country. I understand that the trust has been successful in bidding for additional NHS England funding as part of a national waiting list initiative, and I sincerely hope that that will improve access for the hon. Lady's constituents.

When we hear of cases such as that of Jane, I can understand why people feel that our commitments on transformation ring a bit hollow. I know the hon. Lady will understand that we see this as a long-term process of rolling out improved services. That is the only way we are going to embed the change in culture that we really need in how we prioritise mental health, but we need to redouble that progress, as she says. We are determined that NHS funding for children and young people's mental health services will continue to rise.

The hon. Lady asked me about making sure there is a proper ring fence. We have demanded that CCGs increase mental health spending on children's services by more than their budget rises, but I think we will be taking a more interventionist approach. I know that NHS England is having robust discussions to ensure that all commissioners do exactly what is expected of them. We expect to have been able to treat an additional 345,000 children by 2024 through the additional funding, and we are already seeing some benefits.

I understand that in Sunderland, local commissioners have commissioned Mind to work with young people aged 11 to 25 and give direct support in that way. In addition, there is the new Lifecycle service, which includes access to adult therapies—one of the issues the hon. Lady raised. I am told that in Tyneside 90% of young people are seen within five days for triage into the service, but on the basis of what the hon. Lady has told me, I would like to do a bit more digging to make sure that the figure is robust.

We know that the mental health sector is showing imagination and innovation in filling the skills gaps in mental health nursing and psychiatry, but it is worth noting that one of the upsides of us talking about this subject and giving so much more attention to mental health is that it is raising the profile of the sector as somewhere to work. The really nice thing is that people do care about it. Applications for psychiatry are increasing, in part, I guess, because would-be psychiatrists can see that there will be plenty of demand for their services. Although we are making the sector more attractive, providing the workforce will be a big challenge, so we need to encourage more imagination about how that is delivered.

New roles are emerging, such as peer support workers, making use of lived experience. It strikes me that people going through mental health issues often find it intimidating to talk about it and to respond to treatment. Getting support from someone who has been through a similar experience can be enormously important to their recovery, and we want to encourage much more of that. We have the new nursing associates, and we want to encourage more mature workers—perhaps women re-entering the labour market—to explore careers in mental health. We will need much more imagination in the coming years if we are to continue to deliver the workforce we need.

Mrs Hodgson: I am sure the Minister can guess what I am about to say. Previously, the nursing bursary was so important for older people going back into the

[Mrs Hodgson]

workforce or making a career change, and especially the group of people who now do not even apply for those opportunities. Is there any influence she can exert on the Government, any hope that at some point in this Parliament they will bring back that bursary?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I walked right into that one, didn't I? The hon. Lady is right in the sense that we need to enable people to learn and earn. That is the key. I have conversations with Health Education England about how we can meet our ambitious workforce targets, and I am sure that it will have noticed what she just said and my reply. Applications are increasing despite the removal of the bursary, but I believe we could do more to encourage people who are considering entering the sector, perhaps later in life, when they have a family and they need to earn.

The NHS long-term plan, which contains some very ambitious commitments on mental health, is a huge opportunity for commissioners to think much more creatively about how they deliver their local services, because we are going to have to deliver a step change in the provision of services available in the community.

I have talked a bit about the mental health support teams going into schools, and it is pleasing to see that they are being rolled out. I do not believe we currently have a trailblazer that serves the hon. Lady's constituency, but clearly if the local trust could work with local schools on delivery, it would make a huge difference to delivering services for children and young people. I believe teams are now covering Newcastle Gateshead, Northumberland and south Tyneside, and they will be testing the four-week waiting time, which she will believe is important, particularly when viewed through the prism of Jane's experience. Later this week, we will

be delivering the next wave of those sites, so let us watch this space—hopefully we will be able to get more provision.

The hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) mentioned the issue of suicide and self-harm, which is clearly a considerable priority for me. We have been fortunate in seeing declining rates of suicide for a number of years, but we are beginning to see it on the rise again among children and young people. We could all speculate as to the reasons for that. They will be complex, because every suicide has its own story, and it is usually an escalation of factors that leads to someone taking their own life. We need to take a good look at exactly what pressures our young people are facing. Clearly, Jane had had adverse childhood experiences. We know they contribute to mental ill health, but other things are involved, too. If we can identify people who are at risk early—clearly, adverse childhood experiences are a good indicator—we can make sure we give that support sooner and then we will genuinely be able to tackle suicide prevention. We are on it, but we have a lot more learning to do on that.

I am really grateful for the sensitivity with which the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West has outlined Jane's case, and I will take that away and respond in detail to the issues she has raised. As a pathway of experience, that clearly is not good enough, but I suspect it is all too common. Sometimes it is useful to use a particular case study to see exactly what is going wrong and what we can learn from. I would, however, say that I am proud of the progress we are making on improving services. We need to do much more. I wish I could do it quicker, but I will do the best I can.

Question put and agreed to.

6.53 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 10 July 2019

[MR LAURENCE ROBERTSON *in the Chair*]

Universal Health Coverage

9.30 am

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered universal health coverage.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Robertson, and to be here in Westminster Hall. I am pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words about universal health coverage.

Let me begin with one or two words of thanks. First, I thank Alison Stiby-Harris and, through her, all at Save the Children, which prompted me to seek the debate. I also thank all the colleagues who supported the effort to secure it, and the various agencies and supporters who have contributed to it through their briefings. Secondly, I thank the Library for its briefing pack, which of course is distributed far and wide—far beyond our boundaries. I thank Tim Robinson, Jon Lunn and Philip Brien for their contributions to it.

I also thank my former colleagues at the Department for International Development, who I know will have prepared the Minister for the torrid time he can expect this morning, and with whom I worked so joyfully before Brexit intervened. I thank them and all those they represent, here and around the world, for the immense contribution they make, not only to this area but to all other aspects of aid and development delivery. As I frequently told them and Foreign and Commonwealth Office colleagues around the world, life may be very difficult in some of the spots where they work, but without them things would be just that bit more difficult.

I will first set out the themes of universal healthcare and why I think it is so important, and then offer a few sobering facts and figures about where the world is, and point the way, with reference to what is being done, towards opportunities for the UK to continue to lead in this field, as I hope and believe it can. It is such a vast field that I cannot cover everything.

It is rather nice to start a debate, rather than to have the eight or 10 minutes at the end and have to respond to a veritable volley of questions from Front Benchers and others—not least the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who we heard with great sadness will not be with us in the next Parliament. No doubt there will be plenty of opportunities to thank him for the contribution he has made. It is nice to have the opportunity to kick off a debate, but I will try to ensure that I do not abuse that privilege by going on until at least half-past 10, as I would love to.

Universal health coverage means that

“all people and communities can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship.”

That is the World Health Organisation definition, which embodies three related objectives. The first is equity in access to health services. Everyone who needs services, not only those who can afford to pay for them, should

get them. Secondly, the quality of health services should be good enough to improve the health of those receiving services. Thirdly, people should be protected against financial risk, ensuring that the cost of using services does not put people at risk of financial harm. Universal health coverage cuts across all the health-related sustainable development goals, particularly SDG 3, and brings hope of better health and protection for the world's poorest.

I am sure it is not difficult for us to explain to the British public why this topic has such resonance. Health is fundamental. Our nation's commitment to a national health service, free at the point of delivery, is now such a staple of our lives that its principle needs little further emphasis. So it is around the world.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on all he has done in the positions he has held, but it is good to see him leading a debate in Westminster Hall. Tuberculosis is the world's deadliest infectious disease, killing more people each year than HIV and malaria combined. It affects the most vulnerable and marginalised—those with less money—and both the disease and the treatment have long-lasting consequences. Does he agree that it is imperative that we prevent rather than treat TB, since the latter leads to the emergence and spread of drug resistance, which is a real danger to individuals—especially the vulnerable—and to public health more broadly?

Alistair Burt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. He is a noble champion of many health causes, and of the rights of people across the world. TB is indeed a key part of the delivery of universal health coverage. I will cover it later in relation to our contribution to the Global Fund, but it is absolutely right that some of the diseases that we have begun effectively to marginalise in the United Kingdom are still a risk in many parts of the world, particularly for the poorest.

A healthy society is one in which children can fulfil their potential, mothers can give birth safely and the cruellest of preventable diseases, such as TB, can be tackled, with life and nation-changing impact, but to do this effectively, the world needs to tackle it collectively. Colleagues will know how important I hold collective multilateral activity by the world's nations to be. As multilateralism seems under relentless threat from many quarters, universal health coverage reminds us that a common issue or threat is dealt with not by even the best-intentioned individual or bilateral action, but by pooling sovereignty and making collective effort, whether that is in vaccination, in the fight against HIV/AIDS, or in combating anti-microbial resistance. Collective effort also means creating partnerships between the public, private, and charitable and voluntary sectors, which all have a place. Efforts to exclude, or to advocate exclusivity for, one or other of those sectors need examining very carefully.

Jim Shannon: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way again; he is being most generous. On collective responses, the UN's high-level meeting on universal health coverage must build on the success of last year's UN high-level meeting on TB and reaffirm the commitment to diagnose and treat 40 million people with TB by

[Jim Shannon]

2022. Does he agree that though our commitment to the Global Fund is a great first step by this Government and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, we need others to give the same commitment?

Alistair Burt: Indeed. Once again, the hon. Gentleman anticipates something I will come to later. Our 16% uplift in relation to the Global Fund is remarkable in itself, but of course it should be an example to others.

Efforts to build sustainability and to encourage and work towards health system strengthening around the world are really important. Although there will always be a need to respond to outbreaks or emergencies, basic healthcare and steady improvement are achieved not by continual external intervention, but by dedicated work to build, train and equip those who take national responsibility for their nation's health. A DFID brief puts it as follows:

"Countries need strong health systems if they are to achieve Global Goal 3, and 'ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages'—

that is SDG 3—

"and the target of UHC aimed at reaching the most excluded and living in the most remote locations, leaving 'no one behind'."

That determination to ensure that responsibility for health is rightly taken by a nation itself, and our view that our role is to enable such a transition in health to take place, helps us to explain in this country why UK aid and development assistance works, and why our commitment to spending 0.7% of gross national income is so important. Few question the role the UK plays in immunising millions of children around the world, including some 8 million victims of the war in Syria.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Something like 5 million refugees from the Syrian conflict are in camps in the countries around Syria. Will the right hon. Gentleman reflect on the impact on the physical and mental health of people of all ages, particularly the 1.5 million children, of being in camps, rather than in settled communities, often for many years?

Alistair Burt: We could spend another 20 minutes reflecting deeply on that. Like others in the Chamber, I have had the good fortune to visit refugees in various locations. Some are in camps. The majority in Lebanon, for example, where a quarter of the population are Syrian refugees, live on the outskirts of other communities. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct.

Although, understandably, there used to be a concentration on the basic needs—shelter, food and water—there is now a clear recognition of the damage that is done, particularly but not exclusively to children, over a longer period. Of course, one area of concern is education. It is reckoned that perhaps a third of refugee children lose primary education, and perhaps two thirds lose secondary education. There are also the limitations on their action and the impact of that on mental health. Some time ago, the UK and DFID stopped seeing mental health as a nice add-on to support and saw it as essential. We have put money, effort and support into putting workers in to protect against mental health problems.

Of course, if the wars were not occurring, such problems would not be there. That encourages us to redouble our efforts in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the areas most at risk.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that more than 5.6 million children under the age of five die from preventable diseases every year? Does he agree that immunisation is a critical backbone of any universal health strategy?

Alistair Burt: I do, and I may say something further about vaccination in just a moment. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Alongside the health and mental health issues of young people, there is grave concern in many countries about the trafficking of children and young people in camps and outside. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree—I am sure he will—that that also needs to be addressed?

Alistair Burt: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is correct. When I was in the main camp in Cox's Bazar—colleagues will have visited it—with those who had been there a year, protected from the atrocities in Burma, I asked, "What happens next?". I was told the biggest worries on the camp were: boredom and lack of things to do; education for the children; domestic abuse in the camp; and trafficking. That is a signal to all of us that just keeping people in a camp, protecting them from one thing but leaving them exposed to another, is a further tragedy.

Let us look at the state of the world's health, concentrating on three areas in particular. The first is children's health, where the picture is not all gloomy. Each day, 17,000 fewer children die than did in 1990, but more than 5 million children still die before their fifth birthday each year. Since 2000, measles vaccines have averted nearly 15.6 million deaths. Despite determined global progress, an increasing proportion of child deaths are in sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia; four out of five deaths of children under five occur in those regions. Children born into poverty are almost twice as likely to die before the age of five as those from wealthier families.

Secondly, let us look at maternal health. Maternal mortality has fallen by 37% since 2000. In eastern Asia, northern Africa and southern Asia, it has declined by about two thirds, but the maternal mortality ratio—the proportion of mothers who do not survive childbirth—in developing regions is still 14 times that of developed regions. The need for family planning is slowly being met for more women, but demand is increasing rapidly. Again, we see that in the camps, where women who, in the countries they come from, had been excluded from reproductive health advice, perhaps for religious reasons, gain rapid access to it in the camps. That again is a lesson for the future.

Thirdly, I turn to HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. In 2017, 36.9 million people globally were living with HIV, and 21.7 million people were accessing antiretroviral therapy, but 1.8 million people became newly infected with HIV and 940,000 people died from AIDS-related illnesses in that year. TB remains the leading cause of death among people living with HIV,

accounting for about one in three AIDS-related deaths. Globally, adolescent girls and young women face gender-based inequalities, exclusion, discrimination and violence, which puts them at increased risk of acquiring HIV. It is the leading cause of death for women of reproductive age worldwide, and now the leading cause of death among adolescents in Africa, and the second most common cause of death among adolescents globally.

More than 6.2 million malaria deaths were averted between 2000 and 2015, primarily of children under five years of age in sub-Saharan Africa. The global incidence of malaria has fallen by an estimated 37% and mortality by 58%.

What is DFID doing in these areas, and where are we going? The UK's significant boost to the Global Fund, the combined effort to combat AIDS, TB and malaria, was announced by Prime Minister at the recent Japan summit. The 16% increase to our already generous contribution sets a new standard for others to follow, and I thank the Minister and all those behind him who worked on that over a long period. My friends at STOPAIDS and ONE and many others welcomed the achievement. ONE said:

"This is global Britain in action."

There's a phrase! It continued:

"It is fantastic to see the UK reaffirming its position as global health leader, working in partnership with other donors, countries affected by the diseases, the private sector and philanthropy to make the world a safe, and healthier place".

However, we must ask the Minister how he plans to ensure that others follow. Will he outline any changes or developments in transition strategies, as nations take on more of their own responsibilities and work towards what, in such areas, is often a difficult process?

Let me say a few words about vaccination. Gavi, created in 2000, is a global vaccine alliance bringing together the public and private sectors with the shared goal of creating equal access to new and underused vaccines for children living in the world's poorest countries. From 2016 to 2020, the UK is providing a quarter of Gavi's funds. We are its largest donor, and have supported it since its inception. Gavi's first replenishment conference was hosted by David Cameron in London in 2011.

As well as providing direct funding to Gavi, the UK was also instrumental in creating the international finance facility for immunisation, which raises funds for Gavi by issuing vaccine bonds on international capital markets. The UK also helped create the advanced market commitment for pneumococcal vaccines, which have helped protect millions of children in developing countries against the leading cause of pneumonia, as well as the matching fund, which encourages funding from the private and philanthropic sectors by doubling donations. That is my point about partnerships. It is always tempting to think that this work can be done by one sector or another alone. My experience is that that is not the case. Partnerships can contribute to the whole, but they need to be handled carefully.

Let me mention polio. As we know, it has decreased by over 99% since 1988, but transmission has never stopped in three countries: Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria. There remains a risk of failure. We must thank the development and health workers who are responsible for vaccination. In particular, we recognise that in some countries they face genuine physical threats and loss of life.

In other countries, vaccination faces a threat from anti-vaccination campaigns, which are run for all sorts of reasons. It is essential that anti-science is combated by evidence of science and evidence of success. As far as I am aware, vaccination is about Edward Jenner and smallpox in the United Kingdom, and about Pasteur and others worldwide. It is not about big pharma trying to sell vaccines; it is a proven method of saving countless millions of lives. As we have learned to our cost, we might find a good argument lost for want of it not being made regularly. Let that not happen with vaccination.

Finally on polio, I must mention rotary. I am an honorary member of the Sandy rotary club—my father has been a member of the Bedford rotary club and Bury rotary club for many years—and we recognise that rotary has helped vaccinate 2.5 billion people in 122 different countries and given more than £1.8 billion over 30 years. I have met Judith Diment, the national representative, a number of times. We thank those in rotary up and down the country and abroad for their efforts and voluntary work.

Finally, on behalf of Save the Children and others who have written to me on this issue, I turn briefly to the high-level meeting. The first ever high-level meeting on universal health coverage will take place in September at the UN General Assembly. It is a critical opportunity to galvanise global momentum behind healthcare.

"The theme...is 'Universal Health Coverage: Moving Together to Build a Healthier World.' This...will be the last chance before 2023, the mid-point of the SDGs, to mobilise the highest political support to package the entire health agenda under the umbrella of UHC, and sustain health investments in a harmonised manner."

I am shamefully reading out the briefing from Save the Children. I am not pretending to claim authorship of this; I am acknowledging the support we get from our remarkable partners. The high-level meeting has the potential to be a transformational moment for children everywhere, but countries need to step up their efforts to tackle the biggest challenges in global health today, from ending the scourge of preventable diseases to reigniting action on stalled global immunisation rates, for the reasons I mentioned.

I know the Minister will have been presented with a series of challenges for the high-level meeting. Perhaps I could outline them. We hope that the Secretary of State will attend the high-level meeting. The UK should champion free-at-the-point-of-use health and nutrition provision, helping to deliver on the "leave no one behind" agenda and to ensure that we reach those furthest behind; it should signal its support for domestic resource mobilisation, which is essential for encouraging more countries to work on strengthening their systems; it should champion the full integration of nutrition and immunisation into national universal health coverage plans; and it should fund UHC2030 as the main institution that can make a difference in driving the UHC agenda and on accountability, with a focus on meaningful civil society participation.

I could mention much more. Sexual and reproductive health is vital. At the 2017 summit, we announced £250 million of support over the next four years. Access to sexual and reproductive health services is under increasing threat from some developed nations that ought to know better. It is essential that the United Kingdom follows its independent path, and is not browbeaten by any of its larger partners or friends into

[Alistair Burt]

offering restrictive reproductive health facilities just because somebody else does not like them, for questionable reasons.

We must continue the work on neglected tropical diseases. We are protecting some 200 million people from 2017 to 2022 with support of £360 million. I have not mentioned anti-microbial resistance and the work of Sally Davies. She moves on from her post relatively soon, and we should thank her warmly for all the vital work she has been able to do. Ultimately, it will protect us all; if we cannot find answers, that threatens us all. I thank those involved in the collaborative work that we now do internationally with the Department of Health and Social Care, and I hope the Minister will be able to take that work further.

I could mention the contribution of water sanitation and hygiene—the foundation for good health. I have seen remarkable projects that the United Kingdom is doing around the world on that. There is no point having a global health system or a national health system if there is no effective sanitation. It makes a particular difference to young women at important stages in their lives. It is absolutely essential. Nutrition, one of my favourite subjects in the Department, is much underrated. It is really vital to ensure that nutrition is correctly promoted. There is a difference between feeding people and feeding them nutritiously, as I learned in my first week in DFID.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Should we not also emphasise that vaccines will not work properly on a malnourished child? We need to see these subjects as two sides of the same coin.

Alistair Burt: The hon. Lady is absolutely right and speaks with great experience. A child may be physically alive, but the weaker a child becomes through lack of nutrition, or through existing on the barest rations, the more prone they are to disease, and the harder it is to ensure that preventive measures work. That is absolutely correct.

I wonder whether the Minister wants to venture an opinion on the Department for International Development remaining a stand-alone Department. It might be slightly unfair to expect an answer from him on that, but I hope that this debate will leave him in no doubt of the value that we see in an independent-minded DFID. It is always part of the Government, as I occasionally had to remind officials, but it very much has its own stand-alone processes.

I hope others will cover all those points, and that I have helped to lay the ground, and made it clear how important this House feels universal health coverage is, and how proud we are of the United Kingdom's previous contribution and its determination to keep that up. There is a clear sense that we are a world leader, through the work of our hard-working experts. The Minister should know that he has the full backing of the House in his determination to make sure that this issue remains as important to him as it has been to me and all my predecessors.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair): Order. I ask hon. Members to keep Back-Bench speeches to around seven minutes. That will enable me to call everyone to speak. I call Stephen Twigg.

9.54 am

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I draw your attention to a relevant entry in the register—I visited Liberia in 2017 with the fantastic organisation, RESULTS UK, to look at Liberia's efforts to rebuild a public health system after the Ebola crisis. I congratulate the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) on securing the debate and on his fantastic work as a Minister, and the passion and commitment that he has demonstrated once again today.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, the third of the sustainable development goals commits the world to achieving universal health coverage for all by 2030. It seeks to ensure access to a full range of essential health services based on need, not on the ability to pay. Before I became Chair of the Select Committee on International Development, in 2014 the Committee published a report, "Strengthening Health Systems in Developing Countries", which concluded that universal health coverage cannot be achieved without properly functioning health systems. At that time—five years ago—the Committee urged the Department for International Development to grasp the opportunity and demonstrate genuine global leadership worthy of its health systems expertise.

In recent years, we have seen some serious progress, and it is worth reminding ourselves of the progress that the world has made. For example, incidences of malaria and the number of new cases of HIV have each fallen by around a third since the turn of the century and the adoption of the millennium development goals. The global child mortality rate has been cut in half since 1990. Nevertheless, half of the world's population lacks access to essential healthcare services and, every year, around 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty because of the cost of healthcare.

Let me say a few words about Ebola. In 2014, we saw the deadliest outbreak of Ebola in history—the first to hit epidemic levels. Three years ago, the Committee published an inquiry report on that. We said that a major factor in the Ebola outbreak reaching an unprecedented scale was the weak state of health systems in the affected countries. It is extremely concerning to see what is happening in eastern DRC at the moment, where there have been more than 2,400 Ebola cases. The International Development Secretary, on a visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo this weekend, called for the World Health Organisation to declare the outbreak an emergency. It is crucial that the international system redoubles its efforts in response to the emergency. Health-system strengthening must surely form a core part of recovery efforts in the DRC. DFID has an opportunity to play a leading role in supporting that work.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, we are at a critical moment with this September's high-level meeting. Here in the UK, we have the finest system of universal health coverage anywhere in the world, with our national health service. That gives us the expertise, knowledge and capacity to make a lasting impact on the global debate and to be a powerful voice in it. I support what

the right hon. Gentleman said about high-level UK representation at September's meeting, and on supporting other countries to increase domestic resource mobilisation, ideally to see their health spending rising to 5% of gross national income. We can share policy expertise from our NHS to support other countries to increase their own domestic investment in health.

The coming year provides an unparalleled set of opportunities, with the various replenishments to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. I look forward to the Minister appearing before the International Development Committee this afternoon, as we will have an opportunity to address some of the issues in more detail. I hugely welcome the £1.4 billion pledged by the Government to the Global Fund. It is genuinely excellent news that that commitment has been made and that it has been made early. That has lessons for replenishments in other areas, such as education, but that is for another day.

Let me endorse what the right hon. Gentleman said about Gavi. The United Kingdom hosts the replenishment of Gavi next year. The Mayor of Liverpool, Joe Anderson, and I have written to the Prime Minister, bidding for Liverpool to host Gavi's replenishment, not least because of the presence of the School of Tropical Medicine in our city. Let me also support what the right hon. Gentleman said about polio—I welcome his focus on that. As he said, we have seen remarkable progress since the establishment of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, with a 99% reduction in incidents since 1988, but it is still endemic in Nigeria, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative strategy states:

“Full implementation and financing of the GPEI Polio Endgame Strategy 2019-2023 will result in a world where no child will ever again be paralysed by any poliovirus anywhere”.

We are close to a world free of polio, but this will require one last push to end polio once and for all. I pay tribute to the groups that have come together to form the One Last Push campaign. It was a pleasure to join them at a fantastic event in Birmingham in April, which was also attended by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips). We heard from campaigners from a range of non-governmental organisations, as well as British people living with polio. I learned a lot about some of the challenges facing British people living with polio in this country, and about the challenge of one last push to end polio globally.

The polio initiative is vaccinating the hardest-to-reach children. Our country can be proud that we have provided £1.3 billion to GPEI since its creation. I hope we will be able to show commitment once again to a polio-free world—we have done so with the Global Fund—with a generous financial pledge ahead of the GPEI's upcoming replenishment in November.

Let me finish by echoing strongly what the right hon. Gentleman said about the importance of multilateralism and our standing up for values. I will perhaps be a bit more explicit than he was. The Trump Administration are clearly standing in the way of many of the things that he talked about—not least on sexual and reproductive health. Those global health multilaterals have consistently been shown to deliver high-quality, effective channels for UK aid. The Department's multilateral development review three years ago demonstrated that once again. Those multilaterals have at their heart the Department's strategic objectives of reducing poverty and promoting

global prosperity. That makes moral sense, which we rightly focus on, and it also makes economic sense. For every dollar invested in immunisation, it is calculated that around \$16 is returned directly in reductions in healthcare costs, avoiding lost wages and lost productivity due to illness and death.

Over the next two years, let us grasp these key opportunities to make progress on health outcomes and work together towards the goal of achieving universal health coverage for all. The UK has been central to this endeavour over the past two decades, and I hope very much that we can continue to lead efforts to achieve a world where everyone can get access to healthcare based on their needs, not on their ability to pay.

10.3 am

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) on securing this important debate. I recognise that he was a great champion of these causes during his time as a Minister, and he has continued that valuable work from the Back Benches.

A key part of progress towards worldwide universal health coverage is tackling the world's major health challenges. Only once those are under control can developing nations achieve sustainable healthcare systems and move towards universal health coverage. I am pleased that the United Kingdom is a world leader in supporting the Global Fund to tackle AIDS-related illnesses, tuberculosis and malaria, which kill around 2.5 million people a year.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) on securing this debate and opening it so well.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that TB is a perfect example of the need for universal health coverage, and that if we invest well in TB programmes with universal health care in mind, it will make a real difference to developing countries across the world?

John Lamont: I absolutely agree, which is why the UK's role in tackling TB is so important.

As a country, we will pledge up to £1.4 billion to the latest round of the Global Fund, which will help to provide life-saving antiretroviral therapy for more than 3.3 million people living with HIV, support treatment for 2.3 million people living with tuberculosis, and distribute 92 million mosquito nets to protect children and families from malaria. The UK is the second largest donor to health aid, having contributed \$5 billion over the past 30 years. I believe that is something that we as a nation should celebrate.

This global effort, which is being led by the United Kingdom, is changing the world. Child survival rates are one of the greatest success stories, with child mortality levels more than halving since 1990. However, there is still a huge distance to go. Although access to healthcare is improving globally in both developed and developing nations, progress is slow and the gap between countries with the best and worst access to healthcare shows little sign of closing. We need to address that, which is why I support calls from Save the Children for the UK to

[John Lamont]

champion a universal health coverage approach at the UN's high-level meeting on universal health coverage in September—something my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire has already raised.

This is not about dictating to other nations how they should manage public finances. It is about explaining the benefits of investment in healthcare—not only in improving the health of local populations, but in facilitating improvements in education, poverty and long-term economic development. The UK should champion the principle of healthcare being free at the point of use, and support Governments to increase health spending to 5% of GDP and integrate nutrition and immunisation into national healthcare plans.

Access to universal health coverage needs to be as broad a principle as possible. In some areas, a little investment can make a huge difference to people's lives. Cerebral Palsy Africa is a charity based in Duns in Berwickshire in my constituency, and it provides support to enable children to attend school in Ghana and other African countries. It was set up by physiotherapist Archie Hinchcliffe, after she saw what rehabilitation could do for young cerebral palsy sufferers—the condition was simply not seen as a priority in many African nations. That is despite early intervention making a huge difference to the lives of sufferers. DFID's small charities challenge fund recently awarded the charity £50,000, which is being used to train special needs teachers and specialist physiotherapists in Africa. We should all welcome that, and it demonstrates how funding from the United Kingdom Government can have a real impact on UK-based charities working in other parts of the world.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that DFID's small charities fund is an excellent innovation? In fact, we should see far more resources from DFID channelled through that to support all those great initiatives in our constituencies. They often offer the best value for money.

John Lamont: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. All of these are very good examples of where UK money is invested locally but the benefits are felt all around the world. Very often, it is volunteers from the UK who ensure that funds are spent to best effect.

Although we absolutely must lead the fight against worldwide killers such as HIV and TB, supporting treatment and therapy for rarer conditions has to be part of the move towards universal healthcare coverage. Again, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire on securing this important debate and allowing hon. Members to highlight the great work that the United Kingdom is doing around the world to improve the lives of so many people.

10.8 am

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under you, Mr Robertson. I declare an interest in this subject, as I travelled to Ethiopia with RESULTS UK and saw the impact of setting up vaccination services as the initial building blocks towards universal healthcare. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) for

opening this debate and for his work as a DFID Minister. I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on vaccination, and I really welcome the commitment he showed in giving evidence to our inquiry on the next decade of vaccines. Our report was published in January, and I thank the team he worked with at the time.

As the right hon. Gentleman said in his introduction, universal health coverage is the idea that everyone should have access to quality healthcare without ending up in financial hardship. Half the world's population simply does not have that, while 100 million people are thrown into extreme poverty when trying to access healthcare.

The UK has absolutely been a leader in this sphere. It is the No. 1 funder of Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance, which helps to provide affordable vaccines to low-income countries, and also helps those countries to develop their own systems to deliver vaccines. I particularly welcome the £1.4 billion commitment to the Global Fund and the fact that it was made in advance of the replenishment date. The replenishment of the polio eradication initiative is coming up this November, and the UK making a pledge in advance helps to put pressure on other countries to make similar commitments. The Global Fund is particularly involved in tuberculosis, HIV and malaria, which shows that this about not just a single thing, but a combination of vaccinations, antiretroviral drugs and malaria nets. Underneath all that, there is the need for clean water, among other things.

Vaccination itself has saved 20 million lives in the last decade. In 1988, when the polio eradication team came together, there were 350,000 cases of polio a year. Last year, there were 33 cases, in a difficult area on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. There is no treatment for polio. One problem when people talk "anti-vax" and say, "I don't believe in vaccination" is that they do not remember what these illnesses look like. When I was in Ethiopia, we pulled into a garage to get petrol, and I saw a young man of about 30 standing there with the obvious deformity of flaccid paralysis from polio. The last time that I saw someone in that situation, it hit me like a boot in the face.

On Monday, we held an event in the House for polio survivors, and I thank those hon. Members who attended to hear their stories. Many of the older polio sufferers now use wheelchairs and are not therefore as recognisable as the children with polio, who used callipers or crutches. People are complacent and have forgotten the harm that polio can do and is doing elsewhere.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative has done an incredible job using oral drops, which are critical because the gut protection a child gains from an oral vaccine protects against the further spread of the virus. The injectable form we use here protects the individual, but they can still spread the disease. It is therefore crucial that we eradicate it.

The problem is that, previously, we talked as though we would achieve eradication—obviously, we had hoped to achieve it by next year—and then look at transition. However, much of the infrastructure, staff and funding used to eradicate polio is also holding up the basic vaccination systems in low-income countries. In fact, people are now reluctant to take the oral vaccine. Some of that is because they say, "Here you are again, back in our village with your drops, but I can't get my baby treated for another condition. We don't have clean

water. My children aren't even fully immunised." That is why we need the transition. Universal health coverage is now critical to achieving the eradication of polio; if there are outbreaks in Nigeria or elsewhere, it is because the routine levels of immunisation are simply not high enough.

Seth Berkley, the head of Gavi, pointed out a shocking figure to us when we set up the APPG. He said that although we think we are doing a great job, 85% of children in low-income countries are vaccinated only with DTP3—one of the very basic vaccines—and we put a tick next to them. However, only 7% of children in those countries are fully vaccinated and receive all 11 vaccines recommended by the WHO. More than 90% of children are still vulnerable to disease, and 15% have had no vaccinations at all, so we still have a lot of work to do.

I commend the UK for the 0.7% commitment to aid, which must be maintained. DFID must be maintained as a separate Department, not just for its function, but to show that commitment and drive. If our constituents say, "Charity begins at home, so why on earth are we bothering to spend money miles and miles away?" we should remember the Ebola outbreak and the fear over people arriving at Heathrow and having their temperatures taken. With air travel, the world is now a very small place, so infectious diseases threaten everyone. Vaccines will be critical to preventing antibiotic resistance, which threatens us all.

We should see our commitment both as a way to help those countries to invest in their children's health, which helps them to develop economically and—a little selfishly—as a way to protect ourselves. Vaccination on its own will not be enough unless it is part of a system of universal health coverage that improves the health of all people, particularly the future generations of developing countries.

10.15 am

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I thank the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) for securing the debate.

When our NHS was created, it was the first time in history that healthcare was made available on the basis of citizenship rather than insurance or payment. We are all proud, across parties, of that achievement. The prioritisation of public health has been the bedrock of our country's success ever since, with a healthcare system that treats all of its patients as equals, not as potential customers. As a frontline nurse for almost 15 years, I was really proud to be part of delivering that healthcare—I still miss it today.

After a decade of underfunding and privatisation, however, our NHS now delivers a postcode lottery health service. Even in my constituency, the healthcare afforded to those in the centre of Lincoln is different from that afforded to those in the village of Skellingthorpe. The compression of the budgets afforded to clinical commissioning groups means CCGs have to make difficult choices that can, in some cases, result in the centralisation of service provisions to ensure that the quality of healthcare is maintained. I understand that rationale, as it prioritises patient care, but it degrades the ability of our constituents to reap the benefits of our NHS, as their access to care is restricted and they can no longer rely on local services.

That is particularly striking in my constituency, where some healthcare facilities have been forced to shut, and local hospitals need considerable funding and support.

Last July, the chief inspector of hospitals recommended that United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust remain in special measures. The trust has missed its A&E waiting time target by 32%, has not met the national standard since September 2014, and has an estimated deficit of £80 million. As an ex-member of staff, I know that that has nothing to do with the dedication, commitment and hard work of the staff there.

The pressures at regional level are being passed on to local healthcare in Lincoln. The doctor's surgery in Skellingthorpe, run by the Glebe Practice, has announced that it intends to close because of recruitment issues. That will be consulted on, but services will be centralised in Saxilby, 4.3 miles away. That does not sound far, but it is very difficult to get to. The doctor's surgery serves a majority of the community and is highly regarded by local residents. Some 82% of patients who responded to the national patient survey felt that their overall experience was good or very good, so this is not a reflection on the GPs at the practice. If the surgery closes, my constituents' access to care will be downgraded and their right to free care at the point of need will be undermined.

In June, I held a public meeting in Skellingthorpe, to listen to local residents' concerns. As it is such a sleepy little village, I thought, "We might get six people, or we might get 26." We actually saw 80 people over three hours—it was a really busy and lively meeting. They all had the same concerns. There are infrequent public transport links, and not everyone can access the new location by car—either they have not got a car or they are too old or ill to drive. They talked about age, illness and poor mobility—if they take the bus, it does not go near the the GP surgery. Surely, all my constituents should be able to see a GP without worrying about a long or expensive journey; that is the last thing they need when they are ill.

I completely acknowledge that the Glebe Practice is struggling to recruit clinicians in a rural Lincolnshire village. That reflects the national picture, as the NHS is short of more than 100,000 staff, including 41,000 nurses and 10,000 doctors. I was at a meeting yesterday, and the withdrawal of the nursing bursary has contributed hugely to the fact that we are so short of staff in the NHS.

What concerns me most of all is that, in places such as Lincoln, which are suffering from the Government's mismanagement, the situation does not seem to be improving; instead, it is getting worse. As the co-authored report from the Nuffield Trust, the King's Fund and the Health Foundation found, the NHS could be short of 7,000 GPs within five years. Rural areas are already suffering from undertraining and underfunding. I urge the Minister to assess the implications of closing Skellingthorpe health centre for the health provision of my constituents, and to implement an effective national programme to incentivise GP recruitment in rural areas. We can all talk about the problems of recruiting GPs, but, come on, the Government have had nine years to get this sorted out—they should have been looking at this. We should be supporting GPs such as those at the Glebe Practice, not punishing the public by reducing their access to healthcare.

[Karen Lee]

Before I sit down, I want to say something about the comments we've heard about nutrition and healthcare. As a nurse, I obviously appreciate the links between nutrition and healthcare—I remember the dieticians coming on the ward—but, in a country with the wealth that we have, to see food banks at the level we have is appalling. When we talk about healthcare in this country, we ought to ask whether people really should have to access food banks because they are starving and that is the only way to get food.

10.21 am

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Robertson.

I, too, congratulate the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) on securing this important debate and pay tribute to him. In my experience—even though I have been here only two years—he was one of the most thoughtful members of the Government, and it is a pity to see him on the Back Benches.

The debate is timely, given the year of opportunity ahead of us, with the high-level meeting in September and the various health financing moments between now and the end of 2020. The concept of universal health coverage is so valuable because it recognises how all health interventions interlink.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) said, a strong immune system can only be developed with good nutrition. Without a strong immune system, vaccines and medicines are far less effective, and people are more vulnerable to disease. People living with diseases such as HIV or diabetes are more susceptible to developing other diseases, such as tuberculosis. At this juncture, I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. It was a pleasure to join my hon. Friend out in Geneva last month.

I will focus the majority of my remarks on nutrition, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on nutrition for growth. I will reflect on our recent visit to agencies of the Geneva-based World Health Organisation and the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organisation to discuss universal health coverage and the various challenges faced by Governments and civil society in achieving it. It was fascinating to see the steps being taken to achieve universal health coverage, but I was struck by the number of challenges.

One significant challenge to overcome is political ownership of health interventions. Here in the UK—the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) touched on this—where parties jostle and compete at election time to express their support for and admiration of the NHS, it is easy to forget that in many parts of the world healthcare remains politically sensitive. Even more politically sensitive are investments in preventive measures such as nutrition, which, if done right, reduce the burden on health systems and so, in the long run, the funding that they require.

Despite that, the deputy director-general of the World Health Organisation told us that 95% to 97% of health budgets are still spent on institutions such as hospitals. Through the high-level meeting, the UK Government have an opportunity to encourage Governments around the world to invest more and smarter in preventive health measures such as nutrition. Will the Minister do

what he can to ensure that strong wording to that effect is woven through the political declaration of the high-level meeting?

Another challenge is the siloed approach to healthcare that we see even in this Chamber, with different Members, including me, focusing on different areas of interest. A degree of siloing is perhaps inevitable, but the Government can help to break down the silos in a number of ways. First, DFID should use its position of leadership at various health multilaterals, such as Gavi, the Global Fund and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, to encourage organisations to work together and to add nutrition elements to their programmes. DFID should also take steps to embed nutrition more effectively across its portfolio. Nutrition elements should be woven into the fabric of all DFID's health programmes in order to gain maximum impact from each intervention. Lastly, the UK Government should apply that holistic view of healthcare to their own investments.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, there will be multiple health financing moments over the course of the next year. Politically, it is vital at the moment, despite the turmoil and a lot of changes, that every single Member of this House gets behind that, so that health does not become a political football. I hope that it does not.

Globally co-ordinated initiatives such as Nutrition for Growth, and multilaterals such as the Global Fund, Gavi and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, are proven to be highly effective, and they offer value for money for the UK taxpayer. All those investments complement each other, and are the building blocks to achieving universal health coverage. Likewise, failure to invest in any one block compromises the effectiveness of the others. DFID should invest ambitiously and equitably as each of those moments comes up—as it already has done for the Global Fund—and encourage others to do likewise.

As the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) said, the UK is well respected as a major donor when it comes to global health, and it should not shy away from wielding that influence to encourage others to step up in the campaign for universal health coverage. I hope that the Minister will take on board my recommendations, and I look forward to his response.

Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair): Before I call the first Front-Bench spokesperson, I will say that I would like to leave two minutes at the end for the mover of the motion to wind up.

10.26 am

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I thank the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) for securing this debate, for his great work as a Minister, and for championing the need for a separate Department for International Development.

Sustainable development goal 3 aims to

“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”,

and target 3.8 looks to “Achieve universal health coverage”, which is something that all of us in this House and across these islands have taken for granted since the

establishment of the NHS in the 1940s. Everyone here already knows that implementing universal health coverage ensures that everyone receives quality healthcare without financial cost. We know that that reduces the risk of people being pushed into poverty, drives inclusive growth, builds more trust in health systems, and is more sustainable than simply responding to global health security threats.

Globally, it is important to note that access to healthcare has been increasing fairly steadily over the past 35 years. The healthcare access and quality index shows that almost all countries have seen at least some improvement during that time. However, we still have a long way to go if we are to meet sustainable development goal 3 by 2030. While access to healthcare has been increasing, the countries with the worst healthcare are still a long way behind those with the best, and that gap shows little sign of closing.

At least half the world's population still do not have full coverage of essential health services, with one in eight people in the world spending at least 10% of their household budgets to pay for healthcare. As a result, about 100 million people are still being pushed into extreme poverty because they have to pay for their healthcare. Furthermore, the World Bank has identified that low-income developing countries are starting to face the challenges of ageing populations, and of increases in chronic, non-communicable diseases. That will only exacerbate the funding gap between what those countries have and what they need to provide universal health care. Aid spending on health is just as important now as it has ever been.

To turn my attention to the UK's impact on universal health coverage, it is important to remind ourselves that of the \$58 billion spent on health aid between 1990 and 2017, the UK spent \$5 billion, and is the second largest national donor after the US—something we should all be proud of. Is it not ironic that the birthplace of national healthcare is second to a country that does not provide that for its citizens? Indeed, regressive attempts have been made by the US Administration to roll back the progress made under Obamacare.

The Department for International Development states that it is committed to supporting progress towards sustainable development goal 3, and aid spending on health is generally higher now than in previous years, representing 10.5% of all bilateral aid. That has to be welcomed. Last month, the UK increased its pledge to the Global Fund by 16%, in advance of the time of replenishment. That is a total of £1.4 billion.

We cannot be complacent about our past or current successes. The pathway to universal health coverage will be long and winding with no quick fixes, and the UK Government need to maintain their commitments in that area. All hon. Members in the debate have shown they are fully committed to that. However, there are possible changes ahead. In two weeks' time we will have a new Prime Minister. The leading candidate has stated:

"We could make sure that 0.7 % is spent more in line with Britain's political commercial and diplomatic interests".

Let me be crystal clear: the SNP is unequivocal about the fact that trade and development are two different areas and must not be forced together at the expense of the world's most vulnerable. Will we respond to an Ebola outbreak only if that is in the UK's commercial interest? Who will judge if it is in our political interest

to distribute mosquito nets to prevent the spread of malaria? Will children be vaccinated only in countries with whom the UK is on good diplomatic terms? Those questions may need to be answered. We should consider seriously the comments that have been made—they should send a shiver down our spines.

The same lead candidate has said:

"We can't keep spending huge sums of British taxpayers' money as though we were some independent Scandinavian NGO. The present system is leading to inevitable waste as money is shoved out of the door in order to meet the 0.7 per cent target".

Let us examine that ludicrous statement. Of course, the UK is not some independent Scandinavian NGO, but one of the largest economies in the world. It has both a legal and moral duty to commit to 0.7% aid spending, and to assist in the fight against the diseases we have heard about in the debate. That is not inevitable waste or shoving money out the door; it is exactly what the UK should spend its money on while meeting the 0.7% target.

Let us look at an alternative approach in these islands. Ben Macpherson, the Scottish Government's Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development, has given the following pledge for the Scottish Government:

"international development should be in the national interests of our partner countries and not in Scotland's national interest."

We should all agree that that is what international development means. We firmly believe that spending that must be focused on helping the poorest and most vulnerable, and on alleviating global poverty.

The SNP Scottish Government are playing their part in tackling global challenges, including epidemics and health inequalities. For example, as part of Scotland's global goals partnership agreement with Malawi, the Scottish Government have pledged to strengthen the prevention and management of infectious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. The Scottish Government respond to humanitarian crises through the humanitarian emergency fund, which includes provision to ensure the containment of diseases at times of crisis. While the challenges are fewer at home than abroad, the SNP is committed to defending the NHS, and to ensuring access to universal healthcare domestically; health spending is £185 higher per person in Scotland than in England.

To deliver universal health coverage, all countries must strive to provide quality healthcare at home. Those who are able to do that have a responsibility to support the same abroad. With a Department committed to international development and a 0.7% aid target, the UK already plays a significant role in doing so, and should never lose sight of that. The likely next Prime Minister talks about the UK walking away from its aid commitments, but it is imperative that the UK instead uses the opportunity of the universal healthcare agreement, which is due to be signed at the UN General Assembly in September, to refocus and renew efforts, for many years to come, to ensure universal health coverage.

10.34 am

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson.

I thank the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) for securing this debate, and for his work in his previous role at the Department

[Preet Kaur Gill]

for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; I know he is well respected by the whole House for his contributions and openness. He spoke compellingly about the importance of universal health coverage, and passionately about the strides made. He coined the term “Global Britain in action” in respect of our commitment to the Global Fund. He referenced, as many Members did, the high-level meeting in September on universal health coverage, and the UK’s role in that and our ongoing commitments. Finally, he made the point that DFID should remain a stand-alone Department.

As chair of the International Development Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) has made a vast contribution, and it will be a huge loss when he leaves that role. I thank him for raising the serious concerns about Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Secretary of State’s declaration of an emergency. He spoke passionately about the One Last Push campaign to end polio globally.

The hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) spoke of the small charities fund in the UK, and the impact it can have in supporting DFID’s work. The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), chair of the all-party parliamentary group on vaccinations for all, spoke of how vaccinations have saved 20 million lives, but that must be in the context of access to universal health coverage. My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) and the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) talked about the importance of incorporating nutrition in UHC.

Last week, the national health service celebrated its 71st birthday. The NHS has rightly become nothing short of a national treasure in the UK. It has allowed us all to access quality healthcare free at the point of use, regardless of our income. But for too many people across the world, their right to quality healthcare is far from realised. Despite the global commitment to sustainable development goal 3—to

“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all”—

some 3.6 billion people do not receive the most essential health services they need, and 100 million are pushed into poverty from paying out-of-pocket for health services. It is right that securing health for all is a top priority for our international development work. It is essential that we take seriously this year’s UN high-level meeting in September, at which a universal health coverage agreement will be declared. I am delighted that this debate has been called, so that we can discuss how to achieve healthcare for all and what needs to be included in that declaration.

I will use my short time to cover four priority areas, starting with the need for public health systems. I mentioned the NHS; we know from our own experience that having a publicly provided universal health system, funded through progressive taxation and free at the point of delivery, is crucial to ensuring everyone can access the healthcare they need. It is only through putting people, rather than profit, at the heart of the agenda that we will ensure truly universal access to healthcare and meet the SDGs. After all, universal health coverage is about the social contract between the state and the population.

Country Governments are accountable to their population for delivering the right to healthcare. The NHS has provided us with a wealth of experience and expertise in universal health systems. That means the UK is well positioned to work with Governments, civil society groups and other stakeholders across the world to support the development of public health systems. Labour has committed to establishing, when it comes into government, a new dedicated unit for public services in DFID for that very purpose. We know that is crucial to gender equality. Women bear a greater burden of unpaid care work, so when a fully functioning health system is in place, women are freed up to engage in paid work opportunities, political decision making, education and other aspects of life.

Rather than strengthening public health systems, this Government have too often undermined them through their support for privatised forms of healthcare. Promoting public-private partnerships and private health facilities is not the way to achieve health for all. Health should never be commodified and turned into a profitable commercial venture, because that is a recipe for leaving the poorest without healthcare. Will the Minister inform us of the steps he is taking to ensure that we strengthen, not weaken, public health systems across the global south? Will the Government ensure that a strong focus on public health systems is included in the UN declaration?

Secondly, let me talk about health financing. Researchers at the World Health Organisation have estimated that the annual cost to poor countries of meeting the SDG target on healthcare for all by 2030 would be \$112 per person. That is a significant increase on previous estimates, and would leave low-income countries facing an annual funding gap of up to \$35 billion. The WHO estimates that poor countries will need to spend up to 20% of GDP on health to bridge that gap—clearly an impossible ask. If low-income countries are to have any chance of making up even part of the shortfall, Governments of rich countries and international institutions urgently need to address their role in creating global poverty and inequality, including through enabling unjust global tax and trade rules, demanding unsustainable debt repayments, failing to regulate their corporations properly, and imposing costs on poor countries through their contributions to climate change. I hope the Government will use their leadership position at the UN meeting in September to ensure that there is honest recognition of their responsibilities and the reasons why many poor countries do not have the domestic resources necessary to fund public health systems.

My third point is on access to medicines. We will never achieve healthcare for all without access to affordable medicines, vaccines and diagnostics. According to the STOPAIDS coalition, the price of new medicines worldwide is rising year on year. Due to a lack of transparency in drug pricing, too often we are left in the dark by pharmaceutical companies, which are free to set their own prices. As a result, treating a number of diseases remains unaffordable for both individuals and national health systems. Will the Minister ensure that improved affordability and access to medicines is championed in the declaration agreed at the UN meeting in September?

Fourthly and finally, I raise an important point about the “leave no one behind” agenda. At the launch of the SDGs, the Government pledged to ensure that “every person counts and will be counted”,

and that the

“people who are furthest behind, who have the least opportunity and who are the most excluded, will be prioritised.”

Five years on from the SDGs being agreed, too often the most marginalised are still being left behind. An important piece of research by the UN’s population fund, and the UK non-governmental organisations Health Poverty Action and the Minority Rights Group, found that women from indigenous and ethnic minority communities experience far worse maternal health outcomes than the majority population in all 16 countries that they studied.

In the light of this evidence, do the Government agree that including data on ethnicity is a vital part of ensuring that we can keep track of inclusion in health systems? Will the Minister explain why ethnicity continues to be neglected in DFID’s inclusive data charter action plan? When do the Government intend to meet their commitment under the SDGs by disaggregating data by ethnicity? Can the Minister assure us that the most marginalised ethnic groups will be counted and included in the high-level discussions in September?

I conclude by saying a few words about the Government’s record on universal health coverage to date. It has been five years since the International Development Committee urged the Government to formulate a strategy for its approach to health systems strengthening. The Government accepted this recommendation, yet nearly five years on, there is still no sign of the strategy. It is true that there have been promises of imminent publication, most recently last December, but there is still nothing. I hope the Government will tell us why there has been such a delay to this most important document. After all, strengthening public health and health systems is the most important step we can take towards achieving health for all.

10.41 am

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Dr Andrew Murrison): I congratulate all involved today on an excellent debate. It is timely because on 23 September we will be discussing universal health coverage at the high-level meeting in New York.

I am pleased to have heard almost universal praise from across the House for the advance declaration that the UK has made in relation to the Global Fund. I am proud of that, and I hope everybody here is proud of it too. Not only is it a significant sum of money and an uplift to what we were spending before, but when taken with the other Global Funds, it propels us to the top of the league table of international development, particularly relating to healthcare.

It is more important still because it is advance notification. The whole point is to encourage others to pledge and commit—the two are slightly different—generous funds aimed at dealing with the healthcare issues we all struggle with, because we are all in this together, particularly in relation to infectious disease. That point has been made by a number of right hon. and hon. Members, because infectious diseases respect no borders.

Having started on a positive note, may I introduce an element of gloom? Strategic development goal 3 and the 17 development goals related to it are not on track

to be successfully rolled out. Universal health coverage is an aspiration, but it is not secure; the glass is indeed half empty.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt). It is ironic that I am here potentially answering for decisions that he made in Government.

Alistair Burt: All good ones.

Dr Murrison: I was about to say that I am really comfortable to do so, because the decisions he made, and those he is associated with vicariously, are good ones. I am happy to have inherited his portfolio, but he is a difficult act to follow, that is for sure.

My right hon. Friend identified all the issues in his contribution, as I would expect him to do. He started by highlighting universal health coverage and its contribution to SDG 3, but he also made the point that universal health coverage touches on the other SDGs as well. In advance of the high-level meeting on 23 September, he was right to ask about the aims and ambitions the UK Government have for that meeting. They are encapsulated in getting more money—obviously—and getting better quality and integrated healthcare. That is something many of the contributions have touched on one way or another. I have been struck by the level of support for an holistic approach to delivering universal healthcare.

We have talked about immunisation and about the mistake we would be making if we simply imagined that going around the world offering people vaccinations and inoculations would be “job done”. It really would not be. Those interventions would be treated with a great deal of suspicion by communities, as they are at the moment, if that were all we were offering. It has to be much more than that; it truly has to be integrated. I look forward to making this point loud and clear in September in New York.

On a broader theme, as I have gone around the world, I have been struck by the roll-out of healthcare systems. Very often, there is a temptation for politicians to roll out shiny things that they can demonstrate to their constituents. That generally means hospitals, and hospitals are great things, but they may not be the right thing in low and middle-income countries.

Dr Whitford: In the four health systems across the UK, we are trying to address our obsession with hospitals and tertiary centres, realising we have not got enough resources in primary care, and certainly not in prevention. We need to share that knowledge with developing countries.

Dr Murrison: I agree with the hon. Lady. In the context of low and middle-income countries, my focus would be on primary healthcare and public healthcare, by which I understand something slightly different from public healthcare in the context introduced by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), who speaks for the Opposition, and I will come to that in a minute. The focus needs to be on prevention and on things that deal with the problems that the poor are exposed to, first and foremost. The difficulty with shiny stuff—electorally obliging though that might be—is that it risks exacerbating health inequality; shiny things tend to be in urban centres and accessed more easily by the better-off, rather than the poor, and particularly the rural poor. We need to be very careful about that.

[Dr Murrison]

We need to introduce the notion that countries themselves must grow their healthcare systems, and a number of contributions touched on that. That means addressing unpleasant things such as taxation. In addressing universal health coverage, we need to ensure that we encourage Governments to establish proper mechanisms for raising taxation, so that countries can ultimately stand on their own feet. I am pleased that the UK has introduced some trailblazers in that respect—the four in Africa are Rwanda, Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda, and the other is Pakistan—where we will be assisting Governments to build structures that will make their healthcare systems sustainable in the longer term.

A number of contributions touched on polio. I know that will be the subject of my grilling later by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg)—I will say lots of nice things about him in anticipation that he will give me an easy ride this afternoon. I am sorry that he is standing down; it will be a great loss to the House, and I urge him to think again. Polio is on the cusp of being defeated. There were 33 cases last years, from only three countries—only two countries, really. We must make sure the boot remains on the carotid, because there is a real risk that, if we are tempted to divert funds from this, we will be back to square one. That would be a tragedy because of the lives that would be lost, and because, at some point, we would have to pick up the pieces. It makes no sense, in raw economic terms, to relieve the pressure on that particular nasty at this point. I hope we will make sure in September that the pressure stays on that particular one of the “Captains of the Men of Death”.

I appreciated the comments made by right hon. and hon. Members about nutrition; they were absolutely right. The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) rightly said in an intervention that there is no point vaccinating people if they are undernourished. It is nonsense epidemiologically and in public health terms to do so, and we must adopt an integrated, holistic approach to universal health coverage. If we can get that across to people in New York in September, we will have done the world a great service.

I am proud to be a member of a Government who are fully committed to not just the Global Fund but other funds that require replenishment. Our leadership has been salutary over many years—not just under the present Government, although I am pleased about the commitment they have made to the Global Fund—and I am confident, whoever wins in two weeks’ time, to answer the point made by the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), that that process will continue.

10.50 am

Alistair Burt: It is a pleasure to briefly conclude the debate and to thank all those who took part for the contributions they made in a variety of ways. The hon. Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) and for Dundee West (Chris Law), speaking from the Front Bench, ensured that I was not far wrong when I spoke about the Minister having a torrid time. Theirs were thoughtful contributions that will remind the Minister that his post is not an easy wicket all the time. There are serious questions to be asked about development, and they were well asked, as always. My right hon. Friend

responded very well. I thank him for his generous remarks and his response to the debate. We can all feel that the matter is in good hands.

I thank colleagues—the hon. Members for Glasgow East (David Linden), for Lincoln (Karen Lee) and for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford)—for the variety of contributions they made. The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire always speaks with great authority in such debates, and she reminded us about complacency and how things that we take for granted can easily be lost. My hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) reminded us of the efficacy of small charities, and he was ably supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), who is quite a champion of their work in many parts of the world. He speaks with great knowledge about that.

We shall miss the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who is a thoughtful critic. He is always good at supporting the good things that the United Kingdom does, but keen to press the point where things are not right and to move us in the right direction. He has made a significant contribution, and his reputation across the House and beyond is well deserved. However long we are all here, I know he will continue to add to that.

I want to say a brief word about the conundrum that is the United States. On the one hand, it is the most extraordinarily generous contributor to the world—billions of dollars flow from it. There is a great risk of confusing the United States in general with elements of the Administration, and that would be unfair. We all work with colleagues in America who are the most generous and gifted of individuals. There will be the odd clash with an Administration of any sort, particularly at the moment. We have to be careful. The American Government are themselves a significant donor. There is a conundrum, and there are areas where we will challenge, but we must be careful that that does not tip over into unwarranted criticism.

In relation to partnerships that need to be created—I noticed the emphasis placed by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston on public systems—medicine and health cannot work without a partnership between the private, the public and philanthropy. With the sheer scale of what is available, and the ability of the private sector to make a contribution, the skill is to use that effectively to ensure that the poorest, and those in the most difficult locations and with neglected conditions, are still brought in. That is where political skills can be exercised. We have a role to play.

The gist of the debate was about focusing on what is meant by universal health coverage and about looking ahead to the meeting in September. If there is any part of my former role that I miss, it is UNGA week. I did 60 engagements in four days; that was my best. I sincerely hope that the Minister will be well used and well worked. It is an opportunity for him to see all the people involved and to make the contributions he needs to, and for the UK to lead by example. Because he represents DFID, he will find, as I did, that he is received everywhere he goes—he will be standing on the shoulders of all those who work for DFID—in a way that would warm anyone’s heart.

This is about a partnership, with people in the UK working hard for something that DFID and Ministers deliver at top level. As we head towards the high-level

meeting, I know the Minister will be determined to ensure that the global leadership continues, and that the example is set. We will all do our best to contribute to the good things, to mount challenges when that is needed, and to give praise when it is deserved. We need to stay in the forefront in relation to what the world needs. We know that the problems are not going away, and that the challenge, and the need for determination, will continue for some time.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered universal health coverage.

Drone Users: Registration

10.56 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con):
I beg to move,

That this House has considered a registration scheme for drone users.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this issue. I recognise that it may appear to be something of a specialist subject, but I was rather swamped—or perhaps I should say swarmed—with a barrage of emails and letters from drone-operating constituents in May and June. That coincided with the Civil Aviation Authority's consultation document on the charge proposal for a drone registration scheme. The consultation closed on 7 June and the Government's response is awaited. It would be useful to hear from the Minister when a response is likely, given that the intention was that the registration scheme should open on 1 October, a date that is not far away.

I suspect that many other hon. Members will have been approached about the CAA proposals, because the activity in question is quite big. I have met a number of constituents who are involved, and I had not appreciated the magnitude of involvement in operating drones and model aircraft. There are an estimated 170,000 operators in the UK, including 600,000 model aircraft operated by 40,000 members of the four main UK model flying associations, the British Model Flying Association, the Large Model Association, the Scottish Aeromodellers Association and FPV UK—the association for radio-controlled model and drone flying. I fear we may get lost in acronyms as we continue. As I have said, it is a big activity, and the numbers involved compare with just 20,000 manned aircraft on the UK aircraft register. A lot more people fly model aircraft than real ones, and the figure is likely to grow.

The number of drones has risen exponentially because of the greater availability and easier affordability of multi-rotor drones over the past six years or so. You and I, Mr Robertson, can go into high street shops and buy one of those craft for under £100. Whether we would know how to operate the thing is another matter—which is what I want to come on to discuss.

The activity generally has a good safety record and largely responsible memberships affiliated to the various clubs; indeed, the most recent fatal accident involving a model aircraft occurred way back in 2003. The evidence given to the Science and Technology Committee on 26 June by Andy Sage of NATS, who categorised drone operators as “clueless, careless and criminal”, was unfair, inaccurate and insulting. I am pleased that he subsequently apologised for those comments. This is a growing and legitimate activity, and we need to be able to accommodate it. However, at the same time, I think we all recognise that it brings with it criminal or potentially damaging and intrusive opportunities, of which a small minority will take advantage, and are doing so.

The most high-profile issues around drone usage arose last year, in my neck of the woods at Gatwick airport, which was shut down for several days before Christmas because of sightings of drones that might have interfered with passenger aircraft. It remains something of a mystery as to exactly what drones were involved; nobody was prosecuted. More recently, we have heard

[Tim Loughton]

from direct action groups such as Extinction Rebellion, which I have to say I get on well with in my constituency, about using drones to disrupt flights. I certainly condemn that, but it is an issue that we have to take into account.

There is a growing problem of drones flying drugs and other illicit goods into prisons, and just last week we heard that Wimbledon has had to team up with a technology company to prevent drones from flying overhead and disrupting play, which is becoming a common challenge for many other major sporting events. There is also potentially a nuisance problem of certain drones invading people's privacy in residential areas, creating noise and flying dangerously close to crowds.

Drones are subject to existing laws, such as the Air Navigation Order 2016, but there are few prosecutions. I think that most people acknowledge the need to bring in more robust rules to regulate the use of drones, but how should those rules work? They need to be fair and proportionate, which is why many of my constituents quite rightly have concerns, and I share those concerns.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab) *rose—*

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

Tim Loughton: I will give way to the hon. Lady first, and then to the hon. Gentleman.

Stephanie Peacock: I am grateful, and I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. On those concerns, does he agree with my constituent, a model airplane enthusiast who is concerned that, while the regulation around drone usage and the problems it can cause should be tackled, people who fly model airplanes should not be caught up in this and are now being asked to pay £16 a year? Perhaps we should look at an exemption for model airplane use.

Tim Loughton: I agree. If the hon. Lady bears with me, I will come on to exactly that point. However, it is £16.50, not £16, just to be picky.

Dr Drew: To build on that point, people who fly radio-controlled model airplanes feel that the way this has been handled has ignored them, and that they were only brought in at the last moment. I hope the hon. Gentleman will talk about why they should be handled very delicately, because they have never been involved in any criminal activity but almost feel that they have been criminalised.

Tim Loughton: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I will come on to precisely that if he hangs around.

As I say, I think most people acknowledge that we need more robust rules. Back in 2018, the Government decided to mandate a drone registration and education scheme in the UK, to strengthen the accountability of drone users and their awareness of how to fly their drones safely and responsibly. Fortunately, it was agreed—after different thinking originally—that the scheme should register the operator, not every individual aircraft or drone, which could have made it a much more bureaucratic exercise. To that end, the Government propose that everyone in the UK operating drones or model aircraft

between 250 grams and 20 kg in weight must register by the end of November this year and take an online safety test, or face a fine.

The scheme will be run by the Civil Aviation Authority which, as the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) said, proposes an annual £16.50 charge per operator, supposedly to cover the cost of running the scheme. That is based on an estimated 170,000 assumed registrations, which would raise something like £2.8 million—not a small sum. The CAA claims that it needs to cover the costs of the IT service hosting the system, IT security packages, a major national drone safety and registration requirement campaign, variable costs linked to user volumes and the ongoing upgrade of drone registration services, although there is not a lot of detail on those ongoing costs and why such a large amount of money is required.

I agree with the hon. Lady. One of my constituents' main concerns is why the charge is £16.50, and why it is levied every year. Why not just an up-front registration fee, without the need to re-register? The United States scheme costs just \$5 for three years, in Ireland it is €5 for three years, and France brought in a free scheme, so £16.50 seems disproportionate, given the experiences of comparable countries. Why is it as much as £16.50? Why not a one-off fee? What are the ongoing costs? Will it go up from £16.50? These things have a curious habit of going up but never going down when schemes begin. Is it fair to charge a teenager £16.50 for using a drone when Amazon, which in years to come will probably operate fleets of hundreds of drones to deliver goodies to everybody, will also be charged £16.50? Those are my first questions to the Minister.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: Of course. It would not be a debate without someone giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is most kind. I congratulate him on introducing the debate. He, I and others in the Chamber recognise that drone use has led to contraband being taken into prisons; it comes up in Justice Questions nearly every month. Does he recognise the real need to register and approve all drone users to stop contraband going into prisons? It is important that we deal with criminality and those who use drones for criminal purposes.

Tim Loughton: I completely agree, which is why I said I think we all agree that we need more robust regulations and a registration scheme. I think most users do not dispute that but they do dispute the proportionality and cost. The scheme needs to be effective, because there is criminal activity in prisons—terrorism and other things, as I mentioned. How it will do anything to deter people who use drones to drop drugs and other illicit goods into prisons is not clear. A small minority misuse drone technology, and if we are going to operate a scheme it should not penalise the vast majority who operate legitimately but should be quite clear about how it will clamp down on criminals using drones for completely illegitimate activities.

What does registration actually offer to the operator, other than a confirmation of compliance? Membership of the British Model Flying Association, through the

various recognised clubs, usually includes public liability insurance cover and proper training and oversight from qualified instructors, and clubs tend to police their own members because they want everybody to operate responsibly and within the law. Why is the CAA effectively trying to reinvent the wheel when the current membership scheme works well in the existing clubs? It could just oblige all operators to register through a club, rather than through the CAA-run scheme.

The scheme could also be operated by the police, who could choose to contract it out to local clubs, when clubs prepared to take that on are available. Where they are not available, the police could operate it themselves, or through somebody else. That is how they do driving awareness classes and similar schemes in various parts of the country. The model is already there.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): I am delighted that my hon. Friend has taken the opportunity to raise this issue, which is of considerable importance to a relatively small number of people. All Members have constituents who are highly reputable model aircraft operators who have carried out their hobby for years and years without any problems whatsoever. We now face a completely different animal, the drone, which he rightly says is used for commercial as well as nefarious purposes. There surely has to be some way of separating those two. My gut feeling, as I think is his, is that members of reputable clubs ought to have some kind of different treatment.

Tim Loughton: I have some sympathy with that and it is the thrust of what I am coming to. The scheme as it stands will put everybody in the same pot, treat everybody in the same way, when actually the activity is already policing itself, with existing members of model clubs, very well. How can we expand that expertise and build on what we already have, rather than trying to come up with something completely new? That is the thrust of my argument.

Under European Aviation Safety Agency rules in France, for example, there are powers to delegate registration and regulation to recognised local model flying clubs. We would likely want to go down the same route in a few years' time, so why not start on that basis now? Surely we should be running a complementary scheme to that of other European countries. In the UK, the CAA already delegates powers to the British Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association, the Light Aircraft Association and the British Gliding Association, among others, so there are already precedents.

The various flying associations had been working constructively with the CAA and the Department for Transport, but they now claim that they have been rather stonewalled, as they put it, by both those parties, particularly since the beginning of this year and post the Gatwick episode. That is unfortunate. They believe, as the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) said, that the model flying community is being unfairly vilified for the actions of a small handful of unlawful drone operators. It is easy to see why they believe that; I have a great deal of sympathy with that view.

Other concerns have been raised. The online test is a simple, multiple-choice static test. It is not really a competence test, whereas if it were carried out by clubs, they could ensure that it was a proper test. They could

be there in person to see that the operators really did know what they were doing. There are many grey areas in the law about flying over private property or public land and about enforcement of the law about flying too close to crowds. Again, proper instruction and tips and recommendations from flying clubs seem to be a good way of ensuring that we have responsible operators.

Should there be differentiation between commercial operators and private hobby operators? As I have said, Amazon is likely to be operating loads of drones commercially in future. Surely it should be subject to a higher and more expensive level of regulation. I recently saw the first unmanned air taxi being trialled in Dubai. I am sure that use of such vehicles will become the norm before long. It looks a little scary at the moment, but anyway, that is the speed at which technology is advancing.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I am very glad that my hon. Friend has raised this matter. In 2017, I led a debate in this place on drones and airprox incidents with drones, which had risen from three in 2015 to about 70 in 2017. Can my hon. Friend confirm that those were nothing to do with model aircraft, but were all to do with drones? The safety record of model aircraft is completely different and therefore they should be put in a different category or, as he says, dealt with through the reputable clubs, of which my constituents are also members.

Tim Loughton: To an extent. The exact statistics are that out of 55 airprox incidents—near misses—in the six months to May 2019 in the consolidated drone, balloon and model category, drones accounted for 49, unknown objects—Martians or whatever else—for five, and balloons for one, so model aircraft were not anywhere near the level that drones were at. It is therefore clear why most model aircraft flyers, who do not class themselves as drone operators but will be caught up in the new system, feel particularly aggrieved.

There are concerns about STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—education, because model flying and drone flying can be the gateway to STEM skills, providing a bottom rung to aviation by which young people can be inspired to pursue technical careers. I have been round many schools, and in my constituency I have Shoreham airport, which is working with schools on some of the skills in relation to aircraft, model aircraft and so on. We want to encourage that.

There is some inconsistency in relation to age criteria for licences for various activities. In this country, people have to be 16 to get a motorcycle racing licence, only eight to get a level 1 powerboat licence, and 14 to be a solo glider. It is unclear how the 18 limit originally suggested in this case will work. Who will be responsible for a minor if damage is caused when they are operating a drone uninsured, for example?

There is quite a debate in the industry about the potential impact of a single drone colliding with a passenger aircraft—that is a different debate for another day—and the various options of interfering with radio signals for potential terrorist activity and so on.

There is the issue of geofencing, which means having a capability to receive and transmit a GPS signal to show where a drone is, so that it would appear on the radar of anyone seeking to detect illicit drone use.

[Tim Loughton]

However, the mass technology is not available on a viable commercial basis for that just yet. The issue is whether the new scheme is proportionate, affordable and effective in supporting the legitimate model aircraft and drone operating community, while isolating and facilitating better policing against a small number of unlawful drone operators and those determined to use drones for various forms of criminal activity.

There still seems to be a divide between that view and the CAA and the Department. A letter—curiously, it was not signed, but was written by “The Drones Team” from the Department for Transport—sent in reply to one of my constituents, who made many of the points that I have made, said that

“the principle that the Government set out in our January consultation response still stands. Any alternative approach for model flyers must be achieved without imposing undue burden on the state and the taxpayer, whilst also being efficient and enforceable, without compromising the integrity of the policy. A blanket exemption from registration and competency tests or having the associations register their members into the registration system, as suggested in many of the consultation responses submitted by model fliers, will not meet these criteria.”

That is unfortunate because certainly the industry will say that it can meet those criteria and it is prepared to be flexible.

The chief executive of the Association of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, whom I met earlier this week, has said:

“We support registration, e-conspicuity and the requirement for airspace management... This will become increasingly important over the coming years as the use of drone technology increases and it is embedded into roles across multiple sectors. Drones will be acknowledged as delivering substantial benefits in the emergency services, environmental services and the commercial environment as well as providing a great recreational pastime enjoyed by many thousands of users.

The issues we have are not with the concept of Registration but the quality, cost and therefore value for money that the current registration proposal appears to deliver to government and to the users required to register.”

I agree with that. It does seem that the DFT and the CAA are trying to reinvent the wheel and failing to harness the huge experience and network capability of existing legitimate, respected and experienced model flying aircraft operators. It seems a no-brainer to me that they should be talking with them much more closely and using what is there already, rather than coming up with a completely new and, on the face of it, rather bureaucratic and disproportionate and costly scheme.

I have posed several questions to the Minister. I hope that we can come up with a proportionate and workable system, so that this legitimate activity can continue safely. I hope that, while respecting the rights and safety record of those legitimately involved, a new system can show how it will be easier to clamp down on just the sorts of criminals that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned and others who would use technology with malign intent. We should not let the illegitimate activities of the very few spoil what has become a widespread and enjoyable recreation and a technological advance that many people will be using for good in years to come.

11.18 am

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on securing this debate about the registration scheme for drone users. The registration scheme will be open to operators of all unmanned aircraft between a very light 250 grams and 20 kg. That will include drones and model aircraft.

Let me say this at the outset. Drones are expected to bring significant benefits—I accept that—to the United Kingdom’s economy in the coming years. Drones are good things. Like many good things, they can be used badly, and I will come to that. But PricewaterhouseCoopers has estimated that by 2030—just 10 or 11 years from now—the UK’s drone industry will be worth no less than £42 billion and will contribute 628,000 jobs. That is a significant advance in an important developing industry.

Our police, fire, and search and rescue services regularly use drones in emergency situations to help save lives. A few years ago, Northamptonshire police showed me a drone that it uses with its fire and rescue service to good effect. Drones are used to inspect and maintain important national infrastructure, reducing the risk of accidents, and driving productivity and efficiency. I acknowledge that the members of model aircraft clubs are law-abiding and upstanding individuals. I am grateful for their work with schools, which my hon. Friend mentioned, and their other engagements in public service.

The increase in availability of drones at all price ranges has meant greater enjoyment for people of all ages, and for a wider range of leisure users and hobbyists. The Government are committed to harnessing the positive impacts of drones, and to supporting the industry in growing. This Government support industry, business and our communities. However, the number of drones is increasing dramatically. As the technology evolves, drones are able to fly faster, for longer and at higher altitudes. This increases the risk of drones being flown too close to aircraft, buildings, including strategically important buildings, and people, whether accidentally or deliberately.

We know drones are used for criminal purposes, such as smuggling drugs into prisons. That matter is regularly raised with the Ministry of Justice. In extreme cases, they can be used for terrorism. Those risks to safety and security apply to all unmanned aircraft, including drones and model aircraft, so it is essential that the regulatory framework in the UK enables the responsible use of drones in a way that protects the safety and security of people, other aircraft and sensitive sites.

In 2016, the Government consulted on how to make the most of the emerging drone sector. We are not doing this unilaterally, but consulted on it some time ago. We want the UK to continue to maintain its world-class aviation safety record, which is admired around the world. We also sought views on how to address the security and privacy concerns associated with increasing drone use.

In 2018, the Government consulted further on next steps to ensure the safety, security and accountability of the drone industry, while harnessing the benefits that drones, used in a safe way, can bring to the UK economy. Ensuring that airspace is shared safely between manned and unmanned aircraft, and that security and people’s

safety is protected, must be at the forefront of any regulatory regime. That is the case for our maritime and road regimes, and it must be the case for unmanned aircraft.

That is why the Government took forward a package of measures, following the 2016 consultation, at the heart of which was accountability on the part of the operator of the unmanned aircraft. Those include: a requirement for all operators of unmanned aircraft between 250 grams and 20 kg to register themselves with the Civil Aviation Authority; mandatory competency testing for remote pilots of unmanned aircraft between 250 grams and 20 kg; tighter rules on where unmanned aircraft can be flown, which include a flight restriction zone around airports; and further restrictions on flying small unmanned aircraft above 400 feet without permission from the CAA. Those measures were legislated for through an amendment to the Air Navigation Order in 2018.

The disruption caused at Gatwick and Heathrow airports by drone incursions in December 2018 highlighted the need for better protection around aerodromes. Flying drones near an airport is a serious criminal offence. Using drones deliberately to put people's safety at risk carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Following the 2018 consultation, the Government legislated earlier this year to extend the flight restriction zone around aerodromes, to better protect, in particular, aircraft on approach and take-off.

In the limited time remaining, I want to focus on the requirements for unmanned aircraft operators to register with the CAA, and for remote pilots to undertake a competency test. The requirements for registration and competency testing will come into force on 30 November 2019. These requirements will make unmanned aircraft users within UK airspace more accountable for their activity.

The CAA is setting up an unmanned aircraft registration and education service, which is expected to go live in October 2019, ahead of the legal requirements coming into force. That will include a competency test and a registration scheme. The test aims to ensure that remote pilots understand how to fly their unmanned aircraft responsibly and are aware of the rules. It will cover subjects such as air safety, airspace restrictions, general knowledge about unmanned aircraft, limitations to human performance, and relevant privacy and security considerations.

The registration scheme will ensure that unmanned aircraft operators are easily identifiable, and that aircraft are traceable back to their operator in the event of an accident. I do not think that is an unreasonable requirement. We need to be able to trace operators where an offence has been committed, as we do with other modes of transport. The development of the registration scheme and competency test is well under way. The CAA is testing it with users throughout the process to make it as user-friendly as possible.

As a statutory body, the CAA is required to recover its cost from those it regulates, meaning that the unmanned aircraft operator registration and education system, which is required under statute, must not impose an undue burden on the state and the taxpayer. The CAA's consultation on charging for the scheme, which ran from 26 April to 7 June 2019, committed to keeping the charge for registration as low as possible, while ensuring that the scheme funds itself from 1 October 2019. It would not be fair for the public to fund the scheme through the CAA. The CAA is analysing the responses, which will inform its final decision on the cost. It is important to highlight that, whatever the final cost, the charge will be per operator. This means that one operator may register several unmanned aircraft at no additional cost. Amazon and similar commercial operations will have additional, more stringent requirements and costs.

I want to emphasise that the Government recognise that the majority of unmanned aircraft users already fly responsibly and within the law. We are particularly aware of the strong safety culture fostered by the majority of model aircraft flyers and clubs, and the Government support their hobby. However, all unmanned aircraft have the potential to pose a safety and security threat, either deliberately or accidentally. There have been instances of model aircraft being flown illegally, for example within restricted areas around airports. The registration and education scheme must reflect the reality of the risk by including all users.

Stephanie Peacock: Will the Minister address the point made by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) about the cost comparison with other countries, and say why there is a cost each year?

Michael Ellis: Other countries have different schemes and regulations, which may operate more centrally. We have a system under the CAA, which is a statutory body and is regulated in such a way that it is under a duty to recover its reasonable costs. Many model aircraft and drones cost a substantial sum of money. The £16.50 cost is not unreasonable in those circumstances.

In summary, this Government are committed to maximising the benefits of emerging technologies, such as drones, to the UK's economy and to individuals for industrial, commercial and leisure use, but we must do so in a way that protects people's safety, security and privacy. The unmanned aircraft registration and education requirements are an essential element of our programme to do that.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered a registration scheme for drone users.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Retail Strategy

[SIR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the development of a retail strategy for the future.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship in this important debate, Sir David. Nearly a quarter of jobs in my constituency are in retail, so it is important to me that the retail sector is strong and vibrant. The fact that it provides 8,000 jobs, or 23% of the total—the highest in any constituency—is perhaps hardly surprising, given that Blaydon has Metrocentre, which is still the largest indoor shopping centre in the UK. However, there are also many local high streets in villages, towns and communities across my constituency, with small businesses that have to face huge challenges to survive, particularly given the closure of bank branches and the loss of footfall that that brings.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way so early in her speech. Does she agree that, with online banking, online retail and edge-of-town and out-of-town shopping, the high street has seen a radical transformation in the past few years, and not for good? We need a comprehensive strategy to save the high street in the next five to 10 years; otherwise, we will all be the worse, including future generations.

Liz Twist: I most certainly agree that we are seeing a radical transformation and that we need a vision for the future. Our strategy must do more than just deal with short-term problems; it must look at the longer term. That will be the burden of my speech.

Since I became the Member of Parliament for Blaydon just over two years ago, it has been my sad lot to visit stores and talk to too many staff who face store closures, including at Toys R Us, Homebase and House of Fraser. Thankfully, some of those stores, such as the House of Fraser store in Metrocentre, have had a respite, but their future remains uncertain.

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): I am happy my hon. Friend has secured this important debate, and I congratulate her on doing so; she is making an excellent case. Some 74,000 retail jobs were lost in 2018, and the town centre vacancy rate in April 2019 was 10.2%—the highest ever. Does she agree that the UK retail industry is in crisis and needs immediate, comprehensive and radical action?

Liz Twist: I most certainly agree that radical action is needed so that we can stop the situation teetering into crisis and think of a plan that will allow the sector to remain vibrant and become stronger. As my hon. Friend points out, there are some really challenging facts.

I have visited larger stores and talked to staff, but I know—because people tell me when I go on social media—that many other stores, which may be smaller or less high-profile, have had to give up the struggle, although I did not know about them until later, which is very sad. I am keen to do all I can to support the retail sector in my constituency.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Part of the solution has to be business rates; that is what is fed back to me in my community. We have had grand talk and some baby steps forward from the Government, but is it not now time for radical reform to bring in investment and protect enterprise?

Liz Twist: Business rates certainly feature strongly in the study by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, of which I was a member until recently, and in submissions to me by organisations such as the British Retail Consortium and by individual stores. We certainly need to look at that issue, which I will return to.

As I said, I have visited different places, and there are more closures that I do not know about. It is not just about jobs, although they are hugely important, and nor is it just about empty shops; it is about the impact on our local communities, especially those such as Blaydon that are made up of several smaller towns. Shops are such a central part of our high streets; from Crawcrook to Chopwell, from Birtley to Blaydon, and everywhere else in my constituency, they are a really important part of making our high streets vibrant.

A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of visiting a shop in Birtley called High Street Quilting—a real Aladdin's cave that stocks every imaginable thread, fabric, tool and design for quilters and embroiderers. People in one of the back rooms were getting guidance on developing their dressmaking and upholstery skills, and the shop was due the very next day to have an embroidery class, which was hugely well subscribed. Such shops create real variety and focus for our high street, but the owner told me about the difficulties she faces as a small business owner in making ends meet, even with the small business rates relief, and in ensuring that she can continue to employ people and move forward. We must not forget the small businesses when we talk about the bigger picture.

We face a changing external environment as a result of online shopping and of failures in strategy that have led to venture capital taking over stores, with scant regard for retail. The British Home Stores closures happened before my time as a Member of Parliament, but I know from talking on the doorstep to people who worked for BHS what a traumatic experience that was.

Nationally, retail employs 3 million people, with an additional 1.5 million jobs dependent on the success of the retail industry. Retail produces 11% of the UK's economic output and approximately £7 billion in business rates, which is far higher than any other industry. It is the largest private sector employer in the UK and the second largest contributor of tax. The British Retail Consortium estimates that 74,000 retail jobs were lost in 2018, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid) noted. Sadly, that trend is expected to increase in future years. We should remember that the workforce are predominantly women, and many of their jobs are part-time, so the situation has a disproportionate effect on some of our constituents.

I am disappointed that the Government's industrial strategy has so little to say about the retail sector. Given that 9% of jobs across the country are in retail, it is really disappointing to see the sector being given such scant focus.

Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): Like many hon. Members present, I have seen my main retail high street, Fishergate in Preston city centre, lose many top brands. They are being replaced by charity shops, betting shops, tattoo parlours and vaping shops. I recently met the leader of Preston City Council and impressed on him the need for a retail strategy in Preston. That needs to happen in councils up and down the country; as my hon. Friend points out, the Government are not going to do it for them. I really fear for the future of our towns and centres and for their ability to retain retail.

Liz Twist: Indeed. One of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee's findings was that local authorities have an important part to play in ensuring the future of our high streets. I very much welcome my hon. Friend's engagement with his local authority to ensure that it takes measures to improve what will be a changing high street, but a lively one.

Returning to the industrial strategy, I do not believe that retail has been given enough focus. I am aware that the Retail Sector Council has been set up, with representatives from the industry liaising with the Government, and that a number of workstreams have been drawn up and are already producing work. However, I fear that what we are doing in those workstreams is looking at the detail of current problems, rather than doing what we need to do, which is to produce a longer term strategy and vision to build and strengthen the retail sector, addressing the challenges we know about and those that may yet come, which we need to scan the horizon for.

There have been some examinations recently of the situation faced by high streets in particular—of course, high streets are one part of the retail sector, but not the whole part. I have already referred to the report by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, which is called “High streets and town centres in 2030”. As we have heard today, many such reports have identified the current business rates system as a real problem and noted the huge disparity in costs between online businesses and shops, including the rents that shops pay. Clearly, that is not the only issue, but when many of us heard about the online tax in the Chancellor's last Budget statement, we thought it would be a means of addressing this problem of the disparity between online businesses and physically present businesses and shops.

Faisal Rashid: Will my hon. Friend join me in urging the Government to heed the call by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers to take urgent action to save our shops by implementing a comprehensive and co-ordinated industrial strategy for the sector?

Liz Twist: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He could have been reading my mind.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): All our minds.

Liz Twist: Yes, indeed. I was going on to say that I was really pleased that USDAW, the shop workers' union, launched its industrial strategy for retail last month to a packed room. I was really impressed by the work that had gone into developing that strategy and by the outcomes it wants to achieve, which are presented under three helpful headings: “Economy and Community”,

“People and Productivity” and “Changing Perceptions—Retail Jobs are Real Jobs”. Even in the opening speech of a debate, where I am not so restricted for time as other speakers might be, I do not have enough time to cover all the detail in those three areas of the report. However, I certainly commend it to the Minister, if she has not seen it already; she should look at it, because it has a wealth of positive points and positive ways forward.

What is USDAW calling for? Under the “Economy and Community” heading, it is calling, as others have, for a fundamental reform of business rates; a review of town/city centre parking charges and other transport issues; reform of the tax laws to ensure that companies pay their fair share of tax—for example, by preventing the avoidance of corporation tax—and to create more of a level playing field between online and bricks-and-mortar retailers, which I have already touched on; closing the pay gap between chief executive officers and the lowest paid workers; stronger corporate governance rules to curb asset stripping, which has been one of the issues the retail sector has faced; ensuring that business failure cannot be rewarded with excessive bonuses and pay-outs, as was the case with British Home Stores; and a review of the role and functions of the Competition and Markets Authority, in light of the increase in proposed mergers within the sector—USDAW is really encouraging us to consider the CMA's role to see whether it reflects the changing retail environment.

Under the heading “People and Productivity”, USDAW is calling for a minimum pay rate of £10 per hour for all workers, irrespective of age; the introduction of legislation to tackle underemployment and insecure work by providing a minimum contract of 16 hours a week for those who want to work that long; contracts that reflect the actual hours that people work and not the hours on their paper contract, which are often exceeded; and legislation to ensure that workers have guaranteed seats on the boards of large companies, with the same duties and responsibilities as other directors, and with measures put in place to ensure that those in such seats reflect the gender breakdown of staff across the company.

The third area is “Changing Perceptions—Retail Jobs are Real Jobs”. That is something that is really close to my heart, having met so many shop workers over the years; in fact, my mum was a shop worker for many years, so it really is dear to my heart. USDAW is calling for an increased focus on retail across Government policy and decision-making mechanisms, to reflect the importance of the sector; promotion and recognition of the benefits of working in retail, to help to develop talent and increase retention levels, because retail offers employees greater flexibility than most sectors, and often allows them to work around their family/caring commitments or studies; and a challenge to the overt perception that women simply work in retail for “pin money”, or that retail is just a stopgap.

A key part of challenging those perceptions is the skills agenda, which means recognising that retail jobs are not just jobs that anyone can do. Dealing with customers day in, day out is a hugely important skill. First, it is a contribution to the social environment that all of us live in; indeed, for many people, it may be the only contact they have with another person. Also, it is a huge skill to deal politely and kindly with other people, and that needs to be recognised. However, further skills will also need to be developed in the future. As we have

[Liz Twist]

heard, retail is changing, and different skills are needed, for example in IT and other areas. Therefore, there needs to be some kind of clear path for career progression, to increase both productivity and job satisfaction. I was going off the USDAW script a bit there, but I feel very strongly about that.

I will return to the Government's industrial strategy. I have already said it is lacking in detail, given the size and importance of the retail sector. The Retail Sector Council brings together Government and industry to

"seek to encourage growth and positive change in the sector as it adapts to rapidly changing consumer habits".

The workstreams for the Retail Sector Council include business costs; skills and lifelong learning, which I have just touched on; the industrial strategy; employment; the circular economy, which I am told is the environment, wrapping and things such as that; and consumer protection. From the council's website, I understand that its work will feed into the work of Government Departments, where appropriate, to contribute to and inspire initiatives that support the council's objectives. It will work, for example, with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government around high streets and communities.

One thing I would stress, as members of the British Retail Consortium have already stressed, is the need for much greater co-ordination between Government Departments, to ensure that when a decision is made by one Department, the knock-on effects are not felt by another. The kind of petty example I refer to quite often is the need, when we talk about, and perhaps reform, business rates, to consider the impact on local government. We must seek to ensure that that longer-term issue is not just passed to someone else.

However, there are other issues to consider as well. Clearly, there are issues about benefits, and particularly in-work benefits, which will also affect the economy, as well as decisions by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We all know that it is complex to achieve such co-ordination, but it needs to happen. We also need a retail sector deal, to put retail on a par with other sectors that have already launched such initiatives. As I say, with 11% of the workforce in retail, we really need that deal.

I have a couple of specific things to ask of the Minister. The first is to urge her to look at USDAW's industrial strategy for retail. It contains a huge amount of detail—I have just touched on some of it—and looks at the growth and development of the retail sector in the future. I very much hope that she and her officials will meet USDAW to go through its report, which is an important document, and will look at its proposals. Secondly, the Minister should look to establish a real vision for retail, not just by tackling known problems, but by developing a vision for the future and setting up a retail sector deal to give retail its due importance alongside other sectors.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. There are six Members standing to speak. I want to call the Front-Bench spokespeople at 3.30 pm. If Members could keep contributions to around six minutes, everybody should be able to get in. I call John Howell.

2.50 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist). She has highlighted the structural changes that are occurring in our high streets. She is right to point out that the retail sector employs a lot of people and is therefore extremely important. It is also fair to point out that rent and rates play their part.

I want to stress the structural changes, which the hon. Lady hinted at, and the move away from face-to-face to online shopping, which we are all doing. In those circumstances, a retail strategy is very difficult to bottom out. It is very difficult to come to a view on how an overall strategy should be managed, because the decline that is occurring takes place in different ways in different businesses. I will illustrate that in a moment.

I want to make some general points about things that might help. To start with, I welcome the future high streets fund. It is a much better way of facing the future, rather than harking back to the past and "how things always were". If we look around the country, there are a number of different councils that are doing things in different ways. Great Yarmouth, for example, is developing cultural quarters as a way of encouraging businesses and people into the centre of town. It is all about the creation of place. Others, including Henley, see themselves more as events destinations; the Henley regatta has just finished. It is interesting to note that shopkeepers in Henley always have a difficult view on the regatta; they claim that when it is on, they lose business because young people are all tied up in the regatta and cannot go shopping.

Sir Mark Hendrick: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that city centres have to look at other offers as well as retail to help enliven them. Preston has tried to do that through leisure. Unfortunately, the major business interest that was driving the leisure offer has just gone bankrupt. On the future high streets fund, Preston, a city that is much in need, has just had its bid rejected. That is not good enough. These little pots of money are put there to act as sticking plaster for town centres.

John Howell: The future high streets fund is looking at how high streets can be transformed for the future, not harking back to how things were done in the past. It is looking at imaginative schemes to take things forward. Two things that the future high streets fund grants funding for are improving transport access to town centres, which is absolutely crucial—if people cannot get in and out, the town centre is likely to die—and increasing vehicle and pedestrian flows, which follows on from that. That is a major improvement for the functioning of our town centres.

I have two examples of different types of business that are handled in different ways. The first is pubs. The reduction in the number of pubs has been going on for a number of years, for many reasons—we all seem to want to reduce our alcohol consumption for health reasons; there are the changes in the law on smoking, although they have largely worked their way out; there is a case for saying that many pubs have not got over the recession and are still struggling; and there is also the pricing of alcohol, which means it is often much cheaper to drink at home than in the pub. Alongside that,

however, employment in pubs and bars has remained quite steady, and has even increased slightly, which needs to be considered in parallel.

My second example is banks. The decline in banks has been going on for 30 years. It is even more significant now with the rise in online banking. I have probably not visited a bank in two or three years—I do all my banking online because it is much more convenient to do that.

My final point is about the integration of housing in the mix. It is important to try to get people to live in the centre of our towns again, so that there is a mix of retail and living accommodation. In my role as Government champion for neighbourhood planning, I will give an example. The town of Thame had about 700 houses earmarked in its neighbourhood plan. It deliberately chose to spread them around the outskirts of the city rather than to have a big development at one end of the town, which would have meant creating a new area and a new shopping area. The reason it spread that housing all round the town was to increase the flow into the centre of town. That is a very good example, which I would endorse, to everyone who is looking to sort out how their towns are organised for the future.

2.57 pm

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) on opening the debate this afternoon. I declare an interest as chair of the USDAW group of Members of Parliament and as a member of USDAW, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. I am particularly pleased to take part in this debate. It is very important to send a message to the Minister that we think that the retail sector is an important contributor to the UK economy. It employs millions of people and is key to the regeneration of our local towns and communities, and also key to the employment across the country of many people. Three million people are directly employed in retail; 1.5 million work in related activity that depends on the success of our high streets. Our high streets are the fabric of our communities and we need to look at what we can do to protect them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon and the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) have raised some of the challenges on our high streets at the moment. Disposable income is falling for many people. There are real challenges in the economy as a whole, which means less money is spent locally. The issue of online sales is a particularly big challenge. I have bought things online, as everybody else in this House will have done. It is important to look at the context behind that and consider what that challenge poses.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): It is not only the impact on the shopping centres; there are also the centres in the outlying districts where there is a major impact. Coming back to the point that the hon. Member for Henley made, a lot of banks and even cashpoints are closing down; banks are shedding a lot of labour these days and that has an impact on people in cities.

David Hanson: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend.

Disposable income is one of the big issues. Online sales are also a big issue. The cost of shops and rent and business rates is certainly another, as is the impact of out-of-town shopping, which employs many people in my constituency. Many of my constituents work at Cheshire Oaks in the constituency of my hon. Friend

the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), but that does not hide the fact that big, out-of-town shopping centres are dragging people away from smaller towns. In many towns, the loss of Government offices such as the local DWP office or the local post office and doctors' and dentists' surgeries stop the footfall going through towns, which presents a challenge.

This year, we have seen a 2.4% fall in the number of staff employed in the retail sector. That does not sound like a great deal, but 74,000 people who were employed at the beginning of the year are now not employed in the retail sector. Vacancy levels in town centres are now at 10%, the highest for four years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon mentioned, some big key employers in many of our areas are folding. I want the Government to recognise that shops are a generator of economic value, so we need to look at what we can do to support them. My hon. Friend mentioned the USDAW's "Industrial Strategy for Retail", a blueprint of ideas that are worth discussion. I hope the Minister will focus on some of those ideas, and see whether they are applicable to Government and the devolved Administrations.

I have a couple of points that I want to throw into the mix. First, we need to look at how we can support the maintenance of key drivers of footfall in town centres. That means the Government need to look at supporting post offices, Government businesses and doctors' and dentists' surgeries in town centres. They need to ensure that we have an offer in town centres that brings people in because, as has been said, town centres have to be places of destination as well as places of shopping. We can do that by anchoring key Government facilities in town centres and by adding value to town centres through local council and local government support. For example, we can improve the built environment and plant trees and bushes. If shops are empty, finding ways in which the local council and others can use exhibition and display space to bring people in to make them places of venture is particularly important.

Like the hon. Member for Henley, I want to see integrated issues on planning and look at whether we can find ways to bring houses as well as shops into town centres. When I was honoured to be a Minister in Northern Ireland, I oversaw a scheme whereby we used space above shops for single people and newly married couples to live, ensuring they could use the town centre while also filling empty premises.

The USDAW strategy suggests looking at the online shopping tax. Tesco's chief executive has indicated he wants to look at the potential for a shop tax. An online tax might be a 1% or 2% levy on online transactions, which could help to balance the initiative towards people buying in retail. I do not want to put the cost up for consumers, but it is worthy of consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon mentioned car parking and transport links, which are extremely important, as is the issue of business rates. In my part of the world in Wales, we have a small business rate relief scheme that provides rate relief for businesses up to £6,000 of rateable value with 100% relief, and we have a high street relief scheme that supplies £23.6 million of rate relief for shops in town centres. That helps anchor and keep businesses in those town centres.

Finally, I will give some examples. In Holywell in my constituency, we recently lost all of the banks bar one, but, with the help of a company called Square, we had

[David Hanson]

some potential in the town centre, where we enabled people to use machines for online transactions. That was provided free by Square to help support retailers in the town. We have had support through a range of activities, festivals, theatre and art groups trying to bring footfall into the towns. All of that is part of a retail strategy. It requires not just the shops but local councils, Government and private sector organisations trying to support a focus on retail, and not a drawing away from retail. I commend USDAW's industrial strategy and recommend that the Minister look at some of the ideas. I look forward to her comments on things that have been raised today.

3.4 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Sir David. I thank the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) for securing this very important debate.

Any retail strategy for the future must focus on re-energising our town centres. I accept that the retail footprint will inevitably reduce with changing shopping trends and a changing retail landscape, but the challenge is to manage that change. Empty premises sadly prevail in towns throughout the UK. Online competition—in 2018, almost a fifth of all retail sales were online—crushing business rates and taxes, traffic management systems and parking charges, or a combination of the above, have influenced or played a part in the decline of high street retail.

Many accept, as I do, that there is a place for online shopping, and that is evidenced by the steady increase in internet transactions year on year. Online shopping can assist those with disabilities or who are housebound; others may simply be seeking to exercise their freedom of choice. In the not-too-distant future, our communities might be buzzing not with retail activity, but with drone deliveries of internet shopping. However, online shopping must co-exist with high street retail, and not be a replacement for it. The demise of high street shops could lead to further isolation for the elderly, not all of whom—I might include myself in this—are internet-comfortable when it comes to financial transactions, although I suspect going forward the situation will resolve itself.

On a positive note, eateries in Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock are a great success. It is an element of retail that is really successful. In our area and many areas throughout the UK, that sector uses locally produced goods. It is interesting to note that the towns and villages where shops appear to thrive are those where a variety of small, quality, niche retail businesses are intertwined, as has been mentioned, with the residences and professional offices that are integral to the retail provision, and where traffic management systems are minimal and parking charges are zero or at least reasonable. Sometimes there might be a smaller version of one of the larger well-known food retailers, acting as an anchor store and preventing the drift of custom. However, as residents and as a society, we need to stop and ask ourselves whether we could support high street retail, because we the citizens have a part to play.

Shopping should and can be a pleasurable and social experience; as my wife will remind me, we need a bit of retail therapy from time to time. That applies equally to those providing the service and those receiving it.

Mike Amesbury: I agree on the point about quality. There should be a race to the top. Sometimes quality costs, so quality might mean better pay. Paddy Lillis, the general secretary of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, is my constituent; I recently had a conversation with him, and there is a campaign to raise the living wage to £10 an hour. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with that?

Bill Grant: As someone whose mother worked in the pit canteen and made beds at Butlin's on a Saturday, I fully agree that those who provide such services deserve better pay. We need to recognise those in hospitality and eateries, and the value of those who prepare and serve the food. As a nation, for decades and generations we have undervalued those people, so I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman, and the price has to be passed on to the consumer.

Employees—dare I say the next line? The hon. Gentleman must have been looking over my shoulder—should receive fair pay for work undertaken, and should have security of tenure in their job. Customers should feel involved in the purchase, and should engage with the sales assistant. It should not be a beat-the-clock exercise, in which people have to hurry to return to their vehicle before they receive a fine for overstaying their welcome. Nor should there be an additional cost burden on retailers if their staff wish to park in the vicinity of their place of work; in certain cities, retailers are being asked for £500 or thereabouts per annum per member of staff who wishes to do that.

Recently it has been announced that in Glasgow city centre, parking restrictions and charges will now apply on the Sabbath—on Sundays. Business representatives have already taken to the media to express their concern that the move will lead to shoppers deserting the city centre on a Sunday in favour of large out-of-town shopping centres, which, as we are all aware, generally have free parking. As a business person once said, “When you can't change the direction of the wind, adjust your sail”. We should manage the change. We need to encourage a steady footfall for the future, and stop what appears to be a stampeding exodus of high street shoppers to out-of-town retail centres or online facilities. In Scotland, that may mean the Scottish Government and councils working together, and reconsidering their planning and roads legislation, and policies that affect town centres.

Certainly, in my constituency the main towns are, for want of a better word, hurting. They have not hurt as much in their whole existence, and in many cases they have lost their dignity, which they richly deserve to have returned to them. However, the centre of Cumnock is an exception, as a small town that has recently been sympathetically revitalised by the introduction of a small new build retail facility that blends into the streetscape. The principal occupier, a prominent food retailer, appears to complement the existing, varied retailers—so well done to East Ayrshire Council. Local chambers of commerce and industry, such as the Ayrshire chamber of commerce, are to be commended for their encouragement of local enterprise and excellence.

Inevitably some businesses in the UK will, regrettably, fail, for one or more of the reasons I have indicated. The Government need to consider taking appropriate measures to ensure that the auditing of retail businesses is robust;

that any asset stripping, particularly by big businesses, will be better regulated in the future, for the protection of employees and shareholders; and that a review—and, if it is deemed appropriate, reform—is carried out with respect to company voluntary arrangements. There is also a need to look at business rates and taxes.

Our future is created by what we do while we are living for today, so I hope that as a result of the contributions to the debate, the Minister will be encouraged to reflect on the Government's planning for tomorrow. We need more practical measures like the future high streets fund, which was introduced in the 2018 Budget. It is an excellent boost to high streets, despite the failures mentioned earlier. Hopefully those who reapply will be successful next time. I ask the Minister to bring forward further measures to secure our local retail trade and help to re-energise high streets throughout the UK, while remembering that high streets are no longer a cash cow to be financially milked by an outdated business rating system that needs grassroots reform.

3.12 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I extend my thanks to the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) for obtaining the debate and introducing it so well, and to the other hon. Members who have taken part. I shall probably echo their comments, although obviously I will give mine a flavour of Northern Ireland, because I always do—or, specifically, of my constituency's main town of Newtownards.

At a time when it is easier and quicker to buy online, I am thankful that the high street in Newtownards is bucking the trend and thriving. That is due in large part to a council that wants to be involved and helpful. It co-operates with the local chamber of trade, which is forward thinking and absolutely invested in the future of the high street. Rather than staying the same and trying to hold on to what is there, it is focused on moving with the times. The benefits are clear. I had the opportunity of a meeting with the chamber of trade about six weeks ago. The members have an interesting vision for the high street; it is about the shopping experience. It is more than just shopping online as some people do, but it is also more than just going to the high street.

In my constituency, those over 55 have a certain level of disposable income, so the high street and traditional shops are well utilised; but the chamber of trade vision is that there should, at the same time, be a shopping experience for families. The right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) mentioned that idea. The vision is about having somewhere for the children to go, green and attractive areas in the town, and a bit of coffee culture. All those things make the experience of going shopping more than it would have been in the past, in my younger days. What is exciting is that the chamber of trade and Ards and North Down Borough Council have the same vision. It is important to encourage that when we can.

There are shops that have a face on the high street and an online service as well. We must look at different ways of doing things. An advantage for some of the shops on my high street is that they do probably 60% of their trade on the high street and 40% online. They do business online across the whole world—in the United States, the far east, Canada and Africa. Their products are attractive in those places, and they find avenues to sell and be promoted there.

People have busy lives. My parliamentary aide works until 5, collects her children and brings them home to begin to make their dinner at 5.30. They eat their dinner, have story time and their bath, and then they are in bed for 7.30. She then is faced with the dilemma of whether to go to the shopping centre and run into Asda, or to sit in the comfort of her home and order things online. Late-night opening in shopping centres used to be busy, but now people have an option. Local businesses miss out when busy people go for the easy option of shopping online and ordering from Tesco or Asda. All those shops now do home deliveries.

The easy option may not be safest option. As the debate on electrical safety yesterday highlighted, online retailers do not have the same safety scrutiny as physical shops. That should be a consideration in any retail strategy, as was emphasised in the half-hour debate yesterday led by the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). We need to remind people that going down to the high street on Saturday can be much more fulfilling than scrolling down an online list. As trade changes, with more online sales, it is great to see the plans for our local high street to adapt. I have invited the Minister—I think we are waiting for a date to be confirmed—to come and see all the good things I have been telling her about Newtownards. We look forward to meeting the hon. Lady on that day.

What does the shop in the high street need? It is important to have a better and quicker planning system for improvements, and to support fresh looks and entice more people. We are fortunate as we have had a Saturday market for 20 or 30 years, which attracts many people to Newtownards and its traditional shops. Newtownards is one of the better towns in Northern Ireland when it comes to choice, variety and cost—and all the things that are important in shopping. A mix of shopping and accommodation would be helpful for the evening and coffee culture. Indeed, in the past we had a scheme, the living over the shop scheme, that supported the provision of accommodation on the high street. The right hon. Member for Delyn mentioned it; I did not know he had been the Minister responsible, but I am pleased that it was his initiative, and I am deeply grateful to him. I promoted it over and over in my time on the council and on the Assembly—and only today do I know that he was the man who brought it forward. I thank him on behalf of my constituency. It is so important that empty space is used in a good way, and that was a way to utilise it very well.

The business rates have to be revised. Many stores in the town need assistance, as their rates are truly a significant part of their bills. The ministerial visit will enable the shopkeepers in the town of Ards to highlight the wonderful things that are being done, and to make some input into how Government can restore the high street and encourage online businesses to have a face on the high street. We are indeed fortunate in Ards that the centre of town has wide variety, with many different types of businesses from clothes and shoes to opticians and solicitors. There are areas of redevelopment such as the South Street Precinct, which is providing approximately 100 jobs. That is among the things I would like the Minister to see.

Many stores in our town centre are doing a great trade online. Ards is holding its own, but now is the time to take steps forward and to secure the future of

[Jim Shannon]

the town by adapting and moving with the times. Retail strategy needs to include all of the things I have outlined. I believe that we are on the precipice of greatness, with many high street businesses wanting to keep their footprint, but moving online. Now is the time to make some input into the situation, with a fit-for-purpose UK-wide retail strategy.

3.18 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) for securing this important debate. We have already heard powerful contributions on both sides of the Chamber about how the Government's lack of a clear, coherent and holistic retail strategy is damaging our high streets and shopping centres, not to mention the livelihoods of those trying to make a living in the sector.

I will begin by recounting a couple of conversations I had with business owners in Batley and Spen. A couple of months ago in Batley, I called into a restaurant called Mi Nonnas. It is a really nice coffee shop and lunch destination. The owner showed me painful statistics demonstrating the fall in his revenue due to the controversial changes to our bus routes, which have completely decimated his restaurant's footfall. He told me that he has not taken a wage, and that the situation is really stressful for him and his family. His is not the only local business affected by those changes. Sadly, since 2010, we have lost 3,000 bus routes nationally, and central Government cuts have seemingly little regard for the wider consequences for retailers.

The second conversation I had was at a lovely needlework and wool shop in Heckmondwike. The owner told me that footfall had really reduced because the last bank had left the community. The people who use her shop are often older people who knit and sew. They are less likely to take a longer journey to go to a bank, so they take their business elsewhere; considering that the UK has lost almost two thirds of its banks and building societies over the past 30 years, that will not change any time soon. A fifth of the population are 2 miles adrift from their nearest branch, likely with a substandard bus route to boot.

The massive hike in business rates announced last year is another issue that constituents mention to me regularly. In an age when people shop online, our local independent retailers need a leg up. They need vision and creative thinking. They are hamstrung by antiquated rates systems, which price too many independent retailers out of the market. Although I welcome the short-term rate relief for some businesses announced in last year's Budget, it is nothing more than a sticking plaster. While our high streets are increasingly dotted with vacant shops, the big supermarkets get a cut in rates and online giants such as Amazon pay a fraction of their multibillion-pound turnover. That does not make sense to me. With the collapse of big brands such as Toys R Us, which had a store at Centre 27 retail park in my constituency, it is clear that these issues go way beyond our high streets.

The retail sector accounts for more than 3 million jobs in the UK, yet it is often overlooked. The British Retail Consortium warns that 74,000 jobs were lost last

year, and that up to 900,000 will be lost by 2025. That would be a staggering blow to the sector. We need a clear retail strategy. The fact that the Government's industrial strategy, which was unveiled almost two years ago, has yet to create a sector deal for retail speaks volumes. The Government's Retail Sector Council, which was designed to address key challenges facing the sector, meets a paltry three times a year. That is not good enough. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid), who is no longer in his place, local authorities have to bid against one another for money from the future high streets fund. There is no guarantee of success, and the fund goes nowhere near far enough to address the myriad issues that have been raised in the debate.

How do we move forward? Let us start with the basics. We need to ensure that people can access our businesses. Public transport is crucial. We need to invest in buses and trains to end this downward spiral. We must not have communities where there are no banks left. I applaud NatWest, which has a pilot scheme to bring a number of banks under one roof and offer a limited service to businesses. We need to escalate such opportunities, and perhaps Government should drive them.

I am delighted that the Labour party recently committed to introducing a network of post banks based in post offices in the hearts of our communities. It is really important for older people in particular to be able to access their money, and that business owners do not have to travel too far with cash in their pockets, or put their workforce at risk by asking them to carry large amounts of money around on buses and elsewhere. Our business rates system also needs fixing. Nothing but a comprehensive review and overhaul of the system will suffice, so I am pleased that the Labour party is committed to doing exactly that, along with taxing online retailers, implementing free wi-fi and banning ATM charges. Like colleagues, I commend USDAW's brilliant Save Our Shops campaign, which focuses on levelling the playing field between traditional and online retailers, improving pay and conditions, and changing perceptions of retail jobs.

We are just not having the conversations that matter with policy makers. It is down to us as Members of Parliament, and to trade unions, to try to get those conversations going. I do not think policy makers understand the myriad challenges for villages such as Birstall, or bigger communities such as Cleckheaton and Heckmondwike. Having short-term fixes and Departments working in silos certainly is not cutting it.

A clear retail strategy that looks at the whole picture is overdue. We need great ideas for making our high streets more community focused, tackling loneliness and introducing flexible workplaces and leisure opportunities, and for bringing culture—buskers, art and so on—to our high streets and greening them. We need to ensure that our retail survives and can transform our towns and villages, bringing us a sense of place and home, and making our communities great places to live and work.

3.25 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for

Blaydon (Liz Twist) on securing this debate about a topic that is vital to the survival of our high streets, as evidenced again by the number of Members present. I say “again” because this is not the first time we have gathered to discuss the causes of town centre decline and what we should do about it. Indeed, I took part in a debate on urban regeneration shortly after being elected to this place four years ago.

Very little has changed since then. In fact, things have probably got worse. In 2018, nearly 85,000 retail jobs were lost in the UK as businesses continued to go bust. In the past 18 months alone, the following big chains have gone into administration: Greenwoods, HMV, Berketex, Crawshaw, Evans Cycles, American Golf, Orla Kiely, Poundworld, House of Fraser, Gaucho, Warren Evans, East, Carpetright, Toys R Us, Maplin, Mothercare, Homebase, and L. K. Bennett. Many household names; many long-standing companies. It is a crisis.

The British Retail Consortium’s monthly footfall tracker showed that store visits hit a six-year low in May this year, with declines experienced in every region and across high streets, retail parks and shopping centres. According to a new report, online shopping will account for more than 50% of retail sales within the next 10 years. The report states that that growth will be powered by three primary factors: the changing demographics of the UK adult population; the development of faster, cheaper home deliveries; and fewer physical stores.

Our high streets and small business owners will continue to be hit by those changes in shopping habits. The Centre For Towns showed that the decline of our high streets has picked up pace in the past 10 years as consumers shop online rather than visiting the high street. The Office for National Statistics reported that the number of retail businesses and the number of high street retail jobs fell in every region of England except London between 2012 and 2017.

Those trends are reflected in the two main towns in my constituency: Ellesmere Port and Neston. Both have a retail offer significantly smaller than it was five years ago, due to the dramatic changes we have heard about. The town centre in Neston has lost all its banks, which has had a negative impact on both customers and retail businesses. A lot of retail units are in private ownership, many of them too large for what retailers are looking for nowadays, and shops in Ellesmere Port are closing regularly, and are not being replaced. When banks close branches, they undergo what I consider to be a cursory consultation that changes nothing and does not require them to think about their wider responsibilities for the vitality of our town centres.

Mike Amesbury: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is rather confusing to look at the ownership of some of those banks? Of course, we stepped in some time ago—they were bailed out to the tune of billions of pounds—so there is ownership there, but where is the control? It is as though the referee has just walked off the pitch. Do we require Government intervention?

Justin Madders: My hon. Friend and neighbour makes an excellent point. Indeed, the power that central Government have through procurement and their control over many of those private enterprises should be used for the wider benefit of communities. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) mentioned,

post offices are a great example of where we have lost control of an organisation. A number of the post offices on high streets in my constituency are closing, without any regard for the wider community impact. We really must begin to take back control, to coin a phrase.

Most of all, it is our town centres that are in need of a retail strategy. They are the heart of our communities, and their importance must not be underplayed. A new approach that regenerates our town centres is vital if we are to preserve their character, restore civic pride and give people a positive reason to visit their high streets. Local authorities have the knowledge and tools to tackle this, but they cannot do so without significant financial support. However, local authority funding has been cut like never before and the money needed for a true transformative approach to regenerate our town centres simply is not there.

As my hon. Friend Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) said, we need to be much more joined up in how we approach these things. The move to electric vehicles is one such example. It is not entirely clear who is in charge of the charging infrastructure, but it would be great if there were joined-up thinking, with charging points located in town centres used to encourage people to use the town centre facilities while they charge up.

As we have heard, unfortunately the Government’s plan to address the crisis is to pit towns against one another in a competitive bidding process known as the future high streets fund. Only a lucky few get a slice of the pie. I learned this week that despite putting in an excellent bid for Ellesmere Port, my local authority was not successful in the process. What does that say to the people of Ellesmere Port about the importance of their town, compared with others? What will the Government do to support Ellesmere Port town centre? Will there be a second round of funding? Will there be other initiatives, or will we have a rerun of the 1980s policy of managed decline for parts of the north?

My local council is doing what it can, but the multifaceted challenges we have heard about in the era of austerity cannot fall entirely on its shoulders. The trends are there for all of us to see. The evidence is clear that the capacity to meet such challenges has been hollowed out after a decade of cuts. It will take sustained, focused and locally driven but nationally supported investment. It will take imagination, requiring a change from the old way of doing things. It will take central Government to realise that one of the reasons why so many people feel disengaged and disenfranchised is that when they go to their town centre and see empty shops—

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. Will the hon. Gentleman wind up?

Justin Madders: I will, Sir David. When people see the household names going, the banks closing and the public sector shrinking, they have a stark reminder of how the growth of the economy has not been evenly distributed. Civic pride, community identity, jobs and opportunities all suffer when the high streets are in decline. We owe it to the people in our communities to do much better and reverse the decline.

3.31 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member

[Drew Hendry]

for Blaydon (Liz Twist) on securing this important debate on a matter that is not raised often enough in this place. As a former retailer, I have seen many of these issues over the years, and I am delighted that she has been able to bring the debate to Westminster Hall. As we will get into online retail, I bring the attention of hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

The hon. Lady talked about the effects on people, communities and indeed companies. She brought up the spectre of the BHS closures, which was deeply hurtful to many people involved. She also talked about the work of local authorities and the possibility of them getting involved, and correctly called for a longer-term strategy and vision from the UK Government.

The hon. Lady talked about the business rate system in England, which is a key issue. I will come on to the Scottish context. She also mentioned the requirement for proper pay for people working in retail. She will be glad to know that in Scotland the real living wage—not the pretendy one—is being promoted by the Scottish Government, which indeed is a real living wage employer. Almost just at this moment, the 1,500th private real living wage employer in Scotland has been unveiled: Johnstons of Elgin, the menswear retailer. It was congratulated by the fair work Minister, Jamie Hepburn MSP. Congratulations to Johnstons; it is a really good example.

The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) talked about changes to banking and rural communities. I disagree about everyone being able to go on to online banking. Many people with disabilities and people in rural areas need banking facilities in the heart of their communities. In particular, those who are vulnerable need access to cash in a way that cannot be done online. The hon. Gentleman did, however, make an interesting point about town planning, which people should consider carefully.

The right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) discussed retail's important contribution to the UK economy and employment. Indeed, in Scotland, retail is the largest private sector employer, accounting for 250,300 jobs. Retailers are kind-hearted, having donated £10 million to good causes in Scotland, and retail accounted for 13% of all new businesses formed in Scotland in 2016. It also accounts for a fifth of all business rates in Scotland.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about out-of-town versus city centre. There is much debate about how we marry the two so that everyone can benefit, because they are realities. That is one for greater consideration. He also mentioned the loss of UK Government offices, which I have seen in the highlands, with the tax offices, Department for Work and Pensions offices, local passport offices and Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency offices all coming out of communities and affecting people and local businesses, particularly retail.

The right hon. Gentleman brought up another subject close to my heart: support for post offices. These people desperately need a better deal so they can secure a living wage. As the Minister will acknowledge, there are people in post offices struggling to make a living. The right hon. Gentleman also made many suggestions to the Minister in a very good speech.

The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) talked about regenerating town centres, accepting the online issue. I still get a bit of a shiver

when thinking about this future of deliveries by drones, with all these drones whizzing about. The temptation to bat them out of the way might be too strong, but we should be aware that that may come in the future. He talked, quite rightly, about the danger of isolation for the elderly and those who are not internet-savvy—I think he included himself—with different ways to shop. He said that people deserved better, and he talked about the real living wage, so I am sure he will join me in congratulating Johnstons of Elgin.

The hon. Gentleman quite rightly said that local authorities and the Scottish Government should work together. He will be glad to welcome the work that the Scottish Government are doing with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on town centres. As well as providing the best business rates in the UK, the SNP Scottish Government have put together a business rates relief package worth more than £75 million. Ninety per cent. of businesses in Scotland will pay a lower poundage than they would anywhere else in the UK. The Scottish Government have launched a £50 million town centres fund in partnership with COSLA, with local authorities allocating the funds. That goes a long way in promoting the work between Government and the local authorities.

Bill Grant: To put that in context, when I look at my inbox I see a number of businesses have experienced a significant rates hike. Rural businesses in particular are hurting terribly, so a system had to be introduced to compensate for that. There are anomalies.

Drew Hendry: Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman is trying to punt a line that is not the fact. Through the small business bonus, 100,000 businesses in Scotland pay no rates at all, and those are mainly businesses in rural areas that do not come up to the level for being taxed.

The hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) correctly talked about public transport and its impact on retail. She gave the example of the fall in revenue for one of her constituents due to a change in bus routes. That brings us back to town planning. People must plan for the unintended outcomes as well as those they want in the future. She also mentioned banks and building societies, the importance of business rates and the need to tax big online retailers.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), as ever, did a great job of promoting his own constituency. He talked about the chamber of trade and, importantly, the need for a shopping experience. Green areas, coffee culture and all those things need to be thought out in planning for the future. He talked about the mix of online and physical, which is what we used to call—

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. Will the hon. Gentleman bring his remarks to a close? I added a few minutes for earlier speakers, so I will have to take a minute off each of the Front Benchers.

Drew Hendry: I will try, but there is a lot to say.

Unfortunately I cannot discuss the speech of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), who made a number of important points. I will finish with something that is important to me and my constituents: the unfair situation on delivery charges. As we move to a culture of more online deliveries, consumers in Scotland are having to pay a disproportionate amount more

because of a postcode system used by retailers to charge them extra for deliveries. That is unfair, and the Scottish Government have done a lot of work on that issue. My colleague, Richard Lochhead MSP, and I have worked very hard over the years to make changes, and have made significant breakthroughs with individual retailers. However, it is time for this UK Government to step up to the mark and do something to ensure fair delivery charges for people across Scotland, particularly in rural areas of the highlands and elsewhere.

3.40 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) on securing this debate and on an excellent speech. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) and my hon. Friends the Members for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) and for Ellesmere and Neston (Justin Madders), who all advocated for their constituencies and spoke strongly on this issue. They touched on the importance of a retail sector agreement and referred to the USDAW proposals for an industrial strategy for retail; as a member of USDAW, I declare an interest in that matter.

My wife and I decided to buy a dishwasher, and searched online for a local retailer. We found that Smiths TV, in Formby in my constituency, sold dishwashers. Its website was well designed, and when we went to the store, the layout was attractive and the staff were friendly and helpful, so we bought from them. It is a local independent retailer that is clearly doing well, with four stores in Sefton and west Lancashire. Meanwhile, Aintree retail park and Aintree Racecourse retail park, which are next to each other, are both thriving, packed shopping centres where footfall is strong.

In my constituency and across the country, there are success stories in retail, including independent retailers that combine a strong online presence with excellent in-store customer service, and shopping centres where the management and stores combine to present an attractive offer that ensures that customers come and visit. To return to a point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn, what can high streets learn from successful out-of-town shopping centres? I have mentioned the success stories in my constituency, and it is important that we all do so, because there are plenty more.

However, as is the case with everyone else who has spoken in the debate, the trend across my constituency is far from positive. There have been high-profile closures such as Maplin, Comet and the other names that have been mentioned. In the high streets of my constituency—in Formby, Maghull and Crosby—we have the tattoo parlours, betting shops and tanning salons that others have mentioned, where once we had household names or good local retailers. Many retailers in my constituency, like everywhere else, find trading tough. That is why it is disappointing that the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee had to report that

“the Industrial Strategy promised to work with low productivity sectors, such as retail and hospitality, with the potential for even small productivity gains across people-heavy sectors having a significant beneficial impact on the UK’s overall productivity. Yet we found that so far neither the retail nor hospitality sector has been able to make significant progress on securing a sector deal of their own”.

The retail industry is a key part of our economy; it employs 3 million people and, according to USDAW, contributes 11% of UK economic output. Many people have their first experience of work in retail. In smaller towns and villages, shops are often the heart of the community, and retail is a fundamental part of how we all go about our day-to-day life. However, 74,000 jobs were lost in 2018 alone, with many more job losses predicted. There is a long-term decline in retail, which is a cause of great concern in many high streets and has a profound impact on communities, workers and the whole country.

However, as I have shown through the local examples I have given, there is much in the industry and high streets and town centres that tells us that this crisis can be addressed. Businesses can still thrive, and good, higher skilled, better paid jobs can be available if we improve skills and use technology to drive productivity, with a strong strategy and the proper partnership between national and local government, businesses and the wider community.

A successful retail strategy should put in place support for businesses to harness the power of the internet and to benefit from a combination of online and offline shopping. Smiths TV in Formby shows how that can work, but such good practice needs far greater promotion and support. Labour’s plans for business support will maximise the benefits of technology to help business, deliver the well-paid jobs of the future and help communities as well. As was said earlier, high pay means there is more for businesses too, as well-paid workers are able to buy more goods and services from them. The good use of technology, allied to equipping staff with the technical and interpersonal skills that I experienced at Smiths, offers a vision of a successful retail future.

The challenges in retail, especially in our high streets, have been analysed by a number of organisations. The Government must listen to the British Retail Consortium, to Bill Grimsey and Mary Portas, to USDAW, and to others who have written excellent reports. All have produced reviews with evidence-informed recommendations to address the high costs of business rates; the lack of footfall and public transport; bank and post office closures; the need in town centres for work space and housing, as well as for good-quality leisure facilities such as bars, cafes and restaurants; and the opportunity to re-establish public services with lots of staff near where shopkeepers can benefit from their spending power—services such as doctors and dentists, whose patients are also potential retail customers.

Retail is an industry of national importance. We are a nation of shopkeepers, but we are in danger of becoming a nation of shuttered shops. That is why Labour’s plan—a bold and comprehensive offer that would bring customers and workers to town centres, reform the crippling system of business rates and preserve the essential heart of communities—is so necessary. In it, we have addressed the need to have decent bus services—services that are free for under-25s and that have free wi-fi; to keep banks open; to address the digital exclusion of the too many who cannot go online to bank, those who need to use cash to buy and those businesses that rely on cash; to retain cash machines for the same reason, for consumers and businesses alike; to have a register of landlords to address the challenge of empty shops; and to overhaul business rates and consider the alternatives, such as an online sales tax. All those ideas

[Bill Esterson]

are designed to help address requests made by businesses and shoppers. How about electric vehicle charging points to attract shoppers, while at the same time nudging behaviour on climate action?

A retail council that meets three times a year and whose recommendations go nowhere is a talking shop, and is no substitute for a retail industry strategy; £150,000 for a study of a limited number of high streets is no strategy either. When the majority of high streets have been excluded from the high street fund, it starts to look like window dressing, rather than the basis of a strategy that could transform the prospects of retail and communities. A lack of a detailed plan simply will not save retail jobs, or reinvigorate high streets or communities. There are deep-seated problems in areas of deprivation, which will take much greater intervention than in more prosperous areas.

We must recognise the realities of shopping habits, including online shopping, and not give up on our shops and their staff. Working in a warehouse fulfilling orders cannot be the limit of our aspiration for millions of workers, nor will online shopping be the answer in all cases. Creating an attractive experience that balances online and physical shopping will provide an opportunity for businesses, consumers and workers, as long as we have the right strategy. Human interaction is important in life; that is as true in retail as anywhere else, and online cannot replicate that experience.

Smiths TV in Formby shows what is possible. If it can succeed as an independent retailer, so can many more. However, retailers cannot do it alone, which is why it is now time for the Government to take action. We must have a proper retail strategy, working with the industry to preserve jobs and reinvigorate communities.

3.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) on securing today's important debate. Like her, I have a family history in retail and shopkeeping: my great-grandmother ran a corner grocery store, my great-grandfather was a bootmaker and my father used to run a DIY shop. It is interesting that we are having this debate, because he closed that DIY shop after the retail sector changed. The likes of B&Q finished off some of our small, independent DIY shops. I hope I have been able to bring some direct understanding to my role as a Minister in this area.

As the hon. Lady and other Members have pointed out, the retail sector employs more than 3 million people and contributed £94 billion of gross value added to the UK economy in 2018. The retail sector is at the heart of our communities and our country. I reassure Members that I am extremely passionate and determined about the retail sector and that I care vehemently about it, much as everyone who sits in the House of Commons—not just those in the Government—cares very much about it and values it, the jobs it creates and the value it delivers to our communities.

Retail has always evolved to meet changing consumer demands, and it will continue to do so. Indeed, it is already thriving in many areas. For example, we have the

most developed e-commerce market in Europe, with 48% of the estimated total of €198 billion in 2018. We recognise the high-profile pressures in the sector, but there are also businesses that are expanding and developing, as outlined by the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) with his great plug for his local retailer Smiths TV. Amazon, Lidl, Aldi, Ocado and JD Sports are all companies investing in UK retail, which is a good sign for the future. Primark, which recently opened the world's largest fashion retail store in Birmingham, is proving that a high street business can still be successful without a significant online presence. We have seen sales increase by 4% and increased profits. Organisations such as Pets at Home are taking on the challenge of changing consumer demand. In its stores, it is bringing in veterinary services and grooming services and investing in the workforce and apprenticeships. Many retailers are grasping the challenge of a changing retail sector and ensuring they are able to deliver services on the ground that consumers want.

We have heard examples from Members about local growth. It has been great to hear examples of local authorities working proactively with their high street forums and the opportunities available to them to try to grow and really focus on meeting the needs of the local community through the local retail offer. However, to continue to evolve, we need to innovate. I was therefore excited to see the UK Digital Retail Innovation Centre open in Gloucester in May this year, following a funding award of £400,000 from Gloucestershire's local enterprise partnership. It will be a national centre for testing and developing disruptive digital innovations and will help shape and inform the future of cities with a special focus on retail.

Alongside those successes, we have seen some high-profile names struggle, including Woolworths, Toys R Us and, more recently, Debenhams and House of Fraser. We have been used to seeing those iconic names on our high streets, but in some cases they are no longer there. I do not underestimate the impact of those changes, which can be hugely difficult for the individuals and families involved and for communities. Indeed, I know the hon. Member for Blaydon met Toys R Us staff from the metro retail park when the store closed down. Some of them had been working there for 20 years, and I commend her for the support she showed to her constituents.

There is no doubt the sector is facing significant pressures, whether from uncertainty in the business environment or from changes in consumer expectations and preferences towards online shopping. Those challenges are reflected in retail across the world, not just in the UK. Our retail sector is still one of the best in the world, and we are well placed to deal with the challenges. Retail has a long history of responding successfully to change, of turning challenges into opportunities and of turning pressure into innovation. The Government are, and I personally am, absolutely committed to supporting the sector as it responds to change and strives to continue to serve the public so well, as it has in the past, and as it will in the future.

I am pleased, as part of my portfolio, to serve as the co-chair of the industry-led Retail Sector Council, alongside Richard Pennycook, the chairman of the British Retail Consortium. There has been confusion over the idea that the council does not meet very often and is just focused on the troubles of the past, rather than looking

to the future, but I assure Members that we not only have Retail Sector Council meetings, but a number of sub-groups heading up the workstreams and meeting regularly. A lot of work goes on outside those meetings to reach targets. The workstreams are focused on future challenges and how we can drive the retail sector forward. It is not just a talking shop; if it were, I can assure Members I would want no part in it. I spent many a year before becoming an MP in talking shops, and I do not particularly want to do that as an elected Member of Parliament and especially not as a Minister.

Bill Esterson: I am glad the Minister has mentioned the Retail Sector Council. I am curious as to what it has achieved. Perhaps she can tell us, because if it is not a talking shop, it will have made a difference, and there will be some outcomes, deliverables and differences made.

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. As he will know, when the Retail Sector Council was set up last year, we set its priorities. The six workstreams and the priority workstreams have been agreed. We are working for outcomes. The beauty of the Retail Sector Council is that it is the retail sector coming together with Government to find solutions to the future challenges. It includes not only the bricks-and-mortar retailers, but the online retailers and the small independent retailers. In the council, the sector is working with Government to move forward and bring forward plans and proposals that will benefit and aid the sector.

Liz Twist: Will the Minister agree to set up a retail sector deal to further promote the work of the retail sector?

Kelly Tolhurst: Absolutely, but the hon. Lady will know that all the sector deals are being driven by the sectors themselves with the support of Government and with strong leadership and great ideas. My wider hope for the retail sector is that we will see that deal delivered by the Retail Sector Council as soon as possible.

Costs to business is another workstream, and a number of Members raised them. As part of that workstream, the co-chair and I are meeting the Financial Secretary to the Treasury next week to discuss some of the preliminary findings on costs to business in the retail sector. A large survey of the entire sector was carried out. That area is of big interest to me in terms of how we levy taxation in the future. The skills and lifelong learning workstream is running in parallel with the costs to business workstream. Some of the early work on that is being led by Amazon and a small working group, and that is proving useful.

Alongside the work of the retail sector, the Department regularly considers a wide range of policies. My officials are working across Whitehall on policies that affect the retail sector. A number of Members have mentioned support for our high streets. Members may know that the high streets Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), has recently taken on a joint portfolio with my Department. As I am the retail sector Minister, we work closely on joined-up thinking on retail and high streets. We have the £1.6 billion action plan for high streets, which includes the £675 million future high streets fund. We are seeing 50 organisations move to the next stage in the development of the plans, which will enable local authorities and local populations to drive the development of their towns. We have the taskforce, which will work with local authorities across the country to deliver help for those that need to increase their retail space.

I will sit down now, because I recognise that the hon. Member for Blaydon may want to come in. I am happy to have another meeting with her on the other questions she asked.

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): With not much time, Liz Twist to wind up.

3.59 pm

Liz Twist: I thank all Members who have contributed to a lively and interesting debate on the retail sector. They have shown real enthusiasm for it.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Economic Growth and Environmental Limits

[STEWART HOSIE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I beg to move,

That this House has considered economic growth and environmental limits.

It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Hosie. I am grateful for the opportunity to debate economic growth and environmental limits. It is, of course, a huge subject, covering why and how our current economic model, which puts GDP growth above everything else, must change fundamentally, fast. I will focus on the environmental imperatives for that, especially the climate and biodiversity crises, and set out practical steps that I hope the Treasury will adopt.

It is crucial to note, however, before going into the environmental detail, that the Treasury's obsession with GDP growth is also undermining social and economic progress for the vast majority of UK citizens. GDP is an incredibly poor metric for measuring wellbeing or social cohesion. For example, people becoming unhealthy can actually have a positive effect overall on GDP, as revenue from associated healthcare boosts growth. Similarly, the extraction of oil and gas pushes GDP up, while pushing us closer to the precipice of climate breakdown.

I, of course, acknowledge that Government Departments have goals other than economic output. The Office for National Statistics in particular is doing some important work on wellbeing statistics as part of their "Beyond GDP" programme. There is also the ONS/Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs project that seeks to incorporate UK natural capital into the UK environmental accounts by 2020. All of that is welcome, but it is all at the margins. The ONS website is unequivocal about the priority. It says quite clearly:

"Gross domestic product (GDP) growth is the main indicator of economic performance."

GDP therefore still trumps everything, remaining the primary objective across Government, especially for the Treasury.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on introducing the debate, and on her hard work in this House on the environment and climate change. Although I certainly like to check on GDP and other financial aims, does she agree that the measure of success cannot be GDP alone? It must equally be based on the happiness and health of our constituents.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and kind words. As he says, the purpose of Government should surely be to promote happiness and health, yet we have a perverse obsession with GDP growth, which can often go up even when happiness and health are going down. That obsession must end if we are to secure a safe space for humanity, and if we are to live within environmental limits, or planetary boundaries, to use an alternative term.

I will not be surprised if the Minister takes issue with me on that, arguing that the UK has embraced so-called green growth, perhaps citing the clean growth strategy. Leaving aside the fact that there is nothing clean or

green about the Government's support for rampant airport expansion, road building or fossil fuel subsidies, the essential point is that even so-called green growth rests on the assumption that economic growth can be decoupled from environmental harm fully and fast enough. I will make the case this afternoon that that is a false assumption.

Just yesterday, a new report from the European Environmental Bureau exploded the myth of absolute decoupling. The study looked at a range of factors—materials, energy, water, greenhouse gases and so on—and found that there is no empirical evidence for an absolute, permanent, global, substantial or sufficiently rapid decoupling of economic growth from environmental pressures, either now or in the future. In other words, it is time to move from efficiency to sufficiency. As the report concludes,

"Although decoupling is useful and necessary, and has occurred at certain times and places, 'green growth' cannot reduce resource use on anywhere near the scale required to deal with global environmental breakdown and to keep global warming below the target of 1.5°C".

The transgression of environmental limits has dangerous consequences for all humanity. That was pushed into the spotlight by the UN global assessment of nature—the so-called Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. If ever there was a mouthful that was designed to make it hard to know what anyone was talking about, that is it; we should call it a report on nature.

Regardless, it found that 75% of all land and almost half of all marine and water ecosystems have been seriously altered by human activity. It found that 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction. That is a horrendous number—significantly greater than at any other time in human history—and poses a severe and direct threat to not only those species but human wellbeing in all regions of the world, especially those least responsible for the damage that is causing it.

The report identifies the growth of the global economy, and specifically the growth of material consumption in affluent nations, as one of the major driving forces behind those trends. It is unambiguous about the need to move away from endless consumption and GDP as a key measure of economic success, stating that we must steer "away from the current limited paradigm of economic growth" and

"shift beyond standard economic indicators such as gross domestic product".

I am keen to emphasise that, although Greens have long been leading the political debate on the environmental and social case for ditching GDP growth as a measure of progress, that argument is finally moving into the mainstream. Cross-party collaboration is incredibly important too, and I am delighted that 20 MPs have signed my early-day motion on the report from the intergovernmental panel. My early-day motion calls on the Government to

"urgently show global leadership in developing and advocating alternatives to GDP and in the transition to economies that, rather than being divisive and degenerative by default, are distributive and regenerative by design."

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech and making many good points. I agree that we need to move beyond GDP. Is she aware that work has already been done on

alternative methods of measurement? For instance, the University of Leeds, through the Sustainability Research Institute, has a consumption-based emissions model that would give us an alternative to GDP. We could calculate everything based on emissions, including at source, as well as those used in the UK or other developed countries. Should we not move to that sort of model, rather than a GDP-based model?

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. The work going on at the University of Leeds is incredibly exciting. It demonstrates that there is a lot of work going on, both in this country and internationally, into researching what alternative indicators might look like. I think what is lacking is a real commitment to move them into the mainstream. In the regular updates on the radio or in the *Financial Times*, when we hear about GDP growth and how we should be very happy that it has gone up, we could look at those indicators, which might well show that our wellbeing is being severely undermined by environmental damage.

Turning to the climate emergency, the primacy of GDP growth as the overarching priority for the economy is the elephant in the room. To quote Greta Thunberg,

“Our house is on fire”,

and the GDP growth obsession is the obstacle blocking the door to the emergency exit. In April, Greta visited Parliament and spoke about why she and millions of other young people were missing school to strike for the climate. She said very clearly that the way that we measure progress is absurd and archaic:

“People always tell me and the other millions of school strikers that we should be proud of ourselves for what we have accomplished. But the only thing that we need to look at is the emission curve. And I’m sorry, but it’s still rising. That curve is the only thing we should look at... We should no longer measure our wealth and success in the graph that shows economic growth, but in the curve that shows the emissions of greenhouse gases.”

That call to rewrite the economic rulebook is echoed by many others in the climate justice network, including many in the grassroots movements for a green new deal in the UK and the US, and a vastly growing number of academics and economists. The reaction to a tweet by the London Mayor, Sadiq Kahn, one week into the Extinction Rebellion protests was interesting; it illustrates that climate justice is inextricably linked to the transformation of the economic system. To be fair, I am sure he did it without thinking it through that much, but he tweeted:

“My message to all the climate change protestors today is clear: let London return to business as usual.”

That tweet went down so terribly because the new climate justice movement understands that business as usual is killing the planet and destroying our children’s future. The litmus test for adequate climate action is no longer what is considered politically feasible within the current system; it is whether we are transforming the economic system to fit with what is scientifically necessary to keep within 1.5° of global heating, and to reverse the unravelling of the Earth’s life support systems before our eyes.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): I have immense sympathy with what the hon. Lady is saying, and I agree. She talked about political feasibility. All the proposals and politics that she is suggesting are difficult to achieve in an environment of gross inequality. Would it not be easier if we addressed equality, to make all these things more acceptable?

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his wise intervention. Certainly, if we are not going to make the economy bigger by growing it and growing it—we simply cannot, within environmental limits—arguments about redistribution become absolutely central to the whole debate. Everything that I am saying is about social justice and environmental justice being inextricably linked. They must be, because we have to tackle them together. Although it is quite hard to find opportunities when the environmental data is so grim, there is an opportunity to get our social systems and inclusiveness right, and to get our inequality sorted, at the same time as taking serious steps towards making the way we organise our economy genuinely sustainable.

On climate, as on biodiversity, I believe strongly that we must look at the science. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s October report, entitled “Global Warming of 1.5 °C”, says that we need

“rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented change across all aspects of society”.

We have barely a decade to cut global emissions by half. As the co-chair of an IPCC working group put it,

“The next few years are probably the most important in our history.”

The Treasury is doing a very good impression of ignoring the urgency of taking action. The Government boast about emission cuts and about legislating for a net zero emission goal to be reached in three decades’ time. However, the Committee on Climate Change said in its new report, which was published this morning, that the next 18 months are make or break, especially as the UK

“is lagging far behind what is needed, even to meet previous, less stringent, emissions targets.”

The UK’s carbon reduction statistics ignore consumption-based emissions. Our exported emissions are one factor that explains why global emissions continue to rise, and why we are still heading for a devastating 3° of warming, even if countries deliver on their Paris pledges.

This is all to say that the pursuit of economic growth is devouring our efforts to decarbonise. I will quote the work of Jason Hickel, a leading environmental economist at Goldsmiths. He has explained the situation by examining the IPCC’s trajectories on reaching net zero by mid-century. The IPCC is telling us that we have until 2050 to get to net zero, but the global economy is set to nearly triple in size during the same period, which means three times more production and consumption. It is hard enough to decarbonise the current economy in such a short time span. The idea that we will be able to do it three times over is, frankly, for the birds. However heroic our assumptions about the potential for decoupling, there is no evidence that it can be completed quickly enough in the timeframe that we have.

There is some hope, because the IPCC report contains one lifeline scenario that does not rely on speculative and harmful negative emissions technologies to keep global heating under 1.5°. That scenario is our emergency exit from climate breakdown. So what does it look like? Fundamentally, it is about scaling down material consumption by 20% globally, with rich countries such as the UK leading the way. As yesterday’s European Environmental Bureau report concluded,

“Policy-makers have to acknowledge the fact that addressing” the climate and biodiversity crises

[Caroline Lucas]

“may require a direct downscaling of economic production and consumption in the wealthiest countries.”

I should add, “among the wealthiest people in the wealthiest countries,” because I take the point made by the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins); equality and justice needs to be at the heart of this process.

As I say, the ONS work on wellbeing indicators beyond GDP and on natural capital is important and welcome, but it is clearly not the priority. It is not a primary consideration in Treasury decision making. Nor is the wellbeing work integrated with environmental considerations. Will the Minister commit to ensuring the ONS has the resources and the direction required to integrate environmental limits into its “Beyond GDP” work, including, as a priority, consumption-based carbon emissions? While I am making requests of the Minister, can he tell us what has happened to the latest release of those “Beyond GDP” statistics? If they are quarterly, as the ONS website states, the latest were due a couple of months ago, back in May.

I turn to the positive case for ousting GDP as a measure of progress, and to some of the alternatives that we could adopt. There is an extensive and expanding evidence base to suggest that ousting GDP as a measure of progress is essential to achieve both environmental and social justice. Transitioning away from the growth dogma is not about hurting people’s welfare—quite the opposite. It is about placing wellbeing centre stage, reducing inequalities, cutting out waste and inefficiencies, and prioritising quality of life over quantity of things.

There is a chorus of experts—academics, economists and campaigners—proposing concrete, credible alternatives to get us out of the GDP gulag. Many of them are members of the global Wellbeing Economy Alliance. I will briefly give four examples. The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) will be very happy, because the first example I will give is from the University of Leeds, where researchers are exploring a

“good life for all within planetary boundaries.”

This shows that the UK and other wealthy nations are well past the tipping point at which

“using even more resources adds almost nothing to human well-being.”

The researchers explain that this means countries such as the UK could

“substantially reduce the amount of carbon emitted or materials consumed with no loss of well-being.”

A second example comes in the shape of a doughnut. In her book, “Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist”, Kat Raworth sets out to replace the dominant image of the economy as a closed, self-generating loop with a picture of the economy that shows energy flowing in from the sun, and waste and heat flowing out. Her doughnut image requires us to recognise that all economic activity is embedded in the Earth’s living systems and in society. Instead of maximising GDP, we need to change our goals to meet

“the human rights of every person within the means of our life-giving planet.”

Crucially, this model combines environmental limits with social factors such as housing, equity, political voice, education and income. The inner boundary of

the doughnut is the social floor, below which wellbeing suffers. The outer boundary is an ecological ceiling, beyond which we overshoot the Earth’s support systems. The doughnut’s fundamental point, which the Treasury seems to have not yet grasped, is that the current economic system is failing on both human wellbeing and environmental health grounds.

A third example is a call from 238 academics for the EU and member states to plan for a post-growth future, in which human and ecological wellbeing are prioritised over GDP. They say:

“Growth is...becoming harder to achieve due to declining productivity gains, market saturation and ecological degradation. If current trends continue, there may be no growth at all in Europe within a decade. Right now the response is to try to fuel growth by issuing more debt, shredding environmental regulations, extending working hours, and cutting social protections. This aggressive pursuit of growth at all costs divides society, creates economic instability, and undermines democracy.”

The academics end by offering some measured and moderate practical next steps, including constituting “a special commission on Post-Growth Futures”

in order to

“actively debate the future of growth, devise policy alternatives for post-growth futures, and reconsider the pursuit of growth as an overarching policy goal.”

I would love to see citizens’ assemblies play a major part in that.

Secondly, the academics suggest prioritising alternative indicators over GDP in all economic decision making. Thirdly, they propose establishing a Ministry for economic transition, to drive the shift to a new economy that focuses directly on human and ecological wellbeing, and away from one that is structurally dependent on economic growth.

The fourth and final example is New Zealand, where the Treasury has conducted the world’s first wellbeing budget. Finance Minister Grant Robinson explained that GDP growth was simply not translating into higher standards or better opportunities. Instead, the wellbeing budget looks at spending on the basis of a project’s contribution to the wellbeing of the population, as measured through four dimensions: human capital, social capital, natural capital, and financial and physical capital. The former Cabinet Secretary, Lord Gus O’Donnell, recently launched a report by the all-party parliamentary group on wellbeing economics that makes a similar case for wellbeing to replace growth as the main aim of UK spending in the forthcoming spending review. Those are just some examples.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): The hon. Lady is giving a fantastic speech. She has mentioned the views of four different people on the limits of using GDP, what it is, what good it does in our economy, and what good growth does. Some 51 years ago, Robert F. Kennedy—hardly an economic radical; he was a Democrat—gave a speech on the limits of GDP. I add that because he is someone that I and many people across the political divide can respect. He was well ahead of the curve on this issue.

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Gentleman is a very good friend and colleague, but he has just taken my final point; I was building up to that speech from Bobby Kennedy. I forgive him, because he is a good colleague and it was very good point.

I give a shout out to the all-party parliamentary group on economic wellbeing and the APPG on limits to growth, of which I am a co-chair, and which works closely with the Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity under the leadership of Professor Tim Jackson, who does good work in this area.

I want to leave time for the Minister to respond, so I will conclude. The climate and biodiversity crisis means that urgency is becoming emergency, in terms of getting economic transformation going. I will skip most of my lovely Bobby Kennedy quote, but his words ring as true today as they ever did, so I will keep the last bit. He said that GDP

“measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”

I have three requests of the Treasury to which I hope the Minister will respond. First, will he put rocket boosters behind the ONS “Beyond GDP” work, ensure that the environment is fully integrated alongside social factors, and commit to adopting those indicators and using them alongside or, even better, instead of GDP growth? I would even let him use them alongside GDP growth, as long as that were done regularly, so that we could see those indicators as a key measure of the nation’s progress.

Secondly, from this year on, will the Minister publish consumption-based carbon emissions, material throughput and wellbeing statistics alongside quarterly GDP figures? Thirdly, will he meet me and some of the leading economists, academics and practitioners working on this issue, to inform the forthcoming spending review?

As Kenneth Boulding said more than 50 years ago,

“Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist.”

Thankfully, we now have a new generation of environmentally literate economists, and it is time that we listened to what they have to say.

4.22 pm

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick): I thank the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for tabling this debate and other hon. Members who intervened or who came to listen to and support her. I am always partial to a good Robert Kennedy quote, so I am sorry to see that the hon. Lady’s thunder was stolen at the end of her speech, but I enjoyed it none the less.

As the hon. Lady eloquently set out, it is now more important than ever that the Government and institutions such as the Treasury, which is at the heart of this debate, confront head on the question of how we continue to grow the economy while protecting our environment and tackling climate change with all the vigour and urgency that she and others would like. I believe that the two can and will be done together, and can be mutually beneficial.

The UK is a world leader in this area, but I appreciate that many people—me included—would like us to go further. Between 1990 and 2016, the UK reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 42% while growing the economy by more than two thirds, demonstrating that environmental action need not come at the cost of economic prosperity.

The Government are determined to continue to build concern for the environment into our economic model. In a moment, I will explain some of the workstreams that we have already undertaken and where we could go further. We want to ensure that environmental policies are well considered and that the Treasury as an organisation is leading them, as I believe it is. The hon. Lady argued that it is time fundamentally to change economic models if we want to address the climate emergency. She questioned in particular whether GDP is a sensible measure of our economic wellbeing, so I will begin by addressing that.

GDP remains one of the most important economic indicators, but it is by no means the only one that is of concern to us or which is used by other major economies around the world. It is closely correlated with employment, incomes and tax receipts, which makes it perhaps the most useful indicator currently available to us. It is used by the Government, the Treasury, and the Bank of England to set economic policy and manage the public finances and, as the system of national accounts framework is set at UN level, GDP is easily comparable across countries and time periods, both historically and in the future. It is important that any changes in the economic modelling that we use are made internationally, and the UK needs to show leadership on that.

The Government recognise, however, that GDP undoubtedly has its limitations and should not be seen as an all-encompassing measure of welfare and wellbeing, and we entirely accept that it was never designed to be. Former Chancellor George Osborne commissioned Sir Charles Bean to undertake an independent review of economic statistics. The review acknowledged some of those limitations, such as the challenge of capturing activities where no market transaction takes place, the challenge posed to GDP and to some of our existing modelling by technology, transforming the way that we measure wellbeing and productivity and, as the hon. Lady mentioned, the fact that GDP estimates make no allowance for the depletion of natural resources,

The Government fully supported the recommendations of the Bean review, which we commissioned, and we have provided the ONS with an additional £25 million to help improve UK economic statistics and implement the Bean review. That was the “Beyond GDP” initiative that the hon. Lady mentioned, which aims to address the limitations of GDP by developing a broader measure of welfare and activity. In response to the hon. Lady’s question about the publication of statistics, the ONS is an independent organisation, so we do not control it in that respect, but I am happy to pass on her comments and ask the ONS to respond.

In the time left, I will briefly mention a number of other steps that the Government have taken. The Treasury’s Green Book, our guidance on the appraisal and evaluation of infrastructure and other investments, is essential to a number of decisions that are made by the Government. In 2018, we refreshed the Green Book to include additional environmental values, such as greenhouse gases, air quality and noise pollution. We also included a social cost-benefit analysis, which I hope is making a significant difference. It will be very important in the upcoming spending review. That work is well perceived internationally. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has now convened international Finance Ministers, and

[Robert Jenrick]

the area that the UK will likely lead on internationally is that of economic modelling and how we can do that better on a global scale.

Clive Lewis: The Minister spoke about the Green Book, which is still—despite the changes—essentially a neoclassical economic model based on equilibrium economics. Most scientists and economists on the fringes of economic thinking would tell us that we are moving into a disequilibrium position in our economic model. The two are completely incompatible and the Green Book is not fit for purpose as we enter a climate crisis in which many of its assumptions are no longer credible.

Robert Jenrick: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, but the theme behind his remarks is one of the reasons why we have amended the Green Book. We have created this concept of social value, so we now take into account negative externalities to the environment and to people's lifestyles as a result of greenhouse gas emissions, for example. I am happy to have a further conversation with him on that after the debate, as there is very little time left.

We are working closely with Dieter Helm's review and recommendations. I met him to discuss the issue of natural capital accounts, which we are taking seriously—it is a big endeavour. We are working with the ONS and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to bring that forward. I hope that we will be one of the first countries in the world to take the issue forward.

Following the report by the Committee on Climate Change, the Chancellor and I met Lord Deben and accepted his recommendation over the summer that the Treasury should do a major and urgent piece of work on how we can fund in a fair way the changes that we need to make as a society as a result of the Committee's recommendations. That work is under way. I am very happy to meet the hon. Lady to give her more detail on some of those initiatives, which are extremely important. We want to take them forward with gusto in the months ahead.

Question put and agreed to.

High Speed 2

4.30 pm

Stewart Hosie (in the Chair): Before I call the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) to move her motion, eight Members have notified me that they intend to speak, and I suspect many more may wish to intervene. We only have an hour. I do not want to limit the key points that anyone wishes to make, but if we can have a little brevity, it would be greatly appreciated.

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the business case for High Speed 2.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, in my first debate as a Back Bencher in more than five years. I am delighted to have this opportunity to discuss one of the biggest concerns for many of my constituents, and to outline why I believe that the business case for High Speed 2 must be urgently reviewed by the Government.

I first became aware of HS2 when it was proposed in 2009 by the then Labour Government. Investment in infrastructure, creating jobs and growth, improving travel times between our major cities, and closing the north-south divide were all put forward as reasons in favour of the UK's second high-speed train line. However, those supposed benefits unravelled one by one, and it quickly became apparent that HS2 is not the right infrastructure project, will not improve point-to-point travel times, and will not close the north-south divide. It will create jobs, yes, but at an eye-wateringly expensive rate, far beyond what we might expect from a similar project.

Those of us who expressed concerns about HS2 even while it was still in consultation were dismissed by others as nimbys and told that we were flat wrong about the wider benefits that HS2 would bring to the north. I was then and continue to be willing to be proved wrong, but with the delay to the notice to proceed, growing concerns about the project's spiralling costs, ongoing engineering and design difficulties and, even now, the rumours that the line past Birmingham might never be built, it is high time for the project to be thoroughly reviewed to ensure that it will actually deliver for taxpayers.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to hear the right hon. Lady speaking in a debate, rather than her listening to me asking for one. Does she recall the number of times that I have said in the Chamber of the House of Commons that HS2 will cost much more? Every time I said it, £10 billion more, and going past that. Now, it is accepted that it will cost £100 billion. Does she agree with that figure?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman has raised the issue a number of times, and it is true to say that many think the costs will overrun. I will come back to that.

For me, both as a concerned constituency MP and as someone with 25 years of experience in finance, including project finance, I am alarmed at just how much the business case for HS2 has changed since the project was initially proposed. The business case that HS2 relies on now bears little resemblance to what Parliament was

told at the start of the process—if I cast my mind back to when I first became an MP in 2010—nor to what we voted on when the enabling legislation was passed, which I voted against, or when the subsequent main legislation was enacted.

First, we were told that HS2 was about reducing journey times and improving the economy by bringing businesses and workers from the south to the north to spread economic prosperity around the country. Then we were told it was about capacity constraints on the west coast main line, and managing the continual growth in annual passenger numbers. Both arguments no longer stack up.

On improved journey times and associated productivity gains, the underlying assumption built into the business case for HS2 was that any time spent travelling for business purposes was wasted time, and that business travellers undertake no productive work while travelling. In the 21st century, technological advances such as mobile devices and improved wireless internet connections clearly mean that work and leisure activities are increasingly mobile, and increasingly affordable and accessible for rail passengers. Such advances are expected to continue.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I have great respect for the right hon. Lady, but she is fundamentally wrong on this issue, although she is right to criticise the way in which the Department for Transport uses travel times. In the assessment of all transport infrastructure, the Department fails to take into account the economic investment that always follows investment in transport. The case is the opposite of what she is saying: it underestimates the benefits from HS2.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me: the business case needs to be reassessed with accurate underlying factors taken into account. It is the case that the more productivity on trains increases, in particular as faster fifth generation—5G—mobile internet is rolled out across the country, the less valuable the journey time savings are, and therefore the smaller the estimated benefits of HS2 become on those measures.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): My right hon. Friend is talking about journey times, and I completely agree with her that this is not about journey times. She also mentioned capacity, and it is about that, but it is also about one more thing—connectivity. We have not had a new railway line north of London for 150 years. Surely now is the time to improve our infrastructure and to make our trains and lives fit for the 21st century.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—we certainly need to invest in our rail infrastructure—but my question is whether HS2 is the right piece of infrastructure.

The argument for the business case around journey times and productivity quickly collapsed, and HS2 Ltd turned to arguing for capacity instead. That capacity argument has been questioned almost since it was first made, and most recently by the Lords Economic Affairs Committee in its report of May this year, “Rethinking High Speed 2”.

The original business case for HS2 was put forward at a time of strong and continued growth in passenger numbers in the preceding years, and the expectation

was always that this growth would continue unabated. That is not the case. I made that point in 2011, when I led an HS2 debate on the Floor of the House. As I said then, HS2’s forecasts were “heroic” when compared with Network Rail’s numbers over the same period. According to the Commons Library, across the entire rail network, annual passenger growth peaked in 2011 at about 8%, and growth has been on a downward trend since then. Passenger growth between London and the west midlands has now fallen to 2% growth per annum, against a decadal average of 6%.

It is true to say that the west coast main line is the busiest mixed-use rail corridor in Europe, with 15 fast trains coming into Euston in most peak hours of the week and little to no availability in that period for additional train paths. However, capacity on the trains themselves is a different matter. As anyone who travels at rush hour between Euston and Milton Keynes—as I do frequently—will know that there is always high capacity pressure on any of the trains during that peak period: about 95% of all available seats on morning peak arrivals into Euston are occupied, with many trains cramped and uncomfortable. Again according to the House of Commons Library, across the entire day only about 60% of all available seats into Euston are in use. For the other major cities on the line of route—Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield—across the entire day, all of those stations operate at less than half their passenger capacity in terms of seat availability.

Mr Sheerman: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Andrea Leadsom: Very briefly.

Mr Sheerman: As the right hon. Lady knows, I am a very experienced traveller between Wakefield and London, and know the routes well. May I ask her to pay attention to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer), from Manchester, because he is wrong? All the research in France and other places shows that having super-speed or high-speed trains sucks power away from the regions. What has happened in France? More power to Paris, and less to the provincial cities.

Andrea Leadsom: I fear that I am very much aware of what the hon. Gentleman says, and I agree with him.

Clearly, therefore, much of the capacity constraint on the west coast main line is spatially and temporally specific, being focused on the peak rush hours, and only in Euston and Birmingham. The biggest issue is crowding on individual trains at those times, rather than crowding throughout the day.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Does the right hon. Lady agree that HS2 will free up the main line so that freight will be able to operate more freely, which will help with congestion on our roads and be far more beneficial to the environment?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is right that building a train line frees up capacity for freight lines and all sorts of other things; the question is the business case for this particular project. The question must be asked: is it worth spending £55.7 billion of public money, as

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

allocated by the Department for Transport, to alleviate crowding issues in the morning and evening peaks? The main alternative considered by the Government, known as the strategic alternative, could have achieved the same result at a much lower cost, through a combination of infrastructure and rolling stock upgrades, at a cost of around £4.9 billion in 2011 prices. Additional capacity and more fast-line services could be delivered via Euston to relieve the specific pressure points during the peak-hour rushes, rather than building a whole new line that would create unneeded capacity throughout the day.

The Lords Economic Affairs Committee report concluded that the Government have

“yet to make a convincing case for proceeding with the project” and it has

“not seen convincing evidence that the nature of the capacity problem warrants building HS2.”

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind): On the point about finance, is the right hon. Lady aware that HS2 has entered into an astonishing 270 or more non-disclosure agreements with third parties? Does she agree that the Government should make public the number of non-disclosure agreements, settled agreements, compromise agreements and any other arrangements that include non-disclosure provisions with former staff members?

Does the right hon. Lady share my concern that funding from an unauthorised redundancy payment scheme operated by HS2 was used to fund some or all settlement or compromise agreements with former senior staff? In some cases, those staff were regarded as having made serious protected disclosures about their concerns over HS2's financial statements. Transparency is essential in the funding of this project. Does the right hon. Lady agree?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman mentioned that to me yesterday, and I am gravely concerned. As all right hon. and hon. Members will know, I am extremely unhappy at the prospect of non-disclosure agreements preventing whistleblowers from coming forward with information that is vital to the public interest or their own personal interest. People should not be gagged under any circumstances.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this debate on a topic we have discussed many times. I voted against HS2 at every opportunity in the House of Commons. In 2013, I predicted that it would cost in excess of £100 billion. The then Secretary of State laughed, and I think he was quite right to—it is clear that the project will be far in excess of £100 billion.

Does my right hon. Friend recall the report by Sir John Armitt in August 2018? His committee stated that, given that hubs are no longer in the centre of cities but on the outskirts, an extra £43 billion of infrastructure spending would be required to make use of the current hub sites that have been chosen. That has not been programmed into the budget at all.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the lack of point-to-point movement in HS2. Passengers do not end up at the Bullring in Birmingham, or in the west end of London; they just end up somewhere on the outskirts wondering how on earth they will get to where they want to.

The business case for HS2 is seemingly not based on improved journey or improving capacity on journeys between the cities along the line of route. That was alarmingly confirmed by the chief executive of HS2 Ltd, Mark Thurston, in November last year, when he appeared before the all-party parliamentary rail group. At that meeting, Mr Thurston remarked that to remain on time and on budget, HS2 Ltd was considering fundamental changes to the project, including, but not limited to, reductions in the speed that HS2 trains will operate at and reductions in the total number of trains per hour.

With fewer and slower trains, it is hard to understand how the business case can be maintained, given the growing lack of incentive for passengers to choose to take a more expensive HS2 train over a classic service. I have asked HS2 Ltd to confirm whether it is modelling the impact of such changes, but so far I have been unable to obtain a definitive response.

As the former chairman of HS2 Ltd, Sir Terry Morgan, said when he appeared before the Economic Affairs Committee on the 22 January, nobody, not even he as a former chairman of the project, can say with any certainty what the final cost of HS2 will be. That cost has gone up and up over the years. In February 2011, we were told that HS2 would cost £37.5 billion. By January 2012, that figure had crept up to £40.8 billion. In June 2013, we were told the total cost had risen to £50.1 billion. Today, based on the funding envelope set out in November 2015—not an estimate of the cost but rather the money available from DFT for the project—we are told that HS2 will cost the British taxpayer £55.7 billion. That is £55.7 billion for a single train line.

We have not actually seen a comprehensive breakdown of the costs for the full Y network of HS2 since 2013, although the National Audit Office has more recently said that, at the time of the 2015 spending review, the full cost should have been estimated at £65 billion. HS2's land and property budget alone is expected to be five times greater than originally forecast, but that is of no help whatsoever to my constituents. I have had cases in South Northamptonshire where family farms have been cut in half, people have been forced to sell their businesses at a vastly undervalued rate and one constituent has been forced out of the family home that she had lived in for many years through a lifetime tenancy under the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986. There are countless examples where I have had to intervene time and again on behalf of my constituents, due to the insensitive behaviour and slow engagement of HS2.

Maggie Throup: I, too, have had some very sad cases, where HS2 Ltd is not doing itself any favours. Considering the overall spend, the quibbling is over very small amounts. If it got that bit right, it might get more people on its side to make sure it delivered the project, which my constituents welcome, as long as they are looked after. If part of the line is cancelled, those properties will be blighted for ever.

Andrea Leadsom: I certainly agree that HS2 needs to do much more to protect those who have been affected through no fault of their own. There has been real hardship. There are countless examples in my constituency and I am aware of many in other constituencies.

As hon. Members have set out, concerns have been raised by industry experts and former whistleblowers from the company that the total cost for HS2 may very well be in excess of £100 billion. In contrast, DfT has separately announced investment of £48 billion in our railways over a five-year period through to 2024, comprising major infrastructure upgrades across the country and newer, faster, more comfortable trains to improve the passenger experience. I totally applaud the DfT for that decision—it is the right sort of investment and will improve our railways in all parts of our United Kingdom, sharing the benefits among all rail users.

We should consider HS2 in the context of alternative uses for the money for infrastructure investment. I was delighted when my hon. Friends the Members for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey) advised me they would contribute to today's debate. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) for all the excellent work she continues to do to raise concerns about this project.

I am a passionate advocate for better infrastructure. There is no doubt that properly targeted infrastructure investment can massively improve productivity and enable growth and economic opportunity equally for all parts of our United Kingdom, including in the north and the regions, but getting the best bang for our buck has to be at the heart of all that we do. With the benefit-cost ratio for HS2 declining to 1.4 in October 2013 and remaining unchanged in the intervening period, it is vital that we make sure that we are investing in the right infrastructure projects. The Government's own guidance on value-for-money assessments has said that a benefit-cost ratio of 1.4 for phase one would represent a low value-for-money project.

What can we do? My hon. Friend the Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen) has spearheaded a whole host of alternative transport project proposals with the TaxPayers Alliance—he will expand on that later. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) is here to set out his own ideas about better value-for-money projects. We have to think creatively about our transport infrastructure and be brave enough to scrutinise the value for money of any project if we think it might not deliver the benefit it promises. We have to hold HS2 Ltd to account to ensure that it is open and transparent in all that it does.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister in her response to commit to a full review of the business case for HS2, before the notice to proceed is granted later this year, and to make a clear and open statement on the Floor of the House on whether this project truly does represent good value for taxpayers' money.

4.50 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I congratulate the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) on securing this important debate, and on her excellent speech, with which I strongly agree.

I state categorically that I believe passionately in our railways; I have been a daily commuter for 50 years and I have always believed in their future. I continue to

support strong investment in our railways, but not in HS2. The alleged business case for HS2 has two essential components: cost and need. The costs have been ballooning, dwarfing the claims of £50 billion by multiples. Even the rumoured likely costs now are way below what an eventual bill would be. With more time, I could give some explanations as to why, but I wish to focus on the supposed need and the likely passenger demand for HS2.

The business case is based on a frequency of 18 trains an hour leaving and reaching London. HS2 has grudgingly agreed that a figure of perhaps 16 trains an hour in off-peak periods might be appropriate. The trains would be some 400 metres long, probably with 16 carriages; they would be rather similar to Eurostar trains, which are 20 cars long, and capable of seating 80 passengers per carriage. That is well over 1,000 passenger seats on each train. With 18 trains an hour over the day, that would mean in excess of 200,000 passenger seats going to and from London. That is a significant proportion of the total population of Birmingham; it is complete nonsense. In any case, 18 trains an hour is just not possible. At a meeting of the Select Committee on Transport in 2011, SNCF witnesses from France with some knowledge of high-speed TGVs were astonished at the 18 trains an hour figure, saying it was impossible, and that 12 trains an hour was the absolute maximum.

HS2 has been in a mess and a panic for some time about costs. It asked if it would be possible to terminate trains at Old Oak Common and avoid the horrendously expensive costs of tunnelling through to Euston. The idea would be to transfer passengers to Crossrail at Old Oak Common. That would be impractical because of the vast numbers involved. Up to 20,000 extra passengers on Crossrail every hour is not a serious proposition. All this is just not credible. If HS2 goes ahead, we will surely see expensive trains on a very expensive track rattling around the country with very few passengers on them.

I want to end on a positive note. There are some serious and much-needed alternatives to HS2, and I have written a paper setting out some of them. I submitted my paper, prepared with the advice of a range of friends in the railway industry, to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee for its inquiry into HS2. I also submitted it to the recent Great British transport competition, supported by the TaxPayers Alliance, and was pleased that one of my proposals was selected as one of the winning schemes.

Most significantly, there is the GB freight route, with which I am involved and to which the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire referred. This would be a freight priority line from the channel tunnel to Glasgow, built to a large-loading gauge and almost entirely on railway land, capable of accommodating full-sized lorry trailers on the trains. It would take some millions of lorry journeys off our roads every year, with immense benefits. It would link all the majority economic regions of Britain to each other, and to the continent of Europe, and Asia beyond.

There are several serious rail schemes that should be adopted and, if HS2 does not go ahead, all the schemes paused and abandoned by Government in recent times could simply be readopted. Electrifying the whole rail network, with massive improvements to railways in the north in particular, where rail has been disgracefully neglected, could and should go ahead. These schemes

[*Kelvin Hopkins*]

could provide many thousands of jobs very quickly, with track work ready to go. This would be money well spent in every sense.

We should reflect on the sensible Eddington report, which recommended rail investment in and around our major cities and conurbations, where real passenger need is most concentrated.

Mr Sheerman: Does the hon. Gentleman not realise—I think he does—that those of us in the north of England just want reliable and reasonably speedy connections between the towns of the north, and would love this sort of investment, sooner rather than later?

Kelvin Hopkins: I agree with the hon. Gentleman; absolutely. Even within the northern region there are some dreadful train services. There are old charabancs on rail tracks that are a disgrace and should have been replaced, and the lines have not been electrified. They should have been.

Laura Smith: It is key to note that for Northern Powerhouse Rail to happen, we have to have the HS2 infrastructure in place.

Kelvin Hopkins: I think I have made my point. I am running out of time, Mr Hosie. I could go into much more detail, but on this occasion perhaps I should conclude here. I think the case against HS2 is overwhelming. I look forward to a sensible Government abandoning it and reinvesting in all the other schemes that are so much more beneficial and needed.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Stewart Hosie (in the Chair): Order. I intend to start the summings-up at around 10 past, so the time for each speaker is obvious, if all three want to speak.

4.55 pm

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins). I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) for securing this important debate.

The HS2 business case is clearly deeply flawed, as my right hon. Friend pointed out. When I was first elected, I was in two minds about HS2. I could see the damage it was doing to my constituency, but I thought it might be a worthwhile project for the country, if its administrators were savvy enough to resolve some local issues. Four years on, my view has shifted. The continuing and unceasing lack of care, interest or attention that HS2 pays to my constituents and my community have destroyed any faith that it can deliver the benefits that it promised.

Each individual failure is compounded to create an image of an organisation riven by incompetence and unable to deliver the project. For example, take-up of the need-to-sell scheme for phase 2b continues to be extremely low. The number of new applications has not exceeded double figures in the last nine months. Of applications placed before the panel, only a third have been accepted, whereas half the need-to-sell applications made in phases 1 and 2a were. The process remains

time-consuming, and involves frequent requests for additional information and documentation. In spite of revisions, the guidance is still insufficiently detailed to enable applicants to understand fully what information and evidence is required for a successful application.

Further confusion has arisen in respect of the atypical or special circumstances route, which is intended to supplement the discretionary property schemes and provide a safety net where the specific requirements of existing schemes cannot be met. Departmental officials taking part in local public engagement events have been advising applicants that they should be applying under the atypical special circumstances scheme because of their particular situation, but applicants are then informed by HS2 that it is not available to them, as they are eligible to apply under one of the discretionary schemes.

Applicants understandably expect the advice that they are given by officials during public engagement events to be accurate and correct. The fact that that does not appear to be the case causes further unnecessary anxiety and frustration for applicants, as well as reinforcing the sense of distrust in HS2. It gives the impression that the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing.

Andrew Bridgen: Does my hon. Friend agree that HS2 appeared to be trying to create the perception that the project was beyond the point of no return—that we cannot stop it because so much money has been spent? Does she also agree that in business, the first loss is the best loss, and we are throwing good money after bad on this project?

Antoinette Sandbach: I certainly do. I remember stating the figure of £100 billion on television, only to be told that it was ridiculous. Now it looks like a certainty, rather than the ridiculous proposal that others claimed it was.

Issues continue even once applications under the property scheme are accepted. My constituents repeatedly tell me about the unco-operative and, at times, obstructive approach of surveyors acting on behalf of HS2. The surveyors' repeated failures to acknowledge email correspondence, lengthy delays in responding to correspondence—even after numerous chase-ups and the involvement of members of HS2's property team—and delays in arranging meetings are not only unacceptable but undermine my faith that HS2 can be delivered on its already inflated budget.

There is considerable concern, particularly for applications under the statutory blight scheme, that property valuations are based on the opinion of a single Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors surveyor, who is not local and is paid for by HS2, fostering a sense that the valuer is not impartial; in contrast, the need-to-sell scheme has an average of three property valuations. There have been repeated concerns that properties are being undervalued. HS2's surveyors cite the additional compensation provided under the scheme, the suggestion being that the undervaluation is offset by the additional compensation, rather than there being recognition that the compensation is for the upheaval caused by moving property, and is not related to the value.

I know that the Minister has tried to mitigate some of these issues in the past, but time goes on and nothing changes, despite the Minister's efforts; ministerial orders are ignored and overruled by HS2, which has come out with legions of excuses. If it cannot deliver for my

constituents, how can it deliver for the country? My faith in this scheme is fundamentally undermined, as is my faith in the business case.

5.1 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I congratulate the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) on securing the debate and on giving the House a chance to confront a couple of important choices. She is right to say that nettles need to be grasped and bullets bitten, but I think she has chosen the wrong nettles and bullets, and I will explain why in the next few minutes.

As is traditional now, the argument against HS2 is couched in terms of value for money. In any value-for-money calculation, the money is easy to calculate, but the value is much harder to put your finger on. There were arguments in a previous debate about the Treasury Green Book, which is not a wide-ranging analysis. If we measure what we treasure, we will clearly see that HS2 is one of the best value-for-money projects that this country has contemplated for many years.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Liam Byrne: I will in a moment.

Coming from Birmingham, what I treasure above all is jobs. We have had the slowest jobs recovery since the financial crisis of any city region, and HS2 will bring lots and lots of jobs, not at some distant point in the future but over the next five years. It will bring something like 33,000 jobs around Curzon Street and 77,000 jobs around Birmingham Interchange, in addition to the 30,000 jobs that will be created on the line at peak. This is the most important fiscal stimulus outside London and the south-east. Indeed, if we were to cancel HS2, I would bet my bottom dollar that we would put the midlands back into recession within a year.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman, with his local knowledge, describe what is happening around Curzon Street now, and what has happened around Curzon Street for the last 20 years?

Liam Byrne: The former Secretary of State is right to make that point, because a number of significant businesses are now relocating to what is the worst unemployment hotspot in the country; the worst unemployment and youth unemployment in the country is in and around east Birmingham. We have a chance ahead of us to wipe out that youth unemployment, but only if we grasp the nettle and drive through HS2.

Graham Stringer: My right hon. Friend makes a brilliant case. If anything, he underestimates the result. When the Transport Committee went to France to look at the impact of the TGV, it found that the go-ahead cities that used the high-speed lines got huge extra investment that had not been calculated in the original assessment. Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds are all go-ahead cities, so I expect more jobs than my right hon. Friend says.

Liam Byrne: Precisely. If we measure what we treasure, and if we treasure jobs, HS2 is, frankly, a project that we need.

However, that is not all I treasure; I also treasure tangible action to decarbonise our economy and our region. I want the west midlands to lead the first zero carbon revolution. Back in 1712, when the Newcomen engine was demonstrated up at Dudley castle, we sparked the carbon revolution the first time around. We need a radical plan that allows us to move trucks off the road and on to rail. Only with the capacity that comes with HS2 can we reopen 36 new freight lines that can take a million lorries off the road each year. We cannot de-clog the M6, the M5 or the M42 unless we get that freight off the road. It is impossible to see how we can drive forward the decarbonisation of a sector that contributes 40% of our carbon emissions each year if we do not drive ahead with HS2.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I share the right hon. Gentleman's aspirations, but for Scotland. To meet the UK-wide net zero carbon targets we have set for 2050, we need to make sure that these new rail lines work for the entire country. Does he agree that we need to review HS2, not only on its business case, but on making sure that it works for the entire United Kingdom and connects the powerhouses in the midlands with the true northern powerhouse, which is of course Scotland?

Liam Byrne: I am all for that, so long as it does not introduce a moment of delay in driving this forward. Frankly, our economy cannot have any further delay.

I treasure a project that puts the west midlands at the centre of this economy. I particularly treasure the speed, which will result in a journey time of something like 65 minutes from Birmingham International to Canary Wharf, the most important business site in the country, via the connection at Old Oak Common.

The right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire advanced the traditional bang-for-buck argument, which is that if we got rid of HS2, there would be plenty of bucks left for other kinds of projects. I have to say that that is not fiscal realpolitik at all. The fiscal realpolitik will mean that money currently earmarked for HS2 will be quickly absorbed into other projects, and Opposition Members will be forgiven for worrying that it will disappear into the £10 billion-a-year tax cut proposed by the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson).

The right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire was right to demand choices, but the choices that she proposes are wrong. The real strategic transport choice that this country must confront is not between HS2 and other rail network lines, but between planes and trains. We should drive ahead with HS2 and cancel the ludicrous decision to build a third runway at Heathrow airport for £14 billion. We could use half that money to build a high-speed loop and take passengers from Heathrow to Birmingham, where there is already untapped capacity for 17 million passenger movements a year.

Around the world, a trillion-dollar high-speed rail revolution is under way, and we are being left behind. It is time that this country got on with it.

Stewart Hosie (in the Chair): I call Victoria Prentis. Please be brief. Then I will call the Front-Bench spokespeople.

5.7 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): With that in mind, Mr Hosie, I endorse wholeheartedly everything said by the first three speakers, and particularly my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), who truly eviscerated the business case for HS2. I politely disagree with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne). I do not feel that £100 billion is worth some jobs in Birmingham; there may be ways to assist with employment in Birmingham other than by spending £100 billion of taxpayers' money. *[Interruption.]* I do not have time to go through all his arguments in detail, but I look forward to talking to him firmly about it later.

I will make two brief points. The first is romantic, which I make no apology for. We love our area. It is fair to say that some objections to HS2 are a form of—

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: Nimbyism.

Victoria Prentis: Nimbyism, as the former Secretary of State says.

Craig Tracey: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Victoria Prentis: No, I will carry on, if I may; I have no time.

I reject the nimbyism argument. We are building far more houses in my constituency than in the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill's, finishing three a day at the moment. We embraced the Oxford-Birmingham canal in the 1790s, we embraced the M40 30 years ago and we broadly welcome east-west rail in our area. We are not against large national infrastructure projects, but we object to large national infrastructure projects with no real benefit, for us or for the nation as a whole. We feel that strongly.

As a former civil servant, the rational argument, as opposed to the romantic one, is that the process to set up HS2 causes me real pain and worry. Frankly, the Committee corridor deals done at the time of the Select Committee stink. They set neighbour against neighbour on purpose, and it was not a pleasant experience to watch. There has been a continual lack of engagement and transparency from HS2. I have a list of questions to which I have repeatedly demanded answers, and it shows no sign of taking me seriously or engaging with me. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) had a very interesting wake-up call when she made a freedom of information request to find out what it felt about her personally. I have not yet grown a thick enough skin to make a freedom of information request about my name and HS2, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire has not, either.

It is disgusting that taxpayers' money is being spent on an organisation that behaves this badly. In short, HS2 is a white elephant that is trampling over the dreams and aspirations of my constituents and I cannot support it.

5.10 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I will be very brief—unlike HS2, I plan to run to a timetable. The project could, should and would have worked had it been run properly. Instead, we have burned through £10 billion of taxpayers' money, including some £600 million for

consultants—£600 million for consultants, but not one mile of track laid. If the UK Government want to see how to run an infrastructure project, they should look no further than the SNP Government and our investment of more than £8 billion in Scotland's railways, including the border railway, the longest new domestic railway to be built in Britain in more than 100 years, on time and on budget. Thank you and goodnight.

5.11 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What can I say after that contribution, other than that it is a pleasure to serve under you in the Chair, Mr Hosie? I also thank the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) for bringing forward today's debate in a very candid way.

It is absolutely right that this House scrutinises HS2. I have listened carefully to the debate, and it is absolutely clear that the objection is rooted not so much in the actual scheme as in the governance of it, and I, too, have put question marks over the governance and management of it. Some of that sits fairly and squarely with the Secretary of State and the fact that he is not doing his job of calling HS2 to account. Therefore, it will be absolutely right that, on Monday, hon. Members from across the House support my amendment calling for greater scrutiny of the project. I very much hope that they will join me in the Lobby.

I take issue with the fact that a number of non-disclosure agreements have been issued. We want there to be real transparency. That is about calling management to account for the way they are handling the employment situation in their organisation. It is absolutely right that those questions are asked of HS2 and that it is brought to account for that.

I want now to set out Labour's position on the whole project. Connectivity and reliability must be at the heart of our railway system. There have been problems, and we need to make improvements. We are determined to do that through our enhancement programme. HS2 should not be segregated; it needs to be integrated into our rail enhancement work, and that is certainly what we want to do. We want to see more capacity built across our railways.

Our driving force is, first and foremost, to decarbonise our transport system. Currently, 29% of emissions come from our transport system, and we are in fact seeing regression on carbon reduction, not least with the deeply ecologically and environmentally damaging road building programme—road investment strategy 2—that the Government propose. We want to see good public transport investment, and certainly that is what people will get under a Labour Government.

We want to drive modal shift. It is so important to have people moving from their cars on to our rail network—we see that as comprising the main arteries of our transport system. But crucially, as my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) said, we need lorries coming off the roads and freight moving on to rail. HS2 provides an opportunity to ensure that we have the good connectivity—

Kelvin Hopkins: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Rachael Maskell: I am afraid I do not have time.

There is an opportunity to have good connectivity between ports and airports and to ensure that we can bring that right through to urban consolidation centres and then to the final mile. We need to seriously decarbonise our transport system using rail.

We want skills to be at the heart of this opportunity as we build the rail network for the future, and that brings me to one of the questions I have for the Minister today. In the light of Hinkley point being behind schedule and of the number of infrastructure projects the Government have planned, we have a bell curve whereby we have a peak in demand for skills but not the skills to match that. How will she ensure that there are sufficient skills for this project, particularly given that, at its peak, it will provide jobs for 30,000 people? We need to ensure that the project is not delayed because of poor infrastructure planning across the economy.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), who made a most excellent speech, about ensuring that we measure what we treasure. This is about jobs. Certainly on the Labour Benches, we believe that it is important that we invest in high-quality jobs for those areas of the country that have been missed out to date. Therefore, inward investment in the northern towns and cities, and in the midlands—east and west—will be vital to rebirthing our economy in those areas. At the moment, they are in a lot of pain because we have not seen that investment.

We have a real opportunity, but it has to be managed properly. Building capacity across our transport system is really important. We need sustained freight paths. Part of this will also be about seeing growth in patronage and ensuring that we reduce journey times. We need to lead that right into Scotland to ensure that we can see that modal shift from plane on to train. That is the larger vision of where we are going. But we would also do things differently; we make no bones about that. For instance, with parkway stations, it does not make sense that people have to drive to get the connectivity with the rail network. We would very much want to seek urban connection points; we believe that the situation needs to be reviewed.

The final phase of the project—the 2b stage—has to be fully integrated with trans-Pennine connectivity. This should be one project, not two segregated projects; it needs integrating. We hear that call from Transport for the North, and we hear it now from HS2, and we certainly hear the call from politicians across the north that it is time we brought those projects together into one. There are proposals for constructing things differently from the current Y shape and for making this much more about ensuring, first and foremost, that we get the connectivity across the north. The case was made very clearly in the House of Lords through the paper “Rethinking High Speed 2”, and we would certainly support that.

With regard to the way we proceed on this project, we believe that the missing piece, which is crucial, is that the project is not peer-reviewed. It must be peer-reviewed independently to ensure, first, that the engineering is right and, secondly, that the value is right. That is where the lack of accountability sits. Once we have that information before the House, we can make a sound judgment on whether the project will deliver the value, the jobs and the opportunity for conurbations across this country. Until that occurs, we will put a serious question mark over the governance and over this Government's

handling of the project. We believe that it could be in a different place. Certainly on the issue of cost—the cost financially, but also the cost to the environment—we need to ensure that all these measures are properly brought into check as we move forward in improving scrutiny.

On Monday, we have an opportunity to review phase 2a in relation to the Bill. Labour will bring forward amendments on Report, and we very much hope that people who believe there should be greater scrutiny, governance and accountability of HS2 will join us in the Lobby to ensure that we put in place the right checks and balances for this project, to drive up the very treasure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill mentioned.

5.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) on securing this important debate. I am honoured to be responding to her first Back-Bench debate—I was hoping that it would be on far more compatible terms, but we will have to agree to disagree on a number of the issues under discussion.

The debate provides an opportunity to reinforce the importance of HS2 not only for its capacity or for shortening rail journeys, but for fundamentally boosting the economy and smashing the north-south divide. My right hon. Friend has been a strong advocate for her constituency regarding the impact of the line there. She has quietly and diligently worked behind the scenes to communicate her concerns to the Department for Transport. I value the opportunity to put this on the record for her constituents to see.

Craig Tracey: When the argument changed from speed to capacity, does the Minister agree that there were more options, which could have been considered, to deliver that more quickly and cheaply, and provide greater benefit to our constituents? We are trying to predict rail usage in the distant future, but we have seen huge technological advances since the project was announced in 2009.

Ms Ghani: The business case has not moved from speed to capacity. People hooked on to the speed aspect in the early days, because it was seen as a shiny new train, but capacity, job creation, skilling up and smashing the north-south divide were always important aspects. If hon. Members fixated on one point and now realise there are many more, that is for them to come to terms with.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: The Minister is right. Those people who say that the case has changed from speed to capacity should read the original document put out by the Labour Secretary of State for Transport at the time, which spoke more about capacity than speed.

Ms Ghani: My right hon. Friend is a huge source of knowledge on this issue, as he is a former Secretary of State for Transport. He is right that all of those arguments have always been there. Unfortunately, people fixated on one or two points and now they are rather surprised that a large infrastructure project, which moves people from A to B, has many other positive impacts.

Luke Graham: One of my constituents, who was recognised as a whistleblower on HS2 and was featured on the “Panorama” programme, cited several problems with the assumptions used in the original business case. What are the Government doing to address those issues? They were raised and it went to the Public Accounts Committee. There are a number of follow-up questions still to be answered.

Ms Ghani: We are given a tight deadline to respond to any Select Committee. We respond as much as we can to the deadlines provided. I will go on to address the business case.

Mr Ivan Lewis: Will the Minister make public the number of non-disclosure agreements, settled agreements, compromise agreements or any other arrangements, which include non-disclosure provisions with former staff members? Can she confirm that funding from an unauthorised redundancy payment scheme operated by HS2 was used to fund some or all settlement or compromise agreements with former senior staff, and that in some cases those staff were regarded as having made serious protected disclosures as to their concerns—this is the same point made by the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham)—over HS2’s financial statements? If she cannot answer today, will she write to me with detailed answers before the summer recess?

Ms Ghani: I know that NDAs are a particularly sore point for the Labour party right now, but we regularly engage with local authorities, sharing work at the early design stage with them, which is why they use NDAs, especially during the planning phase. They are used to protect commercially sensitive and personal information. I will take the point about using taxpayers’ money on the chin. We need to ensure that we are always using taxpayers’ money properly and transparently. We always hold HS2’s feet to the fire on all of those issues. I am happy to put all of this in writing, and to answer in writing any further questions that the hon. Gentleman has.

Victoria Prentis: I do not want the Minister to be in any doubt that worries about NDAs come from only one side of the House. On the Conservative Benches, we are equally concerned about the governance of HS2. NDAs are a real concern to us in getting to the bottom of what is going on.

Ms Ghani: As I mentioned, NDAs are used to deal with commercially sensitive or personal information. This is a large project involving a large chain of people and companies. We will put into the public domain any information that we can. We will respond to all queries from Members of Parliament within the allotted time.

Arguments have been made for and against HS2. I want to explain why this Government are committed to HS2. Every time the House has voted on this project, the Government have always won with a stomping majority. Our current infrastructure is 150 years old. It is an overstretched Victorian network. Passenger numbers have doubled in the past 20 years, and on key routes in the west coast inter-city corridor they are set to triple.

We have an overused and overcrowded railway, which is also one of the oldest. With HS2 in place, we can deal with the pressures on express trains, freight trains and

slower local commuter services, which are already operating at peak capacity. That is just one of the reasons why HS2 is crucial: to solve our chronic capacity problems. I was intrigued by the argument that there will not be as many passengers using our railway network in the future. I hope this Government will not make the argument for people to stand still, but will encourage people to go out for social and work reasons.

HS2 is a new dedicated railway for fast inter-city express services, no longer encumbered by the inevitable inefficiencies associated with mixed-use lines, which will also free up huge capacity on the existing railway for more local trains, including for services to places such as Milton Keynes. In fact, 70% of the jobs created across our economy will be outside London, bringing prosperity to the north and the midlands, just as the first railways did, and not only to the cities on the high-speed line. HS2 trains will call at over 25 stations across the UK, from London to Scotland. It has already created 9,000 jobs and 200 apprenticeships. We expect that to rise to 30,000 jobs at peak construction, including over 2,000 new apprentices, many of whom will be trained at the national colleges in Doncaster and Birmingham.

Ronnie Cowan: In 2009, the Labour Secretary of State for Transport, Geoffrey Hoon, said that

“a new company, High Speed 2, has been formed to develop the case for high-speed services between London and Scotland.”—[*Official Report*, 10 March 2009; Vol. 489, c. 144.]

Will this Conservative Government reinstate that aspiration?

Ms Ghani: Indeed, because the full stretch of HS2 will go up to Scotland. One of our ambitions is to reduce the journey time from London to Scotland. That is why we are continuing to ensure that we get through all the legislation and that the line stays on track.

HS2 will have a big impact on local jobs. At present we have over 2,000 businesses in the supply chain, 70% of which are small and medium-sized enterprises. That is what comes of building an ambitious railway line connecting eight of our top 10 cities.

Kelvin Hopkins: On the Scotland point, in 1990, British Rail ran a special train from King’s Cross to Edinburgh, with a two-minute stop at Newcastle, in three and a half hours—three and a half minutes faster than is planned for HS2. All that is needed is a bit of modification on the east coast main line, and that could be a regular service.

Ms Ghani: I am sorry, I was not in the House in 1990 when that was reported; I am talking about 2026 and 2033, when we will connect faster trains to Scotland.

I will now discuss some real live cases of how HS2 is bringing greater economic benefits than we thought would be possible over a decade ago. HSBC, for example, has brought 1,000 jobs to Birmingham by moving its retail and business banking headquarters. Other cities along the line are seeing benefits from businesses which are relocating, including Burberry investing in a new factory in Leeds, claiming proximity to the HS2 station as a key factor in its decision. Freshfields and EY now employ 1,000 people in Manchester. Locally, places are gearing up for the arrival of HS2: Toton has plans for it to facilitate the Toton innovation campus, with the

potential for up to 10,000 new jobs and a range of new housing; and the Cheshire science corridor enterprise zone, which was launched in 2016, aims to create 20,000 jobs by building a golden triangle with Liverpool and Manchester.

I fear that I am running out of time, but the business case is clearly solid: there is one budget and one timetable—HS2 will continue on track. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire asked me to confirm at the Dispatch Box what the budget and the timetable are. I stand here to state confidently that the budget is £55.7 billion and that the timetable is 2026

and 2033. I look forward to continuing this debate on Monday afternoon, when we hope that the Bill will return to the Floor of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the business case for High Speed 2.

5.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 10 July 2019

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Whirlpool Tumble Dryers: Product Recall

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): The Government's No. 1 priority is public safety. We are committed to ensuring that the UK continues to have one of the strongest product safety regimes in the world.

I updated the House on 4 April and on 17 June. Following the publication of the review by the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) into the Whirlpool tumble dryer modification programme, I informed the House that OPSS had issued a decision letter placing a number of requirements on the company. Having reviewed Whirlpool's response to the Government's requirements, OPSS determined that it was inadequate.

Accordingly, on 4 June, OPSS notified Whirlpool of their intention to serve a recall notice in respect of as many as 800,000 remaining unmodified tumble dryers currently in use.

I am able to confirm that Whirlpool is now to issue a full product recall of all unmodified tumble dryers from consumers' homes.

Whirlpool has agreed to undertake a number of actions required by OPSS, and which have been reviewed by an expert panel, consisting of an independent Queen's counsel and three chief scientific advisors from the Home Office, health and safety executive and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Under the recall, consumers with an unmodified, affected Whirlpool tumble dryer will be entitled to a new replacement machine. This will be delivered and installed, with the old one removed, at no cost. A refund based on product age or a modification will be available to those consumers who do not want to take up the offer of a replacement dryer. Whirlpool have agreed to implement additional quality assurance procedures for any new modifications in consumers' homes.

Whirlpool will deliver a significant consumer outreach campaign with wide ranging publicity of the product recall. Whirlpool have committed to deliver improved identification of, and outreach to, vulnerable consumers. They guarantee that there will be no charges for the delivery, installation or removal of affected machines. Whirlpool have also committed, and will be legally required, to provide OPSS with effective and timely reporting of progress made in the product recall.

As part of OPSS monitoring of the programme, OPSS is receiving weekly data reports from Whirlpool and it continues to monitor the situation very closely.

The actions taken by OPSS illustrate once again this Government's commitment to ensuring the safety of consumers. No other European country has used the recall process in this way, and on this scale before for domestic appliance safety.

OPSS will closely monitor the recall and it will take further action should it be necessary to ensure public safety. It will continue to work closely with other Government Departments and key stakeholders to raise awareness of the recall.

The message for consumers who have an unmodified dryer is to stop using and unplug their dryer immediately and to contact Whirlpool for a replacement.

[HCWS1707]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government Audit

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Local government in England is responsible for 22% of total UK public sector expenditure. It is essential that local authority financial reporting is of the highest level of transparency to allow taxpayers to understand how their money is being spent.

The responsibilities for the framework within which local authority audits are conducted is the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. It gave effect to commitments to abolish the Audit Commission and its centralised performance and inspection regimes and put in place a new localised audit regime, refocusing local accountability on improved transparency.

Now the Act has been fully implemented, the Government are required to review its effectiveness. The Government want to use this opportunity to step back and review the effectiveness of the local authority financial reporting and audit regime. Developments in the sector have led to a perceived widening of the "expectation gap"; that is, the difference between what users expect from an audit and the reality of what an audit is and what auditors' responsibilities entail.

This is why I am today announcing a Government commissioned independent review to assess the effectiveness of the local authority audit framework and of the transparency of local authority financial reporting. I have asked Sir Tony Redmond, a former local government ombudsman, former local government boundary commissioner for England and former president of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy to chair this review.

This new review will examine the existing purpose, scope and quality of statutory audits of local authorities in England and the supporting regulatory framework to in order to determine:

Whether the audit and related regulatory framework for local authorities in England is operating in line with the policy intent set out in the Act and the related impact assessment;

Whether the reforms have improved the effectiveness of the control and governance framework along with the transparency of financial information presented by councils;

Whether the current statutory framework for local authority financial reporting supports the transparent disclosure of financial performance and enables users of the accounts to hold local authorities to account; and

Appropriate recommendations on how far the process, products and framework may need to improve and evolve to meet the needs of local residents and local taxpayers, and the wider public interest.

A copy of the terms of reference has been placed in the Library of the House.

[HCWS1706]

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Opposite-sex Civil Partnership

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt):

This Government want to see more people joined in a legal union, in the way they want, with the person they love. Greater commitment leads to greater family stability, and greater security within relationships helps to protect children's interests.

That is why the Prime Minister announced last October that we would extend civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples. Since then, the Government supported the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc.) Act 2019, brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), through the parliamentary process.

The Act paves the way for opposite-sex couples to form civil partnerships. Now we are preparing to make those rights a reality through the supporting secondary legislation.

Today we have published a paper entitled "Implementing Opposite-Sex Civil Partnerships: Next Steps", setting out how we intend to implement opposite-sex civil partnerships by the end of this year. This includes important issues such as parental responsibility and parenthood, financial

benefits and entitlements and the protections we intend to put in place for religious organisations in relation to civil partnerships. The Government have already sought views from key stakeholders on most of these issues. We intend, wherever appropriate, to extend existing rights that apply to same-sex civil partners or opposite-sex married couples to opposite-sex civil partners. This document is not, therefore, a formal consultation.

The issue on which we are keen to hear views is conversion into and out of marriage. We know that there are some opposite-sex married couples who would have preferred to form a civil partnership, had this option been available to them, and may therefore wish to convert their marriages to a civil partnership. We are seeking views on proposals to introduce a new right for opposite-sex couples to convert from a marriage to a civil partnership for a limited period of time, before bringing this and the existing right for same-sex couples to convert from a civil partnership to marriage to an end. In this way, couples will have an opportunity to choose the relationship that best suits them, following which marriage and civil partnership will be once and for all established as two distinct and different legal unions by ending movement between them. Our consultation on conversion rights "Civil Partnerships: The Future of Conversion Rights" has also been published today and runs until 20 August.

I have placed copies of the documents in the Library of the House.

We are firmly committed to changing the eligibility requirements for civil partnerships by the end of the year at the latest. Our aim is that opposite-sex couples will be able to register and form civil partnerships by the end of this year. Any substantive changes on conversion are likely to follow in 2020, after the consultation exercise.

[HCWS1705]

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