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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Monday 28 October 2019

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2017]

SIXTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 667

SECOND VOLUME OF SESSION 2019-2020

House of Commons

Monday 28 October 2019

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Leaving the EU: Unaccompanied Child Refugees in Europe

1. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): If she will make it her policy to maintain the rights of unaccompanied child refugees in Europe to family reunion in the UK in the event that the UK leaves the EU without a deal. [900158]

10. **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): If she will make it her policy to maintain the rights of unaccompanied child refugees in Europe to family reunion in the UK in the event that the UK leaves the EU without a deal. [900167]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The UK has a long and proud tradition of offering protection to vulnerable people fleeing war and persecution, and the Government take the welfare of vulnerable children seriously. We support the principle of family unity wholeheartedly, and the Government are committed to meeting our obligation under section 17

of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to seek to negotiate an agreement with the EU on family reunion for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Jeff Smith: The House of Lords Home Affairs Committee recommendation is to temporarily maintain the current rights for family reunion in the event of a no-deal exit to avoid legal limbo. Will the Home Secretary assure this House that the Government will do that to protect vulnerable families in the event of a no deal?

Priti Patel: I would like to reiterate that the Government are committed to getting a deal and, with that, fulfilling our section 17 obligation to move forward in the right way. As I have already made clear, we are committed to ensuring that we protect those who are vulnerable and, importantly, that we continue to have high standards when it comes to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Mr Virendra Sharma: I hope it is in order for me to wish everybody happy Diwali. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

At least one third of all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in England are cared for in London, but London Councils has identified a £32 million funding shortfall. Will the Government commit to fully funding those unsustainable care costs and to reforming the national transfer scheme, so that local authorities can continue to provide the high-quality care and support that vulnerable children need?

Priti Patel: I, too, would like to wish a very happy Diwali to all Hindus across the United Kingdom, and to the hon. Gentleman and others.

The hon. Gentleman recognises and highlights the fact that London authorities do indeed deal with a significant number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. I would like him to know that I have had representations directly from London Councils and London authorities. We are looking, as we always do, at the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who come through the system, but also at the pressures that that puts on local authority budgets.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I am sure the whole House welcomes the generous approach of the Government to child refugees in Europe. Will the Government apply the same generosity to child refugees who are British citizens in Syria?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend highlights a current and pressing issue: child refugees in Syria. I know that other colleagues in the House, including the Foreign Secretary, have spoken about this issue recently. We review on a case-by-case basis. I should just say for the benefit of the House that every case has to be looked at individually. They are difficult cases and we have to look at all the backgrounds behind all the children.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that whatever course of action we take, we must do everything possible to discourage people from sending vulnerable young children on unaccompanied journeys through Africa, Asia and Europe?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. All hon. Members will recognise that we see far too much tragedy in relation to children fleeing war-torn parts of the world. We need to do more in-country and we have to work upstream with our international partners.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): My constituent Helen Tekeste fled Ethiopia in 2015 and came to the UK. In the process, she was separated from her two children. Thankfully, her 11-year-old son was able to join her two years ago, but her 13-year-old daughter's application has twice been refused. Will the Home Secretary meet me to discuss the case?

Priti Patel: I will of course meet the hon. Lady. As she will recognise, everything is looked at from casework on a case-by-case basis, but I will be more than happy to discuss that case with her.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): The Government have stated that they will seek to negotiate a future agreement with the EU on plans for family reunion, but that refers to separated children only. The Home Office's own statistics show that in 2018 over 1,000 adults and children were reunited with their family members in the UK under the Dublin regulations, but the majority of those would not be covered by the Government's commitment. What preparations, if any, have been made by the Government to ensure that safe and legal routes for refugee family reunion continue to operate to the same standards and provisions as under the EU law?

Priti Patel: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Government are very clear that when we leave the EU we will leave the Dublin III regulation, but we will continue to participate during the transition period if we have a deal. The fact of the matter is that discussions are under way across Government. It is important for the House to recognise that this is not just from the Home Office's perspective, but that it is part of our ongoing negotiations with the European Union, which are, of course, led by the Department for Exiting the European Union.

Police Officer Numbers

2. Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): What recent assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of the number of police officers in England and Wales.
[900159]

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): The Prime Minister has made it one of his chief priorities to strengthen police numbers over the next three years by 20,000, starting with 6,000 by the end of March 2021.

Jessica Morden: Gwent police's budget has been cut by 40% in real terms since 2010, so the Government's plans to recruit will only take us back to where we were in 2010, if that. What assurances have Ministers given Gwent police that this programme and, importantly, pension costs will be funded after the first year?

Kit Malthouse: I am happy to say that Gwent police are already up 42 police officers on last year's budget settlement. A target of a further 62 has been allocated in the latest funding round. Announcements about police funding will be made as usual in early December, and I am confident that there will be smiles all round at Gwent police when we do that.

17. [900174] Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): The police and crime commissioner for Devon and Cornwall is over in Portcullis House today, demonstrating innovation in rural policing. It is fair to say that rural policing has not always had its fair share. I ask the Minister whether Cornwall and, more importantly, North Cornwall can have its fair share of the 20,000 officers to make sure that our policing can be brought up to speed.

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is right to highlight that the excellent police and crime commissioner—I have met her several times now—for Cornwall is over in Portcullis House, demonstrating what a great job the police do in that part of the world. As I am sure my hon. Friend is aware, there has already been an initial allocation of police officers to his county force and there will be more news to come. We are in conversation with the policing community more widely about the allocation of police officers for years 2 and 3 of the uplift programme. Once that is concluded, I will let him know.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): At my weekend surgery, a constituent who had phoned the police time after time about neighbours from hell living above him said that he realised, at one moment of desperation, that he had a hammer in his hand. Had he used that hammer against those neighbours from hell, the police would have turned up—no doubt very quickly—and he would have been the object of their attention, not the neighbours from hell. When I meet the Minister tomorrow to discuss extra police for Birkenhead, will he give a commitment not only in terms of numbers but that the police should stand on the side of decent citizens, not on the side of neighbours from hell?

Kit Malthouse: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the police standing on the side of decent citizens. When I hear distress calls from across the

country about people who are not getting the response that they require from the police, I refer everybody to the police and crime commissioner for that area, who is responsible for performance and priority in the police force in question. Happily, the right hon. Gentleman will know that 200 police officers have been allocated from the uplift to Merseyside police, as a target for it to recruit over the next 12 months or so, and there will be more to come when we settle years 2 and 3. Like him, I want to see more police officers patrolling in Birkenhead, particularly in Hamilton Square, which holds fond memories for me as a child.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Police officers are on the frontline of defeating terrorism. The Minister will join me and all others here in welcoming the news of the demise of Baghdadi, the leader of the evil, vile and barbaric organisation Daesh. My question to the Minister is this: military action alone will not defeat Daesh—in 2015, I led the campaign to get the terminology right—so what step will he take to ensure that further work goes on to defeat the idea, the ideology and the appeal, which suck in vulnerable individuals from around the world and here in the UK?

Kit Malthouse: I well remember my hon. Friend's persistent questioning from the Back Benches of former Prime Ministers to get the terminology right about this mission. He is quite right that we all need to work together on a multi-stranded approach to prevent young people from being seduced into these evil ideologies and practices across the world, and the police are at the forefront of that. I hope and believe that some of the measures put in place to bind the police as closely as possible into society will assist in that mission.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): In July on the steps of Downing Street, and again in his heavily criticised speech in front of new police recruits in West Yorkshire, the Prime Minister promised 20,000 new police officers for the frontline, but a leaked Home Office letter suggests that as many as 7,000 of these will not be going to local forces. With the Budget now scrapped, it is anyone's guess if and how these officers will be recruited, so will the Minister tell us: will every one of those 20,000 officers be going to the frontline, as promised by the Prime Minister—yes or no?

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Lady makes a good point about the allocation of police officers across the piece of policing, and I know that every single warranted police officer regards themselves as being on the frontline, whatever job they do. She will know that we have allocated the first 6,000 police officers to territorial policing, but there is a conversation to be had about further allocations, specifically to serious and organised crime, through the National Crime Agency, and to counter-terrorism policing, and about the balance between those and the territorial forces. I would not regard any one of those functions as non-frontline.

County Lines Drugs Gangs

3. **Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): What steps she is taking to tackle county lines drugs gangs. [900160]

7. **David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): What steps she is taking to tackle county lines drugs gangs. [900164]

18. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What steps she is taking to tackle county lines drugs gangs. [900175]

23. **David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): What steps she is taking to tackle county lines drugs gangs. [900180]

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): We are determined to end county lines and have announced a £20 million package of initial measures to do so. This will expand the national county lines co-ordination centre, help to target the transport network and go after the profits from this crime, and support young people to exit county lines.

Andrew Jones: North Yorkshire police have had recent success arresting six people in a county lines operation in Harrogate. Breaking the gangs that operate the county lines is obviously critical, but so is supporting the addicts, who are at the end of the line, and those exploited into dealing. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is through tackling both supply and demand that progress will be made in dealing with county lines?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I gather that he was recently involved with his local constabulary in the apprehension of a drug dealer on East Parade in Harrogate—I am glad to see he is on the frontline too. He is right that we need a balanced approach to tackling the harm that drugs cause in our society. While that includes enforcement and disrupting the business model of those involved in promulgating this awful trade, we also have to provide support to young people to get them out of the habit, or even to prevent them from getting into the trade in the first place. Significant resources are being devoted to this, not least through the early intervention youth fund, which is putting hundreds of millions of pounds behind these kinds of projects.

David Duguid: The Home Office has a number of UK-wide initiatives to combat the range of problem drug use factors, including county lines—we might even refer to it as country lines, because it affects the whole United Kingdom, and there are people suffering from drug gangs coming as far into the north-east as Banff and Buchan. With the SNP's stated policy of decriminalising possession and consumption of controlled drugs, what effect does the Minister think that such a differentiation in Scotland would have on these UK-wide efforts?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend was present at the Scottish Affairs Committee when we discussed this matter in some detail, so he will know that my view is that having a different regime in Scotland from that in England and Wales could cause significant problems for Scotland, not least because it would become a target for those wishing to promote the trade more easily and running county lines from England into Scotland. There are times when we are four nations and times when we are one country, and on drugs we should be one.

Henry Smith: Sussex police were recently in receipt of a Home Office grant to tackle county lines drug offences. Will my hon. Friend update the House please?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is a doughty defender of Sussex police and a great supporter, I know, of the brilliant police and crime commissioner there, Katy Bourne, who is doing a fantastic job. He is right that Sussex police have been in the forefront of the fight against county lines and have received significant funding of £900,000 through the early intervention youth fund and £1.3 million to support police operations in the area. I am happy to say that in the latest week of intensification of action against county lines, which I hope he noted the other week, Sussex police made 29 arrests and safeguarded 50 vulnerable individuals.

David Morris: I am deeply concerned about the county lines gangs from Bradford and Liverpool which are bringing drugs into my constituency. How does my hon. Friend expect the £20 million funding package that has been announced to stop those gangs, and to support victims in Morecambe and Lunesdale?

Kit Malthouse: I too am concerned about the situation in Morecambe, not least because, like Birkenhead, it has happy memories for me of my childhood. I am keen to sit down and talk to my hon. Friend about what more we can do in Morecambe, not least because we are in conversation with Merseyside police about the action that we want to take on county lines. Obviously, many of the lines into Morecambe will be run from my home town. It is a town in a particular position, because there are limited points of access, over bridges and by road, which gives the police a significant opportunity to identify and apprehend criminals before they even get there.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Our July Select Committee report warned that county lines were spreading violence and drug networks into not just cities but towns. In Castleford, in my constituency, where I called a meeting with the police, local schools and community representatives, there is a real sense that the problem is getting worse in our towns, with residents reporting overt drug dealing on the streets and in town centres. People are concerned not just about the halving of our neighbourhood police, but about the fact that the youth endowment fund that the Minister has announced is tiny by comparison with the cuts in the youth service. Does he accept that there is a real perception across the country that the Government's drug strategy simply is not working, and that unless they invest in the youth service as well, they will not turn this problem around?

Kit Malthouse: As the right hon. Lady will have heard, I did, in answer to an earlier question, talk about a balanced drugs strategy that takes into account both enforcement and youth intervention. However, there is always more that we can do. Alongside the expansion of the county lines co-ordination centre and the action that we shall be taking over the next few weeks as part of the general uplift relating to the £20 million of funding that we have received, we have established a county lines group at the Home Office which is bringing together all the partners we think can have an impact, not just in policing but beyond. We need a real push, because we are under instruction from the Prime Minister to bring this phenomenon to an end.

19. [900176] **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): Last week the Health and Social Care Committee, of which I am a member, published a report recommending a radical change in the UK drugs policy—a change from a criminal justice approach to a health approach. Given the high rate of drug-related deaths in Scotland, does the Minister accept that the current UK policy is simply not working, and that a new approach is desperately needed?

Kit Malthouse: As I said to the Scottish Affairs Committee, my mind is open on what more we can do, but there are plenty of things that should be done and are not being done. One of the common phenomena in countries that have been successful in dealing with drug-related problems is investment in health treatment and recovery, but, sadly, that has not happened in Scotland over the last few years. As I said to the Committee, there are many things that the Scottish Government can and should be doing. Given the scale of the problem in that part of the United Kingdom, I am surprised that they are not putting more effort, and more resources, into treatment and recovery.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): We have heard twice about the Minister's early days as a youth, including in Liverpool, but the fact is that he will have to grow up fast, because the wicked people behind drugs in this country are big gangsters, and those who killed the 39 innocent people in that refrigerated van are big players. When will the Government tackle the wicked men and women who run crime in this country, and do it effectively?

Kit Malthouse: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has noted some of the recent successes that we have had in dealing with some of the really big gangs who promulgate this trade—not least the National Crime Agency's biggest ever seizure of drugs, which were being shipped in, funnily enough, in Liverpool, in fruit and veg lorries. Nevertheless, there is always much more to do. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be encouraged by the fact that the Home Secretary and I, along with the Minister for Security, my right hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis), who is responsible for dealing with serious and organised crime, are working closely together to see what more we can do in order to do exactly as the hon. Gentleman says, and take this business out from front to back.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): County lines operations have invaded every town and city across the UK, and they do not discriminate when it comes to the lives they affect. South Wales police, my own excellent constabulary, are seeing children as young as 13 arrested for involvement in county lines. We must protect the young and vulnerable from this exploitation, and no matter what the Government think they are doing, it is not enough. We need to do more to protect young people from this dreadful county lines epidemic.

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Lady is exactly right. Thankfully, her local police force will have more police officers next year to help with this effort, and I know that one of the key focuses of all police forces involved in dealing with this awful phenomenon is the safeguarding of young people. Obviously, I will be working closely with colleagues from the Department of Health and Social Care and

the Department for Education to see what more preventive work we can do. I believe that there is quite a lot more we can do around the disruption of the business model, to make it more difficult for people to deal drugs and to launder the money involved in the trade. That would make them less likely to promote it in smaller towns and villages and more likely to concentrate instead on urban areas, where we can get to work on the issue.

Domestic Abuse Commissioner

4. Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment she has made of the potential merits of making the role of domestic abuse commissioner a full-time position. [900161]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): We were delighted to announce Nicole Jacobs as our designate domestic abuse commissioner. The role was advertised as part time because we understood from advice from recruitment advisers that that would ensure the widest range of candidates. However, we have said in our response to the Joint Committee on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill, and in the House on Second Reading, that we have an open mind on whether the role requires a full-time position. The Bill Committee will start its deliberations tomorrow, and no doubt we will look into that question in detail.

Preet Kaur Gill: I welcome the appointment of Nicole Jacobs to the role of championing the needs of survivors of domestic abuse. As a social worker, I know that children are at serious risk of long-term physical and mental health problems as a result of witnessing domestic violence, so what steps is the Minister taking to ensure that the commissioner is given the necessary powers and resources to properly support the one in seven children and young people under the age of 18 who have lived with domestic abuse at some point?

Victoria Atkins: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady for raising this matter. We know that domestic abuse is one of the primary adverse childhood experiences that can have such a terrible knock-on effect on a young person's future life as well as on their own relationships. That is one of the many reasons why we are giving the commissioner powers to require information from public authorities and to oblige public authorities and central Government to respond to her recommendations within 56 days of her making them.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I like the Minister a great deal, but what she has just said about being advised by the recruitment agency that she would get the widest range of candidates only if the position were part time is hogwash. We know that abusers and those who exercise coercive control do not do that on a part-time basis. This needs to be a full-time position, and I hope that when this is discussed in Committee, the Minister will see sense and the position will become full time.

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady; the feeling is mutual, and I look forward to working with her on the Bill Committee. The decision was made in the best of faith, and the joy of appointing the designate commissioner

ahead of the House's scrutiny of the Bill is that these issues can be teased out. As I say, we are approaching this with an open mind, and we will see what the evidence says.

EU Settlement Scheme

5. Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): What recent assessment she has made of the accessibility of the EU settlement scheme application process. [900162]

11. Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): What support she is providing to EU citizens applying to the EU settlement scheme. [900168]

The Minister for Security (Brandon Lewis): The EU settlement scheme is designed to be simple and straightforward for people to apply to. The Government are also putting in grant support for a wide range of voluntary and community organisations, as well as digital and telephone support through the resolution centre.

Jamie Stone: As a remainder, I wish that the EU citizens in my constituency had not been put in this position. As the Minister has mentioned, applications can be made by phone or iPad, but connectivity in parts of my constituency is absolute mince, to use a Scottish expression. I have raised this time and again—we would be better off with two cans and a length of string. Cannot the Government see that this lack of connectivity militates against the EU citizens who want to remain in my constituency?

Brandon Lewis: People do not have to do things digitally. They can speak to people or they can send things in. We also have several hundred centres that people can go to. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could join us in encouraging the Scottish National party to support the Prime Minister's work to see broadband rolled out more widely across the country, so that Scotland can benefit just as the rest of the UK can.

Alex Chalk: I am delighted that the settlement scheme is progressing at pace, with 2 million or so people signing up. However, some individuals in my constituency really benefit from face-to-face contact, so what steps are being taken, through pop-up shops or whatever, to ensure that they can get the vital hands-on support they need?

Mr Speaker: Stone followed by Chalk seems apposite.

Brandon Lewis: The Home Office is undertaking a programme of work through voluntary organisations, and the £3.75 million scheme includes working with people at pop-up events. I visited one in Great Yarmouth that is doing excellent work with communities so that people can see how simple the system is and are able to apply, and we encourage more people to do so. We have now reached 2.2 million applications, and I look forward to that number growing quickly.

Mr Speaker: From Stone to Chalk to Cherry—I call Joanna Cherry.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Introducing digital-only proof of status will cause many problems for EU citizens, and low digital users in particular. The Home Office's own assessment of creating a digital-only "prove your right to work" service said that there was

"very strong evidence that this would cause low digital users a lot of issues",

so does the Minister agree that the same will apply to the EU settlement scheme? Will he reconsider the provision of physical documents?

Brandon Lewis: People applying through the settlement scheme obviously get an email confirming that the application has been processed and dealt with. The process is being done digitally as we are moving to a digital system more generally. It is the right way, it works for employers, and the fact that 2.2 million people have already applied through the scheme in just a few months confirms that.

Joanna Cherry: In Scotland, the Scottish Government have taken a number of steps to reassure EU citizens, and the First Minister has launched a "Stay in Scotland" campaign, which provides practical advice and support to EU citizens during this uncertain time. The Scottish Government have also announced funding for a new programme in Scotland called Settled, which is designed to target vulnerable EU citizens and offer them help with applications to the scheme. Does the Minister welcome that initiative by the Scottish Government? Will he be doing anything similar in England?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. and learned Lady should not be using that kind of language. There is no reason for anybody to have any concerns or be unsettled. We have been clear that we want EU citizens to stay, and that is why we introduced a scheme to ensure that we protect their rights and put £9 million into work with voluntary groups in addition to the £3.75 million to ensure that we get the message out. I am happy to work with anybody who wants to ensure that we are spreading the message positively and properly. Some 2.2 million people have already applied through the scheme, and I look forward to seeing all 3.5 million people processed as quickly as possible.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): The money that the Minister has made available for voluntary groups is welcome, but does he recognise the specific concern around hard-to-reach groups, such as elderly people in care homes and people working in rural areas, in agriculture and in construction? Does he agree that there is a need for real outreach to ensure that all EU citizens have a chance to clarify their position in law?

Brandon Lewis: My right hon. Friend makes a good point. We are working with voluntary groups and through the EU settlement resolution centre to ensure that we reach all those vulnerable and harder-to-reach groups, particularly in rural areas. For example, we are working with local communities by holding pop-up events, such as the one that I saw in my constituency, to reach out to as many as possible. People have until December 2020 to apply to the scheme, and it would be good to get 3.5 million through as quickly as possible.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Minister will be aware of the genuine concern among EU nationals, their families and their employers about the workings of the EU settlement scheme. He will also be aware, as will Members on both sides of the House, about the general problems with delays at the Home Office. For instance, the proportion of leave to remain applications taking more than six months doubled between 2014 and 2017. The Minister correctly said that more than 2 million applications to the EU settlement scheme have now been made, but 18% of them have not been resolved. The Minister caused concern recently when he said that EU nationals who fail to apply before 2020 could be deported. Will he give the House an assurance that every effort will be made to reach out to those who have yet to apply and that applications will be processed promptly?

Brandon Lewis: The short answer is yes. Just to give a bit of flavour to that, there are no delays with the EU settlement scheme; the right hon. Lady conflated two completely different schemes in her question. People's status under the EU settlement scheme is decided very quickly, and 2.2 million people have now applied through that process. In the whole of the process, only two people out of the set of figures that she gave have been refused, on grounds of criminality, which is absolutely right.

Marriage: 16 and 17-year-olds

6. **Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): If she will bring forward legislative proposals to end marriages involving 16 and 17-year-olds. [900163]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): We have listened carefully to the debate on the legal age of marriage and continue to keep it under review. Tackling forced marriage is one of this Government's priorities, and I am proud that we made it an offence in 2014.

Sarah Champion: The Minister is aware that 350 children a year are married in this country. We do not know how many of those are forced marriages, nor do we know how many unregistered or overseas marriages there are. The Minister can change this instantly, and change the culture around it, by making the legal age of marriage 18. Will she do it?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, knowing as I do the work that she is doing on this. We are very much looking at the evidence. In 2016, the last year for which we have figures, 179 people aged 16 to 17 entered marriage, out of nearly half a million who got married that year. In a way, the hon. Lady's question demonstrates the complexities of this difficult subject, but I am very keen to work with her and other Members to look at the evidence on this important issue.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Does the Minister really believe that it is still appropriate for children to marry, with parental consent, before they have completed mandatory education or training up to the age of 18?

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend has rather demonstrated the paradox in age legislation in our country. I take some comfort from the fact that marriages under the age of 18 are on the decline in this country. We know that that is sadly not the case elsewhere in the world, but I am happy to work with her and other Members from across the House on this difficult and thorny but important topic.

Place-based Crime Prevention

9. **Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): What assessment has been made of the effectiveness of place-based crime prevention strategies. [900166]

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): There is strong evidence that place-based approaches can be an effective means of preventing a wide range of crimes, including acquisitive offences such as burglary and theft. That is why, on 1 October, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced the £25 million safer streets fund, which will support the communities worst affected by such crimes to implement effective situational prevention, such as street lighting and home security.

Melanie Onn: Old Market Place and Rutland Street in Great Grimsby have both experienced incredibly violent knife crime, including the on-street killing of a homeless man. Will Operation Galaxy, launched by Humberside police today, look at what changes need to be made to the built environment so that my constituents can feel safe again? Can the Minister also say how much money Humberside police will be getting out of the £25 million announced?

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Lady is quite right that, as I said in my previous answer, small design changes or equipment such as CCTV can have a huge impact on crime. We know, for example, that alley gating can result in a 43% reduction in burglary—I was sorry to read that she was burgled earlier this year. We will encourage applications to the fund from the areas that are most significantly affected, particularly by acquisitive crime, on the basis that the worst affected 5% of areas account for 23% of all offences. I look forward to entertaining a bid from Humberside police.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Ind): The Minister will be aware that there is a plethora of evidence that we can design out crime, both in the built environment and through the design of objects. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care recently launched the national academy for social prescribing, to link healthcare with the arts and creative industries. Can the Minister update us on the work that the Home Office is doing with our world-beating creative and arts industries to help to combat crime?

Kit Malthouse: In typical fashion, the right hon. Gentleman poses an intriguing challenge, which I shall have to research in the Department to find out whether there has been any impact. However, one area that I know we could do more work with, and that is a significant contributor to the cultural life of the nation, is the architectural profession, which often does not make crime prevention a top requirement when putting in place developments, but very often should.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): One of the greatest casualties of a decade of cuts to policing has been seen in the breakdown in partnerships between local authorities and mental health trusts. So what discussions is the Minister having with those departments to ensure that there is investment in those services and shared funding to move them forward?

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Lady is right that the rise in the incidence of mental ill health has caused significant problems across the country, not least to the police. The frontline response teams I have met in the past few months in this job have all highlighted to me the problems they have in dealing with mental health cases. However, the problem has been sorted in some parts of the country, not least in my county of Hampshire, where there is a good relationship between the organisations, such that they are functioning well. I would like to take that best practice and spread it.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): The Minister mentioned being able to design out crime. What more can be done by linking up with local councils to ensure that not only buildings but the landscaping around them are designed to try to minimise crime and make places more pleasant to visit?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend raises an extremely good point. A well functioning local criminal justice partnership, which will involve the local authority as well as the police and other bodies involved in crime fighting, will often look at exactly these kinds of issues. I hope that as we move forward in the police uplift programme one area of focus will be a regional approach to problem solving in policing. I would be more than happy to meet her to discuss this if she has any specific ideas.

Firefighter Numbers

12. **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the number of firefighters. [900169]

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): We are confident that fire and rescue services have the resources they need to do their important work. Operational decisions are for each fire and rescue authority to make as part of the integrated risk management planning process, and it is for individual fire and rescue services to make decisions on the number of firefighters they employ.

Vicky Foxcroft: Since Grenfell, London Fire Brigade has undertaken focused and enhanced visits to high-rise buildings, using both station-based crews and fire safety inspecting officers. Inspecting officers are highly skilled individuals who ensure that those with responsibility for buildings are taking the necessary steps to uphold fire safety standards. What is the Minister doing to support brigades in recruiting and retaining officers in these essential specialist roles?

Kit Malthouse: Obviously the Grenfell inquiry is due to publish shortly, and we will all have to learn lessons from its conclusions. The hon. Lady is right to point towards prevention as a key part of the mission of the fire service, and one in which there has been enormous success in the past decade or more in driving down the

number of fires attended to, in particular, and incidents across the board more generally. We have secured an extremely good financial settlement for the fire service across the country this year, and I have urged fire chiefs, not least in the light of the first set of inspections for some time, to invest in prevention.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I certainly support the Government in recruiting an extra 20,000 police officers, but may I ask the Minister to look again at the resources for the fire service? In West Yorkshire, and I suspect in other parts of the country, they are extremely stretched at the moment. The number of people on a fire engine is going down to try to mask over those stretched resources. Will he look at that again, because the fire service needs extra resources, just as the police do?

Kit Malthouse: I would expect nothing less than a challenge from the champion of Shipley on my portfolio, just as he has challenged me in my previous portfolios. I would be more than happy to look at particular problems in his local fire service if he believes there are any, but we have recently instituted and had the results of the first inspection regime of fire and rescue services for some time. It has been reassuring in parts, but it does point towards particular areas we need to address. As I say, we had a good settlement from the Treasury this year from the financial point of view, and it will be for local fire and rescue chiefs to decide how they invest that extra money.

Police Officer Numbers: Sussex

13. **Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con):** What steps she is taking to increase the number of police officers in Sussex. [900170]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The Government are committed to recruiting 20,000 new police officers over the next three years, with energy and pace. This reflects the biggest recruitment drive in decades, and I know my hon. Friend will welcome the recent announcement that Sussex police have been allocated another 129 officers in the first year of the programme.

Maria Caulfield: I thank the Home Secretary for her answer. Will she join me in welcoming the announcement from Sussex police that they intend to use their extra funding to reintroduce PCSOs across towns and villages in Lewes?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is right—and yes, the Government are more than supportive of police plans to increase the number of PCSOs and their presence across towns and villages, in her constituency in Sussex and across the country. This is all about how, through our new police recruitment drive, we can do more to keep the public safe and increase police visibility.

16. [900173] **Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Ind):** I am delighted to hear about the increase in the numbers of police in Sussex, but will the Home Secretary also reassure me that the London Borough of Merton will see an increase in its officers? Will she support my campaign to keep the police station in Wimbledon open, so that those police officers have somewhere to operate out of?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I know that he will welcome the increase in police numbers—more than 1,300 for the Metropolitan police service. Of course, the issue is now all about local police presence and ensuring that more officers are on the beat. That is exactly what will happen in his borough.

Counter-terrorism

14. **Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con):** What steps she is taking to provide security and law enforcement organisations with the tools they need to counter terrorism. [900171]

The Minister for Security (Brandon Lewis): It is crucial that our security and law enforcement organisations have the tools needed to keep our people safe. A review of powers was undertaken as part of Contest, our updated comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy. In February this year, the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019 received Royal Assent. It ensures that our security and intelligence agencies, prosecutors and the judiciary have the powers they need to counter the threat.

Sir John Hayes: Identifying indoctrination by Islamists and similar fanatics is essential to providing the good order that Edmund Burke characterised as the hallmark of good government. As the Minister will know, the Prevent duty on local authorities obliges them to play their part in that effort. Mindful of the fresh guidance that has been published—I have it here—will the Minister now review the practice of those public bodies, identify what is going well and sanction those who are not doing their duty?

Brandon Lewis: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. He was instrumental in the introduction and delivery of the Prevent duty, to the benefit of everybody. There is obviously work for us to do on extremism, including the unwanted growth in right-wing extremism, which we want to bring down. We are therefore always reviewing how the programmes work, to ensure that everybody is kept as safe as possible.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): International action is, of course, required to tackle terrorism. Paragraph 78 of the political declaration, as it stands, refers to a “balanced security partnership” after Brexit. But the reality is that, three years on, the Government are no further forward in agreeing the security treaty promised by the former Prime Minister and have not put forward any ideas about how to reconcile the UK’s position as an EU third country with the level of security co-operation that we have now. Given the continuing risk of no deal, is not the Government’s attitude to our future security arrangements little short of negligent?

Brandon Lewis: I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues did not vote for the programme motion the other day, so that we could actually have got on with the withdrawal agreement Bill, to get towards delivering on a deal with the EU and ensure that we get a good outcome. The Government’s work to prepare for no deal has continued, with meetings on a daily basis, to ensure that we are ready for when we leave. We have excellent agencies and good working

across Europe—and, indeed, globally: the work we do for Interpol also plays an important part as we go forward.

Low-level Crimes

15. **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): What her policy is on the investigation of low-level crimes. [900172]

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): We expect all crimes reported to the police to be investigated appropriately. Chief constables and police and crime commissioners are responsible for ensuring that cases are investigated properly. Together with the Crown Prosecution Service, they must make sure that charges are brought in cases where there is sufficient evidence and it is in the public interest to do so.

Mr Robertson: I thank the Minister for that answer, but section 176 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 makes theft from a shop of goods worth £200 or less a summary-only offence. According to the National Federation of Retail Newsagents, shoplifting crime has increased since then. Will the Minister have a look at what is going on and what can be done to reduce retail theft?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend has been a persistent champion for those in the retail trade who are subject to crime. I will be more than happy to look at the point that he raises—not least because if the data shows that there is a problem, we have to do something about it.

I would just say to my hon. Friend that when Westfield shopping centre opened in west London, there was a concern about crime. I recommended that all employers there gave time off to some of their shop staff so that they could become special constables, on the basis that there would then always be a police officer on duty.

Mr Speaker: I am sure the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) is greatly gratified to know that he is not merely a champion, but a persistent one at that.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): It feels, unfortunately, as though the police and the Crown Prosecution Service still think that an assault on an emergency worker is a low-level crime and that, frankly, magistrates often say, “Well, a little bit of violence is just in the way of doing your job.” Surely, we must reverse this trend. When there is an assault on an emergency worker, it is an assault on us all.

Kit Malthouse: I think that the hon. Gentleman speaks for us all. In my view, anyone who raises a hand in malice against an emergency worker should face the severest possible penalties.

Topical Questions

T1. [900183] **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): I would like to begin by remembering the 39 people who died in horrific circumstances last week trying to reach the United Kingdom. The thoughts of

the whole country are with them and their families, and I would like to pay tribute to the emergency services who responded with such professionalism. Our focus now is to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Craig Tracey: May I welcome the recent increase in police numbers across Warwickshire, which will see 191 new officers recruited? My constituents will particularly welcome the creation of a rural crime team in north Warwickshire. Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating our excellent police and crime commissioner, Philip Seccombe, and chief constable, Martin Jelley, on this fantastic initiative, which will make our local area even safer than it already is?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to praise his chief constable and his police and crime commissioner. I wish to extend thanks to them for everything they have been doing with regard to making a difference in the local community. That also means being part of our scheme and initiative to recruit 20,000 more police officers, and so I absolutely welcome that.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): We are more than two years on from the Grenfell Tower fire and insufficient regulatory reforms and continued cuts to fire services have not given the local community any reason to trust this Government. There must be scrutiny of processes and resources, not just blaming of individuals. Advice to residents on the night was to stay put as part of a strategy of containment. We need to be absolutely clear here that this is Government policy; not fire brigade policy or a policy dreamed up by firefighters. As promised after the Lakanal House inquest in 2013—that is six years ago—will the Minister commission a review into the stay-put policy as a matter of urgency?

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): As you may recall, Mr Speaker, I had some responsibility for the enormous changes that are required in building regulation and fire safety procedure when I was Minister for Housing. I dispute the hon. Lady's representation that nothing has happened. A huge amount of work is going on under the auspices of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that that kind of thing can never happen again. Having said that, the inquiry will be announcing shortly, and no doubt there will be implications for us all about what more lessons can be learned.

T3. [900185] **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Following time spent patrolling Leigh-on-Sea Broadway on Friday with two excellent police officers, I ask my right hon. Friend to look now at the availability of accommodation for people with mental health issues detained under section 136 and perhaps at some simplifying of criminal behaviour orders.

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for going out on patrol and obviously supporting Essex police in everything they do locally. He is right, and we are working with the Department of Health and Social Care to consider recommendations from the Mental Health Act 1983 review so that people in mental health crisis can receive the right support that they need. We should stop criminalising these individuals and make sure that we

are working across all institutions and local communities to ensure that they have the right kind of help and support.

T2. [900184] **Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): [R] Claire Throssell's abusive husband murdered her two young boys, Jack and Paul, by burning down their family home. It is impossible to put into words the pain that she suffered as a consequence, so does the Home Secretary or the Minister agree with Claire that we urgently need the Domestic Abuse Bill to put an end to aggressive cross-examining and to ensure that children's voices are heard in the family courts, so that no one else has to suffer the same pain that Claire has?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I have had the privilege of meeting Claire. Indeed, her Member of Parliament also set out Claire's case and the names of Jack and Paul on Second Reading of this important Bill. We very much take on board the points that Claire and others make about the workings of the family courts. There are already measures in the Bill to address some of those concerns, but we are very much looking for the Bill Committee and the House to scrutinise our proposals so that we can ensure that the family courts are a place of justice for victims of domestic abuse and their children.

T4. [900186] **Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): Rural areas of the Calder Valley such as Stainland, Todmorden and Ripponden have seen a rise in crime in recent years. The announcement of 20,000 extra police officers is very welcome news indeed, but can my right hon. Friend tell me what the strategy is in the meantime to tackle the rise in rural crime?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is right. Rural crime blights rural communities and harms the rural economy. The National Police Chiefs' Council's rural affairs strategy is intended to address exactly this issue, by supporting rural communities and providing a greater focus for policing. I urge West Yorkshire police to invest in rural crime prevention through the new funding for police recruitment, training and engagement.

T6. [900188] **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): I welcome the new contract for asylum seeker support in the north-east, but the Minister will be aware that there is still considerable anxiety because of the lack of guaranteed long-term accommodation and because of the long delays in accessing services provided by Migrant Help. This leaves many people, including pregnant women, without adequate support. When is she going to sort it out?

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Gentleman will know that the advice, issue reporting and eligibility service provided by Migrant Help was set up to help applicants with their applications and to provide guidance through a single, nationally operated, end-to-end service. I very much take on board his point and would be happy to meet him to discuss this issue. We want to ensure that applicants get the help they need while making their application so that the right decisions are made as promptly as possible.

T5. [900187] **Tracey Crouch** (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): The Vagrancy Act 1824 criminalises vulnerable people for simply having nowhere to go, and wastes

valuable police time and resources with issues that could be far better managed by outreach workers and multi-agency support services. Local police officers tell me that they have plenty of other tools to deal with rough sleeping. With that in mind, will my right hon. Friend reassure me that she is engaging positively with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in its review of this outdated, unnecessary and damaging piece of legislation?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Seema Kennedy): I can reassure my hon. Friend that we are working with MHCLG colleagues. The Government believe that no one should be criminalised simply for sleeping rough. We committed to reviewing the Vagrancy Act in the cross-governmental rough sleeping strategy. Rough sleeping is obviously a complex issue, and we are looking closely at all the options, including retention, repeal, replacement and amendment of the Act.

T7. [900189] **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Given that Ellesmere Port is losing its second pump, I was a little perplexed to hear from the fire Minister earlier that he thought that fire authorities had a good settlement from the Treasury this year. Will he join me in lobbying the Chancellor for extra funds for the fire service for next year, so that we can keep this vital service?

Kit Malthouse: I am sorry to hear that that pump is going, but presumably that was an operational decision by the local fire chief and fire board. We did get a 2.3% settlement, which in the great scheme of things was good for the fire service, but more investment can always be looked at. One area of investment that I have talked to the fire service about and that is of interest to me is technology—the question of what more we can invest in to make the fire service more efficient and its ability to fight fires better, and to ensure that all forces are wetter; Mr Speaker, did you know that there is a chemical that can be added to water to make it wetter and therefore more effective in putting out fires?

Mr Speaker: What an extraordinarily helpful nugget of information the Minister has vouchsafed to me and other Members of the House; he really is an encyclopedia of arguably useful information.

T8. [900190] **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that she is working closely with the Lord Chancellor to ensure that the Domestic Abuse Bill goes hand in hand with root-and-branch reform of family courts to make them more accessible and less intimidating places?

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend has hit upon one of the most common experiences of victims and survivors—namely, the trouble they feel they experience in the family courts. We want to sort this out, which is why the Home Secretary and I are bringing this Bill forward along with the Ministry of Justice and the Lord Chancellor. In fact, we will also be looking at the conclusions of the expert panel commissioned by the Ministry of Justice to examine exactly this point, to ensure that the family courts and private law courts are places of justice for all.

T10. [900192] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): There have been reports that the Home Secretary might introduce a regional visa system—something that the Scottish Government and the SNP have been championing for some time. Is she in a position to provide us with more details on this issue?

Seema Kennedy: As the hon. Gentleman knows, immigration is an issue for the whole United Kingdom, now and after we leave the European Union.

T9. [900191] **Andrew Griffiths** (Burton) (Con): In Staffordshire, we welcome the 90 new police officers we are getting as part of the Government's investment, but we also recognise the danger that those officers put themselves in every day. Officers are asking for access to Tasers in order to keep them safe. Will the Home Secretary commit that any police officer who wants a Taser will get one, and when will they be getting hold of them?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend will know that the deployment of Tasers is an operational matter for chief constables, and it is obviously for them to determine the number of Tasers for officers. However, we have introduced a £10 million Taser fund, and that funding will mean that over 10,000 more officers in England and Wales will have the opportunity to carry a Taser.

Jane Dodds (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): Rural and agricultural communities are significantly affected by a rise in such crimes. Will the Minister confirm that there will be no significant reduction in funding to rural police forces, which in fact need more funding?

Kit Malthouse: Rural police forces in England will receive the same uplift funding as the other police forces do. As somebody who represents a large and very beautiful rural constituency, I have a particular interest in making sure that rural crime does not become a Cinderella part of the service.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): As my right hon. Friend develops a new immigration system, will she ensure that she pays particular attention to its design to facilitate the movement of scientists, researchers and technicians in and out of the country to protect our world-class science base and maintain our position as a global science superpower?

The Minister for Security (Brandon Lewis): My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Yes, the Home Secretary has commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee to look at a future points-based immigration system that is intended not to be geographical but based on the skills that this country needs so that we continue to be globally leading but also globally open.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Does the Minister have any plans to bring in legislation to provide that all specialist housing and registered care accommodation, both new and existing, be fitted with sprinklers?

Kit Malthouse: This policy area actually falls within the purview of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. I know, having been Minister

for Housing until recently, that as part of the review of building regulations, the matter of sprinklers is under consideration.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Shropshire has suffered widespread and dangerous flooding over the past few days, affecting thousands of people. Would the Home Secretary like to join me in putting on record her thanks to West Mercia police and all the people from Shropshire fire and rescue services?

Priti Patel: I would absolutely like to put on record my thanks and gratitude. Flooding is a dreadful issue that has an appalling impact on people's lives, livelihoods and homes. Of course, our fire and emergency services, the Environment Agency and police officers have done a great deal of work to provide a great deal of support and comfort to local residents.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): I have a constituent whose mother is in her 90s. She came to the UK from Poland after the second world war as a refugee. She now has dementia, and she needs to apply for settled status. She has very few documents proving her residency over the past five years. Will the Minister advise me on what she and people in her situation have to do to acquire settled status?

Priti Patel: I would be delighted to look at that application directly with the Home Office. We also have 57 voluntary organisations that have been resourced by the Home Office to reach out to individuals who will not necessarily be able to access technology easily. But, as I say, I will be very happy to look at that individual case.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): May I welcome the confirmation of additional funding for counter-terrorism in the spending review and ask my right hon. Friend what steps she is taking to counter terrorist content online?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. We are determined and focused in making sure that we do everything we can to ensure that we keep all our citizens safe. He rightly highlights the threat to us all of the online environment and the work that we need to do with our agencies right across the board. Great work is being done not just by the National Crime Agency but by other agencies to ensure that we are continually working to make sure that this is a safe environment. However, we all have a part to play in that, and we will continue to be focused on it in terms of finance and of policy and legislation.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): As a direct result of Government cuts, some fire brigades have cut the crew per pump from five to four and even four to three. That is not just an operational decision; it is a direct result of cuts. How sustainable is it?

Kit Malthouse: The exact disposition of the number of firefighters on each appliance is an operational decision. [Interruption.] It is. It is not my job to sit in Whitehall and decide how each fire service should run its operation. We have instituted the first inspection regime of fire and rescue services for some time, which specifically looks at

a service's effectiveness, efficiency and ability to perform its function. Lessons will be learned from the first round of inspections, which I hope and believe will improve the service.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Having called the hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti), to avoid marital disharmony, I must call the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns).

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

A few weeks ago, a young girl got stabbed in my constituency. The family are quite rightly frustrated, as the suspect is walking free while awaiting charges, and their young daughter has had to be put in foster care for her own safety. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss how we can reunite that family?

Priti Patel: I would like to express my sympathies to the family. That is a dreadful tragedy, and I would of course be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and the family to hear much more about that case.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Is it still the Government's aspiration for the UK to be a member of Europol?

Brandon Lewis: We have an ambitious programme of work for our future security arrangements. Other countries, such as the United States, have a relationship with Europol—in fact, I think the United States has the biggest attendance there at the moment. Europol is still an important part of our future as part of our future negotiations.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We must move on from questions to the Home Secretary to the statement by the Home Secretary.

Major Incident in Essex

3.36 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): I would like to update the House on the investigation into the tragic deaths of the 39 migrants discovered last Wednesday in Essex. This morning, the Prime Minister and I visited Thurrock in Essex, to sign the book of condolence and pay our respects to the 39 individuals who died in the most appalling circumstances in trying to reach the United Kingdom. These were people's sons and daughters, friends and family. As victims of brutal and unscrupulous criminal gangs, they have paid the ultimate price. We have been confronted with a stark reminder of the evils of people smuggling and human trafficking. This trade is a blight on the modern world. For the sake of these victims, and for millions like them, we must do all we can to stamp it out.

I would like to pay tribute once again to the outstanding professionalism shown by all our emergency services—in particular, the swift and professional response from the East of England ambulance service, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service and Essex police, who are leading the ongoing criminal investigation—and our operational partners who are working round the clock to assist the investigation, including the National Crime Agency.

The families of the victims, at this incredibly difficult time, are in all our thoughts and have my full sympathy. Nothing can ever undo the loss that they have suffered. We owe it to them to identify those responsible and ensure that they face the full force of the law. I want to work with those families to ensure that they can bring forward any evidence they have to help solve this appalling crime. With their help, we can bring the perpetrators to justice.

I would like to remind colleagues that this will be a long and meticulous investigation. As I heard today and last week from Essex police, it will involve working with partners overseas and foreign law enforcement agencies and unravelling a threat of criminality that could stretch halfway across the world. We are already working with a range of operational partners to piece together information. The police themselves—Essex police—will need to be given the time and space to do just that, while respecting the dignity of those who have died and of course the privacy of their families. The process of identifying the victims is continuing, and I would like to stress that their nationalities have still not yet been confirmed at this stage.

On Friday, three further people were arrested in connection with the incident. A 38-year-old man and a 38-year-old woman from Warrington were arrested in Cheshire, while a 46-year-old man from Northern Ireland was arrested at Stansted airport. All three were questioned on suspicion of manslaughter and conspiracy to traffic people, and have now been released on bail.

The driver of the vehicle was 25-year-old Maurice Robinson from Northern Ireland. This morning, he appeared at Chelmsford magistrates court via video link, charged with 39 counts of manslaughter, conspiracy to traffic people, conspiracy to assist unlawful immigration and money laundering. He has been remanded in custody and is next due to appear at the Old Bailey on 25 November.

Following the devastating discovery of the lorry at Tilbury, the Home Office has set up a dedicated team to co-ordinate an immediate response and a long-term response to this tragedy. I can confirm that Border Force is increasing its presence in Purfleet. It is working alongside Essex police to gather further information regarding this incident. The Home Office will now accelerate our joint intelligence-led operation between the police, the National Crime Agency and immigration enforcement, which aims to disrupt and deter organised crime gangs using refrigerated and hard-sided lorries to smuggle clandestine migrants.

I would like to stress once again that the nationalities of the victims have not been confirmed at this stage, but work is under way to co-ordinate the international response to this incident. I have already spoken to my Belgian counterpart, Minister De Crem, to invigorate the work that is taking place across both countries. I can confirm to the House that, as of today, I have received agreement from the Belgian authorities to deploy extra UK immigration enforcement officers to Zeebrugge. I have also been in contact with other international partners to offer assistance to any foreign nationals who may have been affected by this tragedy.

Last week's tragedy was the culmination of a broad, more general rise in global migration, but also of organised criminality. This is one of the most pressing issues for the UK, as well as for all our international partners. Illegal migration fuels organised crime, erodes public confidence and, most importantly, endangers the lives of desperate people. The perpetrators conduct their activities under a cloak of secrecy. The motivations that lead people to try to cross borders illegally are broad and complex. They are often among the most vulnerable, and then of course they are further exploited.

It is clear that we and all our partners must enhance our response. All areas of Government have a role to play—whether it is in strengthening our borders and eliminating the pull factors in this country, or in addressing many of the root causes to suppress demand for illegal migration. We already have an illegal migration strategy in place, but as the tragic events last week in Essex have shown, there is much more to do. I will be working across Government and Government Departments this week to plan how we can strengthen our response to the wider migration crisis that led these victims to try to enter the United Kingdom. The organised criminals who drive this practice are dynamic, unscrupulous and highly adaptable, but failing to confront them comes at a terrible human cost. We must be ruthless now in our response.

3.43 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for advance sight of her statement.

The events in Essex are a tragic loss of life. All death is regrettable, but this was a particularly gruesome and grotesque way to die, and an horrific experience for the first responders. Many of us in the House will have seen the images in our media over the weekend of desperate communities who are frightened that their young people may have been in that lorry. Many of us will have seen the messages from people to their families on the verge of their own suffocation. One woman said:

"I am really, really sorry, Mum and Dad, my trip to a foreign land has failed".

[Ms Diane Abbott]

I would like to thank the Home Secretary for the information about the arrests and about how some progress has been made in identifying the victims. However, as the investigation is ongoing and criminal charges are involved, I will not say more about this specific case.

As the Home Secretary said, people traffickers are particularly ruthless and simply do not care about human life. I was in Lesbos last year looking at the people trafficking from Turkey across the Mediterranean to Greece. The people traffickers not only deliberately took large sums of money off desperate people, but put those people in completely unseaworthy rubber dinghies. They gave people fake lifejackets and did not care that—as inevitably happened—many of them died in the Mediterranean. The people traffickers are greedy, ruthless and unscrupulous, and they have a callous disregard for human life.

I would, however, like to ask the Home Secretary whether the Home Office will be looking at security at some of the small east coast ports. I do not want to pre-empt the police investigation, but it seems that these small ports are being used because there is less security than at ports such as Dover.

I also want to ask the Home Secretary about the current co-operation with the European police, security and justice agencies in investigating this case. Specifically, how closely are our agencies, police forces and National Crime Agency working with Europol in this investigation? Will she also indicate the level of co-operation with the European Migrant Smuggling Centre, which is an agency of Europol? How are our agents benefiting from co-operation with what is the most sophisticated agency of its kind in the world?

Will the Home Secretary further explain how that co-operation can continue under a no-deal Brexit or the Prime Minister's deal? As things stand, we will lose the current level of co-operation, we will not have realtime access to EU agency databases, and we will lose access to a host of criminal databases and to the European arrest warrant. The House would therefore like to know what plans the Home Secretary has to maintain and, if anything, strengthen that co-operation.

This is a very tragic event. In some ways, it has humanised the issue of people trafficking for many people in this country. Of course we have to bear down on the people traffickers—they are ruthless and have no concern for human life—but we also have to look at issues such as how we make those eastern ports more secure and how we guarantee people the same level of co-operation with EU agencies that we currently have.

Priti Patel: I thank the right hon. Lady for her remarks. There are a number of points I would like to make.

First, the right hon. Lady is absolutely right about the first responders. They cannot unsee what they have experienced and seen through this awful crime. Secondly, she is right to recognise the scale of trafficking and the inhumanity—there is no other word that can describe it—of the perpetrators behind not only this crime but modern slavery, people smuggling and human trafficking.

The right hon. Lady specifically asked about checks at eastern ports. Those ports are not as vast as others and do not necessarily have the large amounts of freight

coming through. She will have heard me remark in my statement that, with regard to Purfleet, Border Force will obviously now be increasing its presence, but it will also be working with Essex police on targeting and on the response it needs to the incident itself, providing further information about what has happened.

The right hon. Lady asked about security and the drivers in terms of working in co-operation and in partnership with other agencies. Of course, that is exactly what we are doing right now. The National Crime Agency is, rightly, taking the lead on this investigation. As I said in my statement, it is a complicated investigation, and we are working with a number of agencies across the European Union, and with others, because of the routes that have been taken. I have no doubt that, over time, we will hear much more, and a lot more information will come out in due course.

The right hon. Lady specifically asked about Brexit and security co-operation. I would just say to the House that the way in which we can absolutely ensure that we have the strongest possible co-operation is by having a deal. That is exactly the Government's position and I would like the right hon. Lady and her party to support it.

On co-operation and security tools, there are no boundaries when it comes to our co-operation. The United Kingdom will remain one of the safest countries in the world, as well as a global leader on security.

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the leadership she is showing across Government on this issue. There has been a lot of talk over the past few days about the security at our east coast ports, but does she agree that it matters nothing how much security we put in place when people are being trafficked through numerous countries before arriving here and going through continental ports? Do not all jurisdictions need to step up to the plate and deliver on this?

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments and her question as the constituency Member of Parliament. We were together this morning to pay our respects and extend our condolences, alongside the Prime Minister. She will know, with Purfleet and Tilbury in her constituency, that the challenges are absolutely vast. She highlights the fact that we could have a huge amount of port security, which we do across the country, but that the major international issue is that serious organised crime gangs exploit vulnerable individuals from across the world who seek a better life in another country. They are the ones who have fallen victim in this case.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement and for advance sight of it. Like her, my thoughts, and those of my colleagues in the Scottish National party, are with the families of the victims, who it seems are far away and desperately trying to gather information about what might have happened to their loved ones. It is very difficult to fathom what it must be like to lose a loved one in such dreadful circumstances. I also join her in paying tribute to the response of the emergency services. I would like to express my concern for their wellbeing, given what they have seen.

I associate myself with what the Home Secretary said about the gross immorality and inhumanity of people smuggling. I will speak about the specifics rather than this case, as it is an ongoing investigation. As the shadow Home Secretary said, an international trafficking and smuggling network can only be broken up through international co-operation. I know that the Home Secretary recognises that. She will also recognise that the European Migrant Smuggling Centre, which is a part of Europol, has been at the heart of this inquiry and of other inquiries into similar tragedies. A Europol source has been quoted as saying that the investigators at Europol are:

“working around the clock trying to put together the pieces of the puzzle.”

I know the Home Secretary is keen for us to support the deal to leave the European Union, but that deal does not adequately address what plans the Government have to work with those vital EU institutions in future. It simply will not do to say that America has a relationship with Europol, because America is not in Europe—we are.

The UN’s trafficking envoy has said that withdrawing from Europol and Eurojust could curtail the UK’s ability to conduct the transnational investigations required to dismantle smuggling networks. Does she accept that leaving the European Union will make such investigations more difficult? If not, will she take this opportunity to clarify, in a way that she was unable to do before the Home Affairs Committee last week, what relationship she thinks the UK should have with those institutions following Brexit?

Priti Patel: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her comments on the actual incident in Essex, and on the issue at hand in terms of people smuggling and the 39 deaths. On her comments about security co-operation, I re-emphasise and restate that we continue to be one of the safest countries in the world and we will be a global leader in security.

The hon. and learned Lady asks about Europol. We can continue to work with Europol when we leave the EU: it is possible for third countries to do that, and there are very good examples of third countries, including the United States, doing so.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): This is indeed a terrible tragedy and, of course, our hearts go out to all the families concerned. I thank my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for praising the outstanding professionals in our emergency services. I also thank all those at Chelmsford magistrates court, where the case has been heard this morning; the Essex coroner and her deeply dedicated team, who are based in Chelmsford; all those working on the investigation at Essex police headquarters, which is also in Chelmsford; and the staff at Broomfield Hospital, which is just outside my constituency in the Saffron Walden constituency but is nevertheless where many of my Chelmsford constituents work—I understand that the bodies of the victims have been taken there. It is very clear that this incident will impact on very many people. Will the Home Secretary confirm that all support and resources will be available in the short and longer terms?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I thank her for highlighting the wide range of local organisations across the county of Essex, in her constituency

and neighbouring constituencies, that have been involved in this terrible, appalling tragedy, including those in the NHS and the coroner. We have discussed on several occasions since last Wednesday, including with the Prime Minister this morning, the type of support that will be put in place, because it is not just short-term support for the individuals who have been affected, the individuals who are now part of the investigation, and the inquiries and the post mortem that is taking place. It ranges from the TRiM—trauma risk management—process with the police and the ambulance service to the welfare service provision that will be put in place not just for today, but for the long term for everyone who has been involved in providing vital support to the police for this investigation.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Home Secretary will be aware of the disturbing news that children were found in another refrigerated lorry yesterday, this time at Calais. They were reportedly already suffering from mild hypothermia and were, luckily, found before it was too late. The refrigerated lorries are particularly dangerous and make this such an appalling crime. Will the Home Secretary say whether it is correct that hardly any checks of refrigerated lorries are taking place at the moment at Zeebrugge, and that at Purfleet 24/7 checks are still not taking place? She still has not explained what work is being done with Europol’s European Migrant Smuggling Centre. Is she working with that centre, and does she agree that we should continue to participate in it after December 2020?

Priti Patel: I thank the right hon. Lady for her comments. Let me be clear to the House: any form of trafficking and smuggling of individuals is completely wrong. She rightly highlights the appalling use of refrigerated lorries, which is effectively what we have seen in the case that she mentions and in what happened in Essex last week. The fact that these containers have been used and are being exploited by criminal gangs is a major issue that affects not just this country but other countries.

The right hon. Lady asks about checks; there are checks, and checks have been made when it comes to refrigerated lorries not just in the UK, but in other ports. She will appreciate, however, that, with the investigation that is taking place and the links with the Belgian authorities, there is much more information to come, specifically on the vehicle and the container that came through that particular port.

There are checks that take place in Zeebrugge as well. I said in my statement that we will escalate our work. There is a plan, working with my Belgian counterpart, to address the specifics of security issues in Zeebrugge and how we can extend more checks if required, although that is an operational decision not just at the port but with the Belgian authorities.

On the right hon. Lady’s question about co-operation, it is right that we co-operate internationally with all partners and all agencies—so, yes, that work is absolutely under way. There must be no doubt that even after we leave the EU, that co-operation will continue. As Home Secretary, I will not move away from high levels of co-operation. We will work day and night to make sure that we have the right processes and structures in place to ensure that that international collaboration continues and grows.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): The heartbreaking texts and final messages underline the abject misery, terror and horror of this modern slave trader practice. Is not our hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) absolutely right that we need to handle this, above all, with a new international convention, as current international arrangements are outdated, ineffective and patently not fit for today's needs?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend is right to raise that issue, as he has done previously. It is clear that this is not a UK-specific issue but an international one. While a great deal of work is done internationally, through global compacts and migration funds, there is much more we can do, working collaboratively with international partners and our friends and allies, to deal with the root causes—the upstream issues—and criminality and to put something into statute globally to stop this happening again.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): Our outrage continues. The latest statistics from the National Crime Agency show that the top nationalities for potential victims of trafficking to the UK were Albanian, Vietnamese and Chinese. Given what we may or may not know, what discussions has the Home Secretary had, particularly with Albania, China and Vietnam, about what is going on and what more can be done to stop it?

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. He will know, through his work on the all-party group on human trafficking and modern slavery, that there are specific source countries—he named some of them—where we see far too much trafficking and criminality. There are discussions taking place—I will not reel them all off, but I have been involved in some—and many more will follow. I emphasise, however, that, outside the Home Office, much more can be done across other Departments, and I will pursue that this week. We have seen various streams of activity by other Departments, but we need to join that up to ensure that we speak with one voice to these countries and that we ourselves have a much more coherent approach.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): It has been reported that the lorry entered the UK at the port of Holyhead before travelling on to Purfleet to collect the container. Given that the UK and Ireland are part of the same common travel area, and will remain so after Brexit, can my right hon. Friend confirm that North Wales police are and will remain adequately resourced to provide a sufficient presence at Holyhead to deter and detect such activity?

Priti Patel: Absolutely. Of course, resourcing the police to support Holyhead is just part of the process, and it is not just about this investigation; it is about ensuring we have the right level of security and the measures in place to enable police officers and others, including Border Force, to act on intelligence. It is worth reiterating something I said in my last statement: we are working with the Police Service of Northern Ireland in this investigation, which speaks to the many links between police forces.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement. A number of the 39 victims may well have come from Vietnam. If so, may I, as chair of the all-party group on Vietnam, offer my heartfelt sympathies to the victims and families? We know that the Prime Minister of Vietnam has announced an inquiry into human trafficking in his country. May I have a commitment from the Home Secretary that her Government will fully co-operate with the Government of Vietnam to make sure that this terrible trade is eliminated?

Priti Patel: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks and the work he does through the all-party group. Although the nationalities have yet to be confirmed, as I touched on in my statement, we will of course work with all our partners. I have already spoken to the Vietnamese ambassador. Many discussions are under way that, as he will understand, are very sensitive at this stage, but we will of course co-operate with any inquiries into human trafficking and people smuggling.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): The Home Secretary has mentioned Northern Ireland. In that context, will she assure me that the Criminal Assets Bureau will have all the resources it requires to play a full part in the investigation? Does she agree that it is time that unexplained wealth orders were in force in Northern Ireland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Of course, there is always more that we must do when it comes to seizing cash and assets from the perpetrators of crime. He is right: there is absolutely much more that we can do. At this stage, we will look into everything in the light of the inquiry and investigation, but I will continue to discuss with the Ministry of Justice how we can upscale some of it.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): On the question of utilising intelligence, there were reports over the weekend that people living near the Waterglade industrial park had previously reported seeing migrants being dropped off from lorries, and, indeed, had found discarded foreign passports at the site, but that their reports were not followed up. Will the Home Secretary comment on that?

Priti Patel: We have received no formal reports of anything of that nature, but we will obviously follow up any evidence of wrongdoing or the discarding of foreign documents.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): No one could fail to be moved by the terrible stories of young lives that were literally snuffed out. I appreciate that my right hon. Friend cannot say where the victims came from, but I know that in the past some victims have been identified as coming from Vietnam, and that the UK has a very strong ministerial strategic dialogue with Vietnam. Will the Home Secretary ensure that at the next meeting she discusses with her officials how we can communicate to these young people, jointly, the message that they should not make this dangerous journey?

Priti Patel: That dialogue is already under way, and, in view of the terrible tragedy that has taken place, it is right that it is under way.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Human trafficking is indeed a terrible crime, and the perpetrators must be brought to justice. Ironically, it is some of the victims who have already arrived in this country who know most about these criminals and their methods, and it would assist us hugely if we could persuade them to turn Queen's evidence without fear of retribution or deportation. Does the Home Secretary agree that we should look at mechanisms whereby that might happen without their being too fearful to come forward and help us?

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I can assure the House that in this particular investigation, that is exactly how we will be working.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): These containers are not necessarily moved around on the backs of lorries, but may be parked on ferries and so on. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the authorities, Border Force and the police—and, indeed, the drivers of the lorries—have the means and the competence to open the containers if necessary?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend raises some important points. There are a number of ways of providing support for lorry drivers and others. A great deal of work is done through road haulage associations in the UK and across the EU to provide information and intelligence about what to do in situations of this nature, and also about how they can protect themselves from trafficking. If there is anything else that my hon. Friend would specifically like to know about the Home Office's and Border Force's work and about how we collaborate with many other organisations, I shall be happy to write to him.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Hull has a long and proud tradition of fighting the evils of human trafficking and slavery. Many of my constituents have been in touch to say how shocked they are about what happened in Essex. They want to know whether additional checks will be carried out at the port of Hull, particularly on refrigerated containers, because we now know that the traffickers seem to be turning their attention to ports on the east coast.

Priti Patel: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. She will know, with the port in her own constituency, that various challenges have now been highlighted. It is important to acknowledge that those who are trafficking people are trying to exploit any vulnerabilities in any aspects of port security, such as, as we have seen, with the refrigerated lorries. Given the work taking place specifically with Border Force right now, I would like to drop the hon. Lady a line and at least keep her updated on the changes that will be forthcoming with regard to the port in Hull.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for coming to the House to make this statement, because it demonstrates how seriously the Government take this matter. Will she

spare a thought for the Border Force officers in Harwich, which I represent, who will be haunted by the possibility of a similar tragedy passing through their care? I am confident that they have sufficient capability, on an intelligence-led basis, to make checks, but they cannot check every single container. Will she also bear in mind the fact that when I have alerted the Essex police and the Essex Border Force to activity on the Essex coast reported by constituents they have always been very swift to respond, and indeed have closed down one operation very effectively already?

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and, being a neighbouring Member of Parliament, I do know Harwich. He is right to point out that all port operators and border staff around the country will be looking at what has happened over the last week with shared horror. They will be taking the right action in their own day-to-day work on risk-based checks, but at this stage I want to give the House the assurance that we are giving Border Force all the support it needs and we are working collaboratively with port operators. I also thank my hon. Friend for his work with Essex police when he has raised concerns in respect of the port of Harwich and on how to deal with those issues.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The Home Secretary will know that three years ago the Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration produced a report on the east coast ports that raised a number of concerns about their operation. Will she agree to look again at the recommendations of the Border Force inspector to see whether she can update the House on the implementation of those recommendations?

Priti Patel: I have gone through that report and seen the recommendations. I am currently reviewing aspects of them, but in particular how we can make them more relevant, because that was a report from 2016—although the findings were published in 2017—and things have clearly moved on since then. But of course there is another factor here: the extent of the organised international criminality, as well as many of the port security features that were raised in that report that also need to be looked at.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind): I thank my right hon. Friend for her powerful statement and the seriousness with which she has taken this very serious matter. She will be aware that small ports and airfields have long been known to be a problem and security weakness; indeed, the former Prime Minister proposed a volunteer force to patrol them. May I urge her not to have a Dad's Army set up like that but instead to have more investment in our Border Force, the National Crime Agency and in working internationally with our partners to combat this appalling and evil trade?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and we are speaking here about international organised criminality through various gangs, routes and countries where this facilitation is taking place. It is right that we invest, and we are investing in the NCA and through our partners, such as our Border Force, and through police and through all aspects of our homeland security, and we will continue to do that.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): The Home Secretary will know that the Government asked her right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), Lady Butler-Sloss and me to review the Modern Slavery Act 2015. During our inquiry we met Border Force staff from a large, not a small, port, and they told us that, unlike for airports where there are passenger lists, they know nothing—absolutely nothing—about the people who are coming through the ports. We asked to meet the Home Secretary urgently to talk about this. Might she speed up our meeting with her, please?

Priti Patel: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for raising his concerns. The answer is yes, of course I would be delighted to meet him. On top of that, he is right to recognise, through his review, the difference between air and sea in terms of the data that are collected. It is clear that when it comes to goods, there are customs checks, declarations and manifests, but when it comes to people we will obviously need to continue our discussions to see what more we can do in that area.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): May I offer my sympathy to the victims and their families? I concur with my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) that the message today is that we need stronger borders, not weaker ones, not just here but across Europe. While I am talking about that, may I just touch on South Dorset, whose police and crime commissioner has called for more officials at Portland port? Will my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary look at that, too?

Priti Patel: I would be more than happy to discuss port support with my hon. Friend and to talk about what more can be done in his area. He is right to identify the need to protect our ports and to ensure that we have the right checks and processes in place across the entire country—which we do as part of the risk-based system—and that they are operated in a consistent way.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Four members of an organised crime gang operating out of Govanhill in my constituency were recently convicted in the High Court in Glasgow of offences relating to the trafficking of 14 vulnerable women. That was a complex, five-year-long investigation led by Police Scotland but also involving UK police forces, Europol, Eurojust and the Slovak police force. I understand that a parallel court case is ongoing in Slovakia. Can the Home Secretary guarantee that the police in Scotland will have exactly the same access to that level of co-operation, post Brexit? Will Brexit have any impact on ongoing cases?

Priti Patel: The hon. Lady has just highlighted how complicated international criminal investigations are. We will expect to see exactly a similar meticulous process in the case in Essex. It is right that we continue all avenues of international co-operation, not just now but when we leave the European Union.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Ind): As the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Vietnam, I echo the comments made by the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Vietnam, the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David). I should like to extend my thanks

to the Vietnamese ambassador to the UK, Ambassador An, and to the Vietnamese Government for their co-operation. I also extend my condolences. I also echo the Home Secretary's comments. As a trade envoy, I see the Department for International Trade, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence in Vietnam all the time. We discuss these issues, but, as my right hon. Friend has suggested, more co-ordination between Government Departments would be very welcome.

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend will know from his own experience the way in which the Government work together, but there are now specific fundamental challenges. If we are going to stop countries continuing the facilitation of illegal people trafficking and migrant movements, there is more that we can do across Government. I look forward to his work and his support in trying to address some of those issues.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): All too often, there is another layer of cruel injustice, which is that families in very poor districts—for instance, in Vietnam—have done everything in their power, including remortgaging their lands, to raise enough money to send a favoured son or daughter through one of these illegal routes. They then lose not only their child but their land and their means of making a living. Is there nothing we can do to try to strike down these hideous financial deals?

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. In people smuggling and the trafficking of individuals, we are witnessing the worst of the worst. We are seeing perpetrators exploiting vulnerable individuals and families, more often than not putting them into debt bondage. They lose their livelihoods and they are then exploited once their children or family members arrive in another country. There is more that we can do—there is no doubt about that—but that can be achieved only through bilateral co-operation and international standards and co-operation across the board, so that we have consistency. If we are going to stop this practice happening, we have to stop vulnerable families being exploited. From the British Government's perspective, yes we will do more, but we will also lead calls internationally to try to root this out.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): As the other Member of Parliament for Thurrock, may I say that we remain shocked and appalled by the events? We can only imagine the pain that the families must be feeling. I pay tribute not only to the first responders but to council officers and councillors, many of whom are my constituents, who have stepped up to meet the challenge. To deter further attempts at moving people in this despicable way, what discussions has my right hon. Friend had both here and abroad about adopting new technology to try to tackle the issue?

Priti Patel: I echo my hon. Friend's words of thanks to Thurrock Council for its work. Having met the leader of the council and other staff this morning, I am grateful to them for their local support. Technology can play a significant role here. It is pretty clear that refrigerated vehicles and containers are being exploited for a range of reasons. The Home Office is investing a great deal not only in research but in new technology for enhancements in border controls. We must also do much more internationally in this area.

Shared Rural Network

4.20 pm

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nicky Morgan): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement to the House about connectivity and our recent announcement about the shared rural network. Last month, this Government announced £5 billion to accelerate the roll-out of the highest-speed internet across the country, including in our rural heartlands. The money is being targeted towards the hardest-to-reach areas of the UK, so that they will not have to wait for their homes and businesses to be connected to fast, reliable broadband. They will be given connections capable of download speeds of 1 gigabit per second to take advantage of everything that the next generation of new technology has to offer.

Connectivity on the go is equally important. Mobile phones are revolutionising our day-to-day lives and are crucial for businesses as they compete and grow. Half of adults—I reckon this will apply to pretty much every right hon. and hon. Member—say that they missed their mobile phone the most of all their devices, with one in three saying that they never use a computer to go online.

However, too many areas of the country are still waiting for high-quality mobile coverage. Today, only 66% of the UK landmass has geographic coverage from all four mobile network operators and 9%, largely in rural areas, has no coverage at all. I am therefore pleased to inform the House that last week the Government announced support for a shared rural network programme, subject to binding legal agreement being concluded. The proposal has been brought to Government by the four UK mobile network operators—EE, Vodafone, 3 and O2—and sets out their ambition to collectively increase 4G mobile coverage throughout the United Kingdom to 95% by 2025.

Under the proposal, areas that have coverage from only some providers—partial notspots—will be almost entirely eliminated, meaning that we will get good 4G signal anywhere, no matter our provider. It also promises to deliver greater coverage in the total notspots—the areas that currently have no mobile phone signal at all. The network will result in 95% of the UK getting coverage, including additional coverage to 16,000 km of roads and 280,000 premises. The biggest improvements will be felt in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The four operators will commit up to £530 million to get rid of the partial notspots, but we recognise the difficulty of building infrastructure in remote locations. The Government are therefore sharing the cost and are prepared to provide a further £500 million to eliminate total notspots. The Government's investment will provide new digital infrastructure in areas that are not commercially viable for operators, to ensure that this new service provision continues for at least 20 years. It will also cover the cost of upgrades to the emergency services infrastructure, making it available to commercial operators.

The announcement is great news for consumers and a big step forward by the mobile network operators. It will be underpinned by legally binding commitments from each operator to reach more than 92% UK coverage by 2026. The mobile network operators will adopt new coverage obligations within their existing spectrum licence conditions to ensure that the outcomes will be delivered.

If they cannot demonstrate that all reasonable efforts have been made to comply with the obligations, there are penalties for the operators, with a maximum fine of up to 10% of annual turnover. Although 2025 is the target date, many consumers will feel the benefit of the programme long before its conclusion. Annual coverage improvement targets will be published, and Ofcom will report regularly on the shared rural network's progress in its "Connected Nations" publication.

The UK has a vibrant telecoms industry, and we are keen that the shared rural network proposal reflects that. The programme will be jointly delivered by all four mobile network operators, but it is expected that organisations from across the industry would have the opportunity to get involved in delivering the programme at various levels of the supply chain, building the required infrastructure in an open, fair and transparent way.

The mobile network operator proposal is conditional on Ofcom removing its proposed coverage commitments, which were included in the design of the original auction. I have written to Sharon White, the chief executive of Ofcom, setting out the Government's support for the programme, subject to a binding legal agreement being concluded. It is for Ofcom to decide how it wishes to proceed with the auction. This morning, Ofcom opened its consultation on an alternative auction design, without coverage obligations.

I have also made it clear to the mobile network operators and to Ofcom that the Government retain the right to support the original Ofcom auction if a final and legally binding agreement on the shared rural network is not reached. I have considered the shared rural network proposal carefully, along with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and I am satisfied that it improves on the coverage obligations set out in Ofcom's proposed auction and should deliver good value for money. However, I have made it clear to the mobile network operators that, until a final agreement is reached, the Government's support does not make a legally binding arrangement or contract and does not create any expectation that Government will act in that way.

In the coming months, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Ofcom and the mobile operators will work to finalise the legal agreement so that we can get on with the important job of improving mobile coverage. The operators share our ambition. I am confident that this proposal is the answer, and I expect to be in a position to update the House early next year.

This is a world-first deal that means that consumers will be able to rely on their own provider's network to use their mobile phones wherever they are. It will make patchy coverage a thing of the past and mean that more people in rural areas can benefit from the speed and efficiency of coverage on the go. This Government are committed to giving rural areas across our United Kingdom the digital connectivity needed to flourish and to make the UK a world leader in 5G technologies. That is what this landmark investment will do. I commend this statement to the House.

4.27 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of her statement. May I start by welcoming her professed enthusiasm for pulling this country out of the cyber slow lane? However,

[Liam Byrne]

having read her statement, I am afraid to say that, on close examination, it would appear that our Teletext Tories will have to do rather better than this.

Let me start, for the benefit of hon. Members, with the points on which we agree. It is surely right that we dramatically step up the efforts to pull the country into the 21st century. We were a leader once. Now the networks that we have, like the targets that we have set, are well behind the best in the world; so while today's progress is, I suppose, welcome, it is really half of a half-measure, when what was needed was a bold 10-year national switchover plan to deliver ubiquitous gigabit per second access to every corner of the country.

At our most generous, we welcome the commitment to 95% 4G coverage, because it is better than the 91% that we have today, but I am afraid that still leaves a 4,681 square mile area of the country where coverage will be non-existent or not good enough. As Members know, that is an area twice the size of Norfolk and much bigger than our largest county, North Yorkshire. Nor, it would appear, will progress be as rapid as was promised. In its manifesto, the Conservative party promised 95% coverage by 2022. Now the Secretary of State says it is 2025, and the industry briefing issued this morning says that will not be achieved until 2026.

Nor is the proposal as well financed as is needed. Ofcom says that the cost of sorting out all the notspots in the country is between £3 billion and £6 billion, yet just £1 billion has been announced, half from industry and half from Government. At best, it is half of a half-measure. Nor, it seems, is the deal with the industry actually done. As the Secretary of State made clear in the rapid canter through the final paragraphs of her statement,

"the Government's support does not make a legally binding arrangement or contract and does not create any expectation that Government will act in that way."

That is known as the small print; in this House, we call it, at best, a running commentary on what she is doing in the office this week. It is a running commentary on half of a half-measure that is four years late and leaves an area of the country twice the size of Norfolk without the coverage it needs. Members will therefore forgive us for not applauding this announcement from the rooftops.

However, to take this announcement seriously for a moment, which is more than the Chancellor obviously has, I suppose we should trouble the Secretary of State with some questions on her running commentary on half of a half-measure. Her Majesty's Government have already backtracked on their commitment to full fibre roll-out by 2025. Can she reassure the House that this measure, such as it is, will not be diluted any further? Will she bless us with some interim targets? Perhaps they could be knocked together. If so, are we likely to see them any time soon? She told us today that the paperwork is not going to be signed until 2020, but she says that Ofcom has announced that it is moving ahead with a consultation on the spectrum auction, without coverage obligations. Why is Ofcom proceeding with that, given that the Secretary of State is commending this different approach to us this afternoon? Under the plans will consumers be able to access a choice of all four network operators in the 95% area that she has

sketched out? Finally, I suppose the Secretary of State should be asked to tell us whether she agrees with Ofcom that £3 billion to £6 billion is going to be needed to eliminate all notspots in the country. If she does agree, will she explain why she is not bringing that proposal to us this afternoon?

Today our network ranks not as the first, second or third best in the world, but as the 26th. Some Eighty per cent. of our constituencies do not enjoy 4G coverage from all big four operators. I know the Secretary of State has done her very best today to dress this up, but we should call it what it is: too little, too late, for a country that deserves far better. *[Interruption.]*

Nicky Morgan: I thank the right hon. Gentleman—I think—for the response to the statement. The paltry support he got from those on his Benches when he sat down showed that they did not think much of it either. It was a typical grudging response from the Labour party, rather than a recognition that this is a significant step forward for consumers and for our constituents. Just to answer some of the questions he put on behalf of the Labour luddites in this House, let me say that the 95% target for 2025 is achieved by getting to just over 92% by 2026. This is a clear commitment given by the four mobile network operators, and it is actually much better than achieving it either through the spectrum auction or through any other roaming proposals. It is right that we should see that this is delivered properly and comprehensively across the UK, rather than rushing, although we are clear about the 2025 target.

On interim targets, we are obviously going to wait for industry to say how quickly it is able to do the roll-out, but I was clear in my statement to say that many areas will see this coverage much more quickly.

On the letter from Ofcom, it is obviously a decision for Ofcom as to whether to carry on with the auction coverage. However, I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman read Sharon White's letter, because she is very clear that by following this proposal and sharing infrastructure,

"the four operators can deliver much greater improvements in coverage at less cost than they could do individually",

and:

"We believe this is an efficient way of improving coverage which should provide a better experience for consumers than other alternatives like rural roaming."

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether all four were included in the 95%, and that is absolutely the case.

This is a significant moment for improving mobile connectivity, which is absolutely essential to making sure that the UK plays its part in being able to develop, use and innovate the technologies of the future. I would hope that all those who hope for coverage in areas such as the west midlands, which is leading the charge in terms of the 5G test beds, under the brilliant mayoralty of Andy Street, could celebrate rather than offer this grudging response today.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Ind): When the previous Prime Minister rang to fire me from my position as telecoms Minister, she could not get through because I did not have a signal on my mobile phone, so this announcement today is close to my heart. May I ask the Secretary of State to update the House on any changes to planning regulations, which are often the barrier to erecting much-needed mobile phone masts in rural areas?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my right hon. Friend very much for his question. As he will know, at the end of August we announced a consultation, which closes on 4 November, about how we can simplify the planning process in relation to mobile phone masts. Obviously, a balance needs to be struck between having masts and coverage right the way across the country and allowing local communities to have their say. We await the responses to the consultation and will bring forward further proposals to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call Chi Onwurah.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab)
rose—

Mr Speaker: I apologise to the hon. Lady; I meant to call Hannah Bardell.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker; I am glad not to be forgotten.

In the words of the author Arthur Herman, “Scotland invented the modern world”, but the reality is that Scotland is now being held back by this Tory Government. The Scottish National party welcomes the Government’s announcement about the shared rural network proposals; if they are delivered with the improvements that the Secretary of State says there will be, they will be improvements for our rural and island communities. But even with that investment, Scotland’s 4G coverage level would still be below the overall UK-wide geographic coverage figure of 95%, leaving further work to be done.

I have to say that I am pleased that the Secretary of State seems to possess a more realistic understanding of what the devolution agreement actually is than her Scottish Tory colleagues. She is aware, it is clear, that telecommunications is a reserved matter. But with Scotland receiving just 3% of UK Government funding for broadband, compared with Northern Ireland’s 91% funding, will she reassure me that the programme will be rolled out and that, when it is, we will get a fairer funding settlement than we have had thus far?

People hearing this announcement today could be forgiven for having a sense of *déjà vu*. The 2017 Conservative manifesto promised to end rural notspots by 2022—a target that we know will not be met. We are now being told that the target will be 2025. Can the Secretary of State give me a cast-iron guarantee that that target will be met? If not, will it really have the teeth that she is suggesting?

Nicky Morgan: I thank the hon. Lady very much for her reply; at least she was a little more enthusiastic than the Labour Front Bencher—not difficult, given the low bar that he set.

The current coverage of all four operators in Scotland is 41%; under these proposals, that would get to 85% of Scotland. Of course there will be more to do—there always is. MPs have fought for this issue: I have been significantly lobbied by Scottish Conservative colleagues for this improvement. The hon. Lady and constituents across Scotland should be encouraged, given that the proposal has come forward from the operators themselves. That means, I think, that they are confident about being able to deliver it.

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on persuading the mobile operators to do what they resisted and told us was completely impossible for them to do? When she comes to address the final 5%—the notspots—will she ensure that lessons are learned from the previous attempt, which was the mobile infrastructure project? Unfortunately, that was able to deliver only a fraction of the number of miles promised, given the numerous obstacles that it ran into.

Nicky Morgan: I thank my right hon. Friend. As a former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, he will understand the significant challenges that there have been to bring everyone together to work on this. He is right to point out that there will always be a final 5%, but there are other proposals such as the roll-out of broadband, all of which have to be taken in the round. We are talking about 4G today, but there are also the 5G proposals and broadband. We know that this is a challenge and that it is in the most rural areas that connectivity is most important.

Chi Onwurah: Businesses and citizens across this country suffer the consequences of the Tories’ ideology of austerity, which prevented proper investment in our digital infrastructure. Rural broadband is not a next generation “nice to have”, but a necessity here and now. Therefore, given this agreement for shared infrastructure, will the Secretary of State say what the quality requirements are for uplink, downlink, latency and congestion; how rural areas will benefit from the infrastructure competition that there still will be in the rest of the country—will he commit to there still being an infrastructure competition in the rest of the country—and how we can make sure that the telecoms companies are accountable for the public money that they will be given to make this happen?

Nicky Morgan: I thank the hon. Lady very much for her question. In talking about the difficulties and the disappointments, she almost ran out of time to actually ask her questions. She is right to say that connectivity is hugely important for all our constituents wherever they are. There will be, as she will know if she looks at the detail, a shared rural network entity, to which all four mobile network operators will be party, and that is the way they will be held accountable by the Department for the targets they are meeting.

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): I suspect that, had my right hon. Friend announced a coverage improvement to 195%, the Labour party would still not have said that it was enough. Some of us can see this for what it is, which is a significant step in the right direction, on which I congratulate her. None the less, does she agree that, as she said, this is a voluntary agreement in exchange for removal of conditions on a spectrum auction, and that it is sensible to make sure that Ofcom keeps compulsory roaming on the table until the ink is dry on a voluntary agreement to make it happen?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend very much. There appears to be a surfeit of former holders of my office on these Benches today, which is a sign of just how much time everyone in this job has had to invest in getting to this stage. He is right that it would not have mattered what we announced

[*Nicky Morgan*]

today, the Labour party would have found reason to disagree with it, which is unfair to the people they represent. He is absolutely right that we need to keep all the options on the table until that legally binding agreement is concluded, and that is what we will both be doing.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Well, I welcome what the right hon. Lady has had to say today, but the people I get very fed up with are those from mobile phone companies, because they will quite often say that a person in a village such as Porth has 100% coverage when, actually, nobody in Hannah Street can get any signal whatsoever. Recently, when there was an arson attack on the mast, which covered several different companies, EE did not even bother to tell all its local customers that coverage would be out for four weeks and it refused to give compensation. The mobile phone companies simply must do better.

Nicky Morgan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. Anybody would think that he was standing for election next week given how much he welcomed this announcement.

Chris Bryant: We might all be doing so.

Nicky Morgan: That is very true.

The hon. Gentleman makes a very fair point, which is that honesty about the coverage being offered is very important. There is nothing more frustrating for people than being told that they have coverage—or it even looking like they have coverage on their phone—but they still cannot make a call. I am concerned to hear how EE handled that particular attack. I hope that Members right across the House will always know that, if they have problems such as that, they should contact me, the Ministers involved, or the Department so that we can follow it up on their behalf.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): How and when will my constituents in west Berkshire and Wokingham be able to get an advantage out of this excellent initiative? Will they need to do anything?

Nicky Morgan: No, they will not need to do anything. They will see the roll-out. Near, if not in, his constituency is, of course, a significant office of Vodafone, and we are grateful that it is part of these arrangements.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The Secretary of State said that we should be fair to those we represent, so, in that spirit, I ask her this. After one of my constituents on the Isle of Arran almost died owing to notspots last year, the previous Secretary of State assured me that there would be 95% coverage in each of the four UK nations by 2022. We see today that that target has now slipped to 2025, and we know that Scotland's 4G coverage will still be less than the UK-wide numbers, as the Secretary of State set out. Will she explain to the House, in the interests of my constituents, what has gone wrong with tackling notspots so far in Scotland and when Scotland will have the same coverage as the rest of the UK?

Nicky Morgan: I would ask the hon. Lady also to raise that question with the Scottish Government. She is right to say that we want to get on with this and that matters of critical importance—even life and death—can rely on having a mobile phone signal, but we need to do this in the right way so that it actually works and provides reliable coverage. As I said in my statement, although 2025 is the target date, there are many areas where shared 4G coverage will be in place much sooner. There are difficulties in the more rural areas, which is why this is going to take slightly longer to roll out in some parts of the UK. I hope that we will have more details in time so that constituents can see where that coverage is going to be achieved in their area.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): First, until we change the rules in national parks, we are not going to achieve universal coverage. Secondly, Connecting Devon and Somerset has been a disaster. Will the Secretary of State please change what that project is doing? Until we do, the good burghers of Somerset and Devon are not going to get universal coverage.

Nicky Morgan: I will certainly look into the issue that my hon. Friend has raised in relation to the national parks, but of course there are always going to be challenges. It is not just about throwing money at the problem. It is also often about ensuring that the physical infrastructure is allowed to be erected.

With regard to Connecting Devon and Somerset, the digital and broadband Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), had a meeting with Members from the area. We know that there have been issues, and obviously the organisation is looking for alternative providers. My hon. Friend is talking about broadband connectivity, which is a slightly separate issue, but he is right because at the end of the day, constituents do not distinguish; they just want better connectivity all round.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): A shared rural network is to be welcomed, as it could vastly improve coverage in Ceredigion. The Secretary of State will appreciate that rural communities will be eager to see swift progress on this proposal, so could she clarify whether recently constructed Home Office masts, in addition to any future emergency services network infrastructure, will be made available to this end where appropriate?

Nicky Morgan: My understanding is that the answer to that question is yes, but I will confirm that and let the hon. Gentleman have the full details.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement and decisive action on this matter. Coverage in rural areas is very dependent on the roll-out of the emergency services network, which is behind schedule and over budget. I understand that it is the preserve of the Home Office, not her Department, but will she use her best endeavours to ensure that this project is brought back on track?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend very much indeed for his comments, and pay tribute to him for campaigning on this issue and encouraging other Members to work together to ensure that my Department was

rightly put under some pressure to make sure that we delivered on it. He will be interested to know that since I have taken over the Department we have been working very closely with the Home Office and got the agreement about the emergency services network, but I accept his challenge, and the conversations with the Home Office will of course continue.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): East Lothian has been let down by Governments north and south of the border, who have ended the LEADER programme, as well as the Community Broadband Scotland and R100 funding. If it were not for East Lothian Council and local companies such as Lothian Broadband that have found imaginative solutions to this problem, East Lothian—its businesses, constituents and the children who are just trying to do their homework—would be in a desperate state. Between the Palace of Westminster and East Lothian, which will win the coverage war?

Nicky Morgan: I will leave the hon. Gentleman to have his fight with the Scottish Government, but he makes a good case about how slow some progress has been under their ownership. I pay tribute to those in East Lothian, including businesses and local authorities, for the work done locally. We are talking about a shared rural network, but this is also a shared endeavour to ensure that we have good connectivity. I would like to think that the more we can all work together, the more likely it is that this announcement will turbocharge connectivity in East Lothian.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State. The shared rural network—something I have lobbied her predecessors for on many occasions—is fantastic news, because healthcare and businesses in rural areas such as my constituency in Devon cannot survive without it. The Secretary of State has mentioned 5G. Could she perhaps look at prioritising the roll-out of 5G in rural areas, where the need is so much greater?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming this announcement. 5G is already being rolled out and there is no intention to stop that process, but we need 4G as well. The intention is to ensure that her constituents have the best connectivity possible, rather than picking particular technologies. There is already some 5G around her constituency in Devon, but I do accept her challenge. At the end of the day, I think constituents just want faster connectivity—in a way, regardless of how it is delivered. We want the UK to be a world leader in 5G, and it is very important that that happens.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment today to the rural broadband network roll-out. She will know that through the confidence and supply agreement, certain amounts of money have already been set aside for the rural network. Perhaps, Mr Speaker, you, like me, will recall Radio Luxembourg and remember that it faded in and out. There are still parts of the Province where a rural network is not achievable. What will be done to address that issue for small and medium-sized businesses and for those who are self-employed, where it is really important to have rural broadband network roll-out?

Nicky Morgan: The hon. Gentleman is right that having good broadband and good mobile connectivity is important for all of us, but particularly for our small and medium-sized businesses, many of which are run from rural, even residential, premises and need that connectivity to be fast and reliable, and not, as he says, to fade in and out. I hope he will welcome the fact that at the moment the coverage of all four operators is 78% in Northern Ireland, but once the shared rural network programme has taken effect, which we very much hope it will and as it is expected to, it will reach 91% of Northern Ireland.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I regularly survey my constituents in Brigg and Goole and the Isle of Axholme on this and produce a network by network, geographically located report. EE has been very good in responding to those surveys. A new mast in Broughton will come online on 5 November as a result of that, and changes are also being made to a mast in Reedness, so there is some good news. However, it is clear from my surveying of constituents that the maps provided by the networks do not have a great deal of reality compared with what my constituents are experiencing. May I urge the Secretary of State to look at that? Will she also look at local authorities offering up their facilities? One of my local authorities, North Lincolnshire Council, did that, but not a single one of the networks took it up on that offer.

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend makes a good point about maps. That is really important. Now that the mobile network operators are working together, it will hopefully be easier to get that information so that our constituents will be able to see the progress that is being made. He talks encouragingly about the two masts and the changes already happening in his constituency. In relation to local authorities, we are working with the Cabinet Office and having conversations to make sure that local authority infrastructure such as hospitals and schools can also be used to increase and improve connectivity in these communities.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State straightforwardly confirm that the deadline set out in her party's 2017 manifesto will not now be achieved? Competition between mobile providers has been very fruitful for consumers over the past 20 years, particularly in reducing call charges. How will Ministers make sure that future fruitful competition will not be blunted by this collaboration?

Nicky Morgan: We are not nationalising the mobile network operators—they have come forward with a plan to work together, which is a very good sign. One of the key elements we will need to get this right and to follow the legal processes is to be compliant with competition law. The right hon. Gentleman invites me to say that earlier targets are not necessarily going to be met. Of course, we have not yet reached the end of this Parliament. Actually, I think that his constituents, like mine, are interested in what we are going to do rather than necessarily always looking at the numbers.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): This is very good news for Staffordshire. Even around the Lichfield area we have notspots. What consideration did my right

[*Michael Fabricant*]

hon. Friend's Department give to roaming? If roaming were permitted, as it already is for 999 calls, this could be introduced so much quicker.

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome for this network. I am delighted that it is going to benefit Staffordshire and all parts of the United Kingdom. The mobile network operators have proposed, and we agree with them, that it will be much better for consumers because it will be much more consistent. The thing about roaming is that people get passed from network operator to network operator, so there is more risk of the signal falling out, whereas in this way they stay with their network operator as they travel across the United Kingdom, and therefore the signal is much more likely to remain consistent.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): My constituency runs along the M4 corridor, and I have been raising the specific issue of the south Wales valleys with the Secretary of State's predecessors and previous digital Ministers for the three and a half years that I have been in this House. Large areas of my constituency have no coverage, and my valleys are blamed for that. Can she set out what specific support will be available for south Wales valley communities, and will she consider using areas such as the M4 to improve connectivity?

Nicky Morgan: I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman, or the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), will be. Unfortunately, although I have many powers, moving mountains and valleys is not one of them—there is a limit to what I am able to do, but perhaps in due course, who knows? We would need to talk to the mobile network operators about their proposals in relation to the infrastructure needed for the future and for masts in particular. As I said in my statement, this proposal will deliver additional coverage to 16,000 km of roads, and I certainly hope that the M4 corridor will be one of those.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): This announcement is hugely welcome for the people of Lincolnshire, who are suffering from notspots. What can I do to ensure that Lincolnshire gets access to the network earlier rather than later between now and 2025?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend. She might want to take a leaf out of the book of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), by working with the mobile network operators to map where they have coverage and masts and where they think they will need new infrastructure, to ensure that this coverage can be delivered. I know that she will be very active in lobbying for that, to benefit her constituents.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I, too, welcome today's announcement. As you know, Mr Speaker, I have said countless times in this place that connectivity in my constituency is very patchy and simply not good enough, so I am grateful for this. I want to ask the Secretary of State to do two things. First, can she ask her private office to provide a big map of Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross? Secondly,

can she write to the Scottish Government saying, "Could you give us a list of all the bad parts of Jamie Stone's constituency?" and then put them on her map, for them to be ticked off one by one?

Nicky Morgan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming this announcement. I am sure that my private office will be listening with great interest to his request for a map and details of the coverage. That would be a good thing to provide, with as much detail as we can, so I will certainly ask the operators about that.

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): The shared rural network will be welcomed in East Hampshire, but what my constituents will most want to know is when they will see things improve in their area.

Nicky Morgan: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. He is right; this is about people being able to see improved coverage. That is why it is important that the mobile network operators conclude the binding legal agreement, so that we are able to map, have milestones for when the coverage will be delivered and understand exactly what infrastructure is needed and which operators need to share infrastructure more. I hope that he will play his part as the local MP by asking operators those questions, and we will certainly play our part in ensuring that they reveal that information to MPs.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I echo the wide welcome for my right hon. Friend's announcement from those Government Members who represent rural constituencies, as well as from some Opposition Members, excluding those on the shadow Front Bench, who do not know what "rural" means. My right hon. Friend referred to the emergency services network and making massive improvements to coverage in the road network, which is excellent. Could she also encourage the operators to improve the signal on our rail network? Many of us are unable to work while travelling to and from this place by rail.

Nicky Morgan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that challenge. He is right; improving rail connectivity remains a significant ambition. I have spoken to the Secretary of State for Transport about that. There are some other challenges, but we are working out how we can do that. I am pleased to say that in the latest franchise, there was a greater requirement for on-board connectivity, and I hope that we will be able to see that throughout the network.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I welcome this announcement. As my right hon. Friend knows, parts of Kent have worse coverage than Kabul. Will she tell me a bit about her 5G plans? I believe that there will be an announcement tomorrow about China's possible involvement in our network. Does she agree that that poses a major danger to the Five Eyes community and that US sanctions against Huawei would leave us looking like we had just signed a long-term lease for business space with WeWork?

Nicky Morgan: I thank the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee. I am not able to say much about this for very obvious reasons. A decision will be announced in due course. I just want to say two things to the House. The first is that high-risk vendors have never been and

never will be in our most sensitive networks. The second is that the security and resilience of the UK's telecoms network is of paramount importance. We will bear both of those things in our minds when making any decisions.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): As an MP for one of the largest constituencies in the UK with a large number of notspots, I do welcome this announcement, but my right hon. Friend will be aware that many of the people who do not have a mobile service also do not have a broadband service. Given the abject failure of the SNP Scottish Government to deliver on any of their broadband targets, will she say today that those people who do not have broadband will be prioritised in the roll-out of this initiative?

Nicky Morgan: My right hon. Friend makes the very important point that connectivity is obviously of paramount importance. Having been driven through his constituency not long ago, when I had the experience of the signal dropping out, I know how important it is. He makes a good point about prioritisation, which I will discuss with the operators, but he makes an even better point about the fact that the Scottish Government, having promised much on broadband, have not so far delivered. I hope that people in his constituency and elsewhere will be mindful of that whenever they come to visit the polls.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): This is obviously great news for my constituents in North Cornwall. The issue was highlighted back in 2014 when the then Prime Minister had to cut short a holiday because of a known notspot that we have. It does not just affect tourism; it is also affecting business investment in the south-west. May I urge the Secretary of State to do all she can to avoid the two-tier system we have with urban and rural communities?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend very much. I well remember visiting his constituency when he was seeking to be elected, and he has been a doughty champion for better connectivity across his part of Cornwall for many years since his election. He makes a really important point. One of the reasons why we are announcing this and why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced the £5 billion for rural broadband is that we want to make sure that our rural areas are absolutely not left behind and that the focus is not just on our urban areas. Both areas need to be better connected, and we need to do it at the same time.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): May I thank my right hon. Friend and the Prime Minister for the breakneck speed at which they have turned this around following my PMQ last Wednesday on this very subject? This is obviously very welcome news to my constituents and businesses and a real boost to the local economy, and it is great to see the UK Government working with the mobile providers. It is good news for everyone in Angus. Could she make it even better news by shortening the time the project will take to be completed?

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend asked a brilliant question at Prime Minister's questions last week, and I am very pleased that we have been able to answer her request quite so quickly. She has asked another very

good question today, and that is a real challenge. We will obviously have to see exactly how quickly the roll-out can happen, but she is a doughty champion for her constituency of Angus, and I will come back to her on exactly when it can expect to get that better connectivity.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I welcome the statement and my constituents in North Dorset will as well, probably with the caveat that it is about time. May I take my right hon. Friend back to the planning issue? Can she keep the planning team's and Ministers' toes to the fire on this? It is all well and good having the policies in place, and they do need updating, but their speedy implementation to get the right decisions to deliver the network is key, and local government has the key that unlocks it.

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend very much. I should just warn him and probably all right hon. and hon. Members that better connectivity may of course mean more emails and phone calls from those we seek to represent, which I know is something we will all relish. He is right about the planning system, and we absolutely will keep those feet to the fire. We are working very closely with colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to make sure those reforms can go through. We obviously need to have a consultation, but we also want to break through these barriers.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): May I welcome enthusiastically this announcement? It really beggars belief to listen to the negativity of the SNP. Given its lack of delivery in government in Scotland, SNP Members have a nerve to talk about our Government. Since Stirling is the third worst constituency in Scotland for mobile phone coverage, may I ask my right hon. Friend why it is right that my constituents should continue to have to pay the full rate of charge for a mobile service they do not enjoy?

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend has raised an important question about customer service. He is a doughty champion for Stirling, and he has brought the issue of better connectivity to my attention. I was happy to accept the challenge, and that is why I wanted to get this announcement out as soon as possible. I hope he will agree that this is a good day for connectivity in Scotland. Of course, Stirling is, I think, one of the first gigabit cities or first fibre cities, but we need to go further, and I know he will be at the heart of making sure that that happens.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): On Huawei, will the Secretary of State accept that we need debate prior to decisions being made? On this issue, will she explain how the £500 million will improve coverage on the Isle of Wight?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend very much indeed. The issue of a debate is obviously one for the Leader of the House of Commons and the usual channels to discuss, but I know that Ministers will have heard his request.

In relation to the Isle of Wight—a place I know well from my family history—I very much hope that, if he is able, as the local MP, to work with the operators to find out what issues there are relating to masts and any other

[Nicky Morgan]

blockages there might be, we will be able to improve the connectivity. We in the Department will play our part to support him in that.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): May I lobby my right hon. Friend hard on behalf of the new unitary authority, Dorset Council, which has submitted bids for better rural connectivity? Can we please have the money, because we need it to create the jobs and prosperity that we desperately need?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend very much indeed. I accept that lobbying request. He is right to say that there are always opportunities for funding bids. He is also right to point out—which he does as a champion for Dorset and his constituency—that with better connectivity comes the opportunity for more employment, more prosperity and more productivity. That is why this Government want to introduce better connectivity right the way across the United Kingdom.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): On behalf of the people of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine—yet another vast rural Scottish constituency with its fair share of notspots—I enthusiastically welcome the announcement made today. Does my right hon. Friend agree that nobody should be punished or treated like a second-class citizen just by virtue of where they choose to live and work in our country?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend very much indeed. He is absolutely right that this Government do not want to draw a distinction between people who live in an urban or a rural area as far as connectivity is concerned. Everybody needs greater connectivity; it is an important way to enjoy the new technologies, to prosper, to build productivity and to support small businesses and households. That is why we are taking it so seriously and why I hope, particularly in relation to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, that people will see this as a great announcement.

Points of Order

5.8 pm

Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The revealing internal documents leaked to the *Financial Times* over the weekend go to the very heart of the issue with the withdrawal agreement Bill and give us a glimpse of the Government's true intentions on workers' rights. Last week, the Prime Minister stood up and said time and again that they would keep the "highest possible standards" on workers' rights. However, in private, members of the Government are discussing the very opposite among themselves.

Just to be clear, these documents talk about "binding commitments" on workers' rights being "successfully resisted". I want to know how we get to the truth and how working people get to the truth. I would like to know how we get either the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to clarify this vital matter of national importance.

Mr Speaker: I have not received any indication of an intention by a Minister to make an oral statement to the House, but the hon. Lady's words will have been heard by those on the Treasury Bench. In so far as she seeks my counsel on how best to proceed with this matter, that advice is persist, persist, persist. Use the Order Paper. Go to the Table Office. Air the concerns. As I often say in this place, repetition is not a novel phenomenon in the House of Commons. Keep going. Do not give up. Never say die.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con) *rose*—

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I will come to the hon. Gentleman. I am saving him up as a delectation of the House and a special taste.

Lucy Allan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We all come to this place to fight for our constituents. From the very first day, I have used every avenue afforded to me to fight to keep A&E and women and children's services in Telford. I have had 25 parliamentary questions, six parliamentary debates, 15 meetings with Ministers and 29 letters. Is it in order for the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to announce his decision on a six-year-long campaign of such importance to my constituents without meeting Telford's elected representative to advise me of his decision, without notifying me by letter of his decision and without responding to multiple letters on the subject? Am I correct in my understanding, Mr Speaker, that all Ministers, as a matter of courtesy to the constituents we represent, have a duty to respond to and engage with Members on important constituency matters, no matter how junior the Member and no matter how important the Minister?

Mr Speaker: Well, I am certainly not suggesting that the hon. Lady is junior. She is now an experienced Member of the House. But in any case, in one very important respect—the most important respect—all Members in this place are equal: all Members have a responsibility to seek to advance the interests of their constituents. This is not, strictly speaking, a matter of order for the Chair. I am most grateful to her for ventilating her concerns and for her courtesy in giving me advance

notice of her intention to do so—as well as informing me that she has given notice to the Secretary of State—but I can certainly confirm that the way in which Ministers respond to hon. Members on important constituency matters should in no way be affected by length of service of the constituency Member. I am moderately surprised by this, because the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) is a very keen Minister and he has not suffered over the years from a deficit of ambition. I think that the right hon. Gentleman would be gravely concerned to have incurred the hon. Lady's wrath. My hunch is that a letter of concern and possibly even of apology will be winging its way to the hon. Lady, accompanied by offers of cups of tea and urgent meetings, because of the solicitous concern of the Secretary of State for the hon. Lady's constituents, and, possibly, for his own future wellbeing. We will leave it there for now. She has done a very sensible thing in raising it in the Chamber. I congratulate her on her foresight.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There has been much discussion about whether a general election will or will not take place in the near future. I am concerned that any general election campaign might cover the Remembrance weekend. It is enormously important to many people to pay our respects to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice and to veterans, families and others. Can you give some guidance on the position we can take, as an MP or as someone standing to become an MP, in laying wreaths on that day?

Mr Speaker: I think the safest answer to that question—I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern—is that it would very much be a matter for local determination. There is, of course, a difference between a sitting Member and a selected or re-selected candidate for Parliament. How that matter is treated in individual constituencies will, I think, rather depend on those organising the services. My advice to the hon. Gentleman is that, with the beatific smile for which he is renowned in all parts of the House and appropriate courtesy at local level, he should make inquiries and he may find satisfaction.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. That is an important point. It is in your gift I believe, Mr Speaker, to determine whether Members, or perhaps former Members in the case of an election, are allowed to use the Portcullis wreaths. Could you determine that for us, please?

Mr Speaker: I will certainly take advice on it—I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman—and if, having taken advice, I have something to report to him and to the House, I will.

Early Parliamentary General Election

5.14 pm

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): I beg to move,
That there shall be an early parliamentary general election.

I think it is fair to say that nobody in this House relishes the idea of a general election, because nobody wants to put the public to this inconvenience—*[Interruption.]*—particularly, as one hon. Gentleman says, during this season. But across the country, there is a widespread view that this Parliament has run its course, and that is because I simply do not believe that this House is capable of delivering on the priorities of the people, whether that means Brexit or anything else.

Of course, I would rather get Brexit done. I share the blazing urgency of many colleagues across the House. Indeed, last Tuesday, we briefly allowed hope to bloom in our hearts when, for the first time in three and a half years, Parliament voted for a deal to take this country out of the EU, and I repeat my admiration for the way MPs came together across the House to do that. In many ways, it was an astonishing moment. They said that we would never reopen the withdrawal agreement. They said that we would never be able to get rid of the backstop. They said we would never do a new deal with the EU. We did all of them. They said we would never get Parliament to agree.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for all he is doing to get Brexit done. In his preparations for a no-deal Brexit, can he make sure that there is plenty of corn feed for the election chickens on the Opposition Benches?

The Prime Minister: Elegantly put, and thanks to the work of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, our preparations for a no-deal Brexit are very thorough indeed. But alas, as I have said, we have not been able to get Parliament to agree. There was a tantalising moment when I thought that Parliament was going to do the sensible thing, and then this House threw out the programme motion, at the urgings of the Opposition, at the final hurdle, as they intended all along. They made it inevitable that the people of this country would be retained in the EU against their will for at least another three months, at a cost of another £1 billion a month. *[Interruption.]* I hear cries from those on the Opposition Benches to bring the Bill back. I have offered that and I continue to offer it. I wanted, and I still want so badly, to accommodate this House.

Those of us on the Government Benches have compromised. Last week, I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition offering him more time for debate—days more in Committee, days more in the Lords, the ability to sit round the clock if necessary, and all last weekend—with only one condition: that he would agree to do what all Leaders of the Opposition are meant to yearn, crave and campaign for and have a general election on 12 December. I offered him that chance and I offer it again today. *[Interruption.]* He turned us down on Thursday and Friday. I offer again today to use all the hours God gives to scrutinise this Bill, provided that that scrutiny concludes in time for an election on 12 December.

[*The Prime Minister*]

Let us be clear: that is enough time to scrutinise this Bill. It was a remarkable feature of the debate last week on the new deal that not only were there no new ideas in that debate, but the Opposition actually ran out of speakers in the debate. [*Interruption.*] They want more time—they ran out of speakers. The people of this country can see the reality. They are not interested in scrutinising Brexit. They are not interested in debating Brexit. They just want to delay Brexit and cancel Brexit. If the House is to convince the country that it is serious about getting Brexit done, there must be a fixed term to this debate—a parliamentary terminus, a hard stop—that everybody can believe in.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): To make this matter easy for those of us on the DUP Benches, could the Prime Minister confirm to the House whether, if he is successful and achieves a general election, he will seek a mandate on the basis of the withdrawal agreement that the House voted for last week, or whether he will seek to change that withdrawal agreement?

The Prime Minister: I can tell the House that we have an excellent deal for the whole of the UK and that we will campaign on the basis of that deal. If the hon. Gentleman wants more time to debate and scrutinise it, as I take it from his question he does, he can have it, but we must have 12 December as a hard stop, a parliamentary terminus, that everybody can believe in.

An election would fulfil exactly that purpose. It would allow a new Parliament and a new Government to be in place by Christmas. Without that hard stop of an election, without that moment of truth, the electorate will, I am afraid, have a sense that we are all like Charlie Brown, endlessly running up to kick the ball, only to have Parliament whisk it away yet again, only to find that Parliament is willing to go on delaying and delaying, to the end of January, to February and beyond. The frustration will go on, the anxiety will go on, and the angst and uncertainty felt by millions of people and businesses across the country will be unnecessarily and unfairly prolonged and exacerbated. That is what the Opposition's course condemns the country to.

If I am wrong, the remedy is very simple: the Opposition—the Leader of the Opposition and all his cohorts on the Front Bench—can vote for this motion tonight. Then we can bring the Bill back and get Brexit done and then go our separate ways and make our cases to the country to reboot our politics in the way our people want. If he does not wish to take that opportunity—if he wants simply to delay Brexit and frustrate yet again the democratic will of 17.4 million people, frustrate democracy in this country—I am afraid we must have an election now. We cannot continue with this endless delay.

I don't know about you, Mr Speaker, but I think the Leader of the Opposition has now run out of excuses for running away. First he said of the Benn Act:

"Let this Bill pass and gain Royal Assent, and then we will back an election"—[*Official Report*, 4 September 2019; Vol. 664, c. 292.]

The Bill passed and gained Royal Assent, but he still shrank from an encounter with the voters. Then he said he would wait until the Act had been complied with.

The letter was sent over a week ago—not my letter, of course, but Parliament's letter—and he is still coming up with ever more ludicrous excuses for hiding from the British people. Now he says we have to take no deal off the table at the end of the transition period in December 2020. I repeat: he wants to take no deal off the table at the end of the transition period in December 2020. Of course I think his so-called anxieties are absurd, because I am confident that we will negotiate a fantastic new trade deal. [*Interruption.*] If the Opposition vote for this motion, we will bring the Bill back. We will negotiate a fantastic new trade deal that will bring thousands of new jobs to businesses and communities across this country.

Even if the Leader of the Opposition disagrees, would it not make sense, even according to his logic, for him to agree to an election now, so that he can have the opportunity to take no deal off the table himself? Is that not the logic of his position? He can run, but he cannot hide forever. Across Parliament, his supposed allies are deserting. The SNP, I now read, is in favour of an election. The Liberal Democrats are in favour of an election. What an incredible state of affairs. There is one party tonight that is actually against a general election. There is one party that does not trust the people of this country, and that is the principal party of opposition. I hope that the Leader of the Opposition accepts tonight that he is snookered and that this charade has gone on for long enough, and that he will agree to allow Brexit to get done and then allow us to make our cases to the people.

When that election comes, the people of this country will have to make a choice between a Government who deliver, a Government who not only got a great Brexit deal when others said it was impossible but who are putting 20,000 more police on the streets, delivering the biggest hospital building programme in a generation, investing £14 billion more in our schools and levelling up education funding across the country—a great one-nation Conservative Government, which is what we represent—and a Labour Opposition who would turn the year 2020 into a toxic, tedious torture of two more referendums, one on the EU and one on Scotland. That is the choice.

It is time for the Leader of the Opposition to move his rusty Trabant from the yellow box junction where it is currently blocking progress, and it is time for us to get Brexit done by 12 December and then go to the people. It is now overwhelmingly clear that the only way to get Brexit done is to go to the people of this country, and I believe it is time that we all, each and every one of us in this House, had the courage finally to face our ultimate bosses, the people of this country.

I commend the motion to the House.

5.26 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): This is a Prime Minister who cannot be trusted. Having illegally prorogued Parliament for five weeks for his Queen's Speech, he now abandons that Queen's Speech. He got his deal through on Second Reading, then abandoned it. He promised us a Budget on 6 November, and then he abandoned that too. He said he would never ask for an extension, and he said he would rather die in a ditch—another broken promise! Every promise this Prime Minister makes, he abandons. He said he would take us out of the European Union by 31 October—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us have some measure of decorum in the debate.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister said he would take us out of the European Union by 31 October, do or die.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Jeremy Corbyn: No.

The Prime Minister spent £100 million—£100 million—on an advertising campaign to leave on 31 October, but failed to deliver. This is serious, Mr Speaker. The National Audit Office says that the campaign “failed to resonate”. I ask the Prime Minister, and I ask this House: with that £100 million, how many nurses could have been hired, how many parcels could have been funded at food banks, how many social care packages could have been funded for our elderly? The Prime Minister has failed because he has chosen to fail, and now he seeks to blame Parliament. That is £100 million of misspent public money.

At the weekend, we learned from the former Chancellor that the Prime Minister’s deal was offered to the former Prime Minister 18 months ago, but she rejected it as being not good enough for the United Kingdom. We have a rejected and recycled deal that has been misrepresented by Ministers in this House, no doubt inadvertently. The Prime Minister said, in terms, there would be no checks on goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland; the Brexit Secretary himself has confirmed that there will be. The Prime Minister made promises to Labour Members about workers’ rights; I remember his saying, with all the concentration he could muster, that workers’ rights would be protected by him. The leak to the *Financial Times* on Saturday shows these promises simply cannot be trusted. He says the NHS is off the table for any trade deal, yet a majority of the British public do not trust him. And why should they? Thanks to a Channel 4 “Dispatches” programme—[*Interruption.*] This is actually quite an important point that the Prime Minister might care to listen to. [*Interruption.*] I will go through it again: thanks to—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is entirely at liberty to do so. If there are people trying to shout the Leader of the Opposition down, stop it; it is deeply low grade.

Jeremy Corbyn: As I was saying, thanks to a Channel 4 “Dispatches” programme we learn that secret meetings—[*Interruption.*] Conservative Members might find this funny, but actually it is quite serious for our national health service.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I understand that the annunciators may not have been working in the offices of Labour MPs, because most of them have not chosen to turn up today. Can that be investigated?

Mr Speaker: It does not need to be investigated at all. Unfortunately, it is not even a very good try at a bogus point of order; as the smile on the face of the hon. Gentleman readily testifies, it is a very substandard attempt.

Jeremy Corbyn: I think this section is very important, so I will go through it again. Thanks to a Channel 4 “Dispatches” programme we learn that secret meetings have taken place between UK Government officials and representatives of US pharmaceutical firms at which the price of national health service drugs has been discussed.

We have a Prime Minister who will say anything and do anything to get his way. He will avoid his responsibilities and break his promises to dodge scrutiny. And today he wants an election and his Bill. Well, not with our endorsement. He says he wants an election on 12 December. How can we trust him to stick to that date when we do not yet have legal confirmation of the extension? The Prime Minister has not formally accepted, and the other 27 have not confirmed following that acceptance. The reason I am so cautious is quite simply that I do not trust the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am afraid that the Leader of the Opposition is mistaken. As I have always said, this Government obey the law. We have complied with the law, and that has taken its course. Parliament asked for this delay, and now it is up to the right hon. Gentleman to go to the country in a general election. That is what he should do.

Mr Speaker: For the avoidance of doubt, such matters are not matters for the Chair, but the Prime Minister has made his own point, apparently to his own satisfaction.

Jeremy Corbyn: I simply say this to the Prime Minister: if he always obeys the law, why was he found guilty by the Supreme Court?

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. On the issue of—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not care how long it takes—I am not having the hon. Gentleman shouted down and prevented from being heard. That will not work. End of subject.

Stephen Doughty: On the issue of trust, which my right hon. Friend is rightly pointing out, is he aware of the interesting rumour that has reached my ears that the Prime Minister might be planning not to stand in his own constituency at an upcoming general election, and that he has apparently instead lined up Sevenoaks or East Yorkshire? Has my right hon. Friend heard that rumour?

Jeremy Corbyn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. I would put nothing past the Prime Minister. All I know is that we have an excellent Labour candidate in Uxbridge.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), I do not trust the Prime Minister, but there is a deeper issue about whether we can trust him with our safety. Let me briefly read this analysis from the *Financial Times*, which says—[*Interruption.*] The Prime Minister may shake his head, but perhaps he would care to listen. It states that when

“Johnson responded, ‘I have never heard such humbug’”—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I invite the hon. Lady to resume her seat. She has a right to be heard. She has a right not to be shouted down by Front or Back Benchers, and she will not be.

Paula Sherriff: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The analysis states that when

“Johnson responded: ‘I have never heard such humbug in all my life’, Labour MP Paula Sherriff began receiving toxic tweets at a rate of more than 100 an hour...One such tweet from that evening read: ‘Tough shit Mrs Shrek. A #SurrenderBill or #SurrenderAct is exactly what Benn’s treacherous act is.’ Another read: ‘Do what the people told you to effing do otherwise yes expect to be strung up metaphorically or physically.’”

The Prime Minister has never apologised for saying what he said that evening, so how can we trust him that we can be safe?

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, and for the stoic way in which she has dealt with the most appalling abuse that has been thrown at her. After the threats that she and other colleagues have received, the damage that has been done to MPs’ offices and the abusive language that has happened in so many parts of this country, I would be happy to give way to the Prime Minister now if he wants to get up and apologise to my hon. Friend for what he said about her during that debate. Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister has an opportunity to apologise for the language he used, but he seems unable to do so. The treatment she received was disgusting by any standards. I would also point out that numbers—

The Prime Minister: I will happily apologise if, for instance, the shadow Chancellor will apologise for inviting the population to lynch the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Jeremy Corbyn: Well, sorry seems to be the hardest word, doesn’t it?

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have a Prime Minister who has a tortuous and difficult relationship with veracity? My right hon. Friend is therefore absolutely right not to believe a single word that comes out of that man’s mouth?

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. She is right. That is why many of us are very cautious about believing anything that the Prime Minister says. We want this tied down before we agree to anything.

A 12 December election would be less than a fortnight before Christmas and nine days before the shortest day of the year. The House must consider that it will be dark before 4 pm in parts of the country, that many students will have just finished their term and gone home for Christmas—[*Interruption.*] Well, actually, people having the right to vote is what an election is all about, and people risk being disenfranchised.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Going back to workers’ rights, he correctly says that the Prime Minister cannot be trusted, so will he explain why the 19 Labour Back Benchers who said that they had secured workers’ rights concessions from the Prime Minister

backed the withdrawal agreement? If the Prime Minister is so incompetent, is there any point at which the right hon. Gentleman is not going to keep him in power?

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister claimed he would defend workers’ rights, but all the information in the *Financial Times* at the weekend suggests that he will not do that at all.

I was talking about students and their opportunity to vote on the date in question, but the latter point may not be the case on 9 December, and we will consider carefully any proposed legislation that locks in the date. The theme here is that we do not trust the Prime Minister. We want something that definitely and definitively takes no deal off the table and ensures that the voting rights of all our citizens are protected.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I am very grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for giving way. If we take him at his word that this most untrustworthy Government and Prime Minister are wedded to doing the most evil and disastrous things to this country, can he explain his reticence about a general election at which he has the chance to sweep us out of office?

Jeremy Corbyn: We have said all along that we want no deal off the table. As there is so little trust in this Prime Minister, we will agree to nothing until exactly what is being proposed is clear and concrete. We agree that an early election is necessary, but we seek good reason for one, as no general election has been held in December since 1923.

The Prime Minister has a Bill to deliver and a Budget to present. He has a Queen’s Speech that he told us was vital. He should, for once in his life, stick to his word and deliver. He says in his misogynistic way that people should “man up”, which is a bit rich for a Prime Minister who refuses to face up to his responsibilities at every turn and serially breaks his promises.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Does he agree that the timing of this proposed general election, not whether we have a general election, is yet another example of the art of voter suppression, ensuring that students are less likely to have a vote and that older people and people with disabilities are less likely to go out and vote? If the Prime Minister truly believed in democracy, we would hold the election when people are able to go and cast their vote.

Jeremy Corbyn: When no deal is off the table, when the date for an election can be fixed in law, and when we can ensure that students are not being disenfranchised, we will back an election so that this country can get the Government it needs. It needs a Government that will end the underfunding and privatisation of our public services, tackle the grotesque poverty and inequality in our country created by this Government and the Government before it, recognise the seriousness of the climate emergency, rebuild an economy that does not just work for the privileged few, which is all the Tory party knows about, and build a better society that ends inequality and injustice and gives the next generation real opportunities and real hope about the kind of country and kind of world that they can live in.

5.44 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): This Parliament is once again misjudging the mood of the public. We were elected here to do serious things on behalf of our public. Conservative and Labour MPs alike were elected to see Brexit through. Three years and four months later, there is no sign of that. Instead, we have this discordant, argumentative Parliament that will do nothing. It will not throw the Government out of office and it will not allow the Government to govern. We owe it to the British people either to allow our Government to govern or to let the British people decide on a better group of MPs who can form a Government and do positive things for our country.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Every constituency in my region voted at the 2016 referendum by a huge margin to leave the European Union. At that time, lots of my constituents, in some of the most deprived communities of this country, told me that they did not trust this Parliament to deliver it. They said, “We won’t get it. They’ll never let us leave.” The five Conservatives out of the 10 MPs in my region might have voted to deliver Brexit, but is not the truth of it that the Labour MPs across my region, bar one or two examples, are never going to vote to leave the European Union, sadly proving right my constituents who said, “They’ll never let us leave”?

John Redwood: My hon. Friend is right, but it is now about more than Brexit. It is about confidence in our parliamentary system to deliver orderly government that can do things for the people or to allow the public to decide who should be a better Government, because the House has no confidence in the Government.

This Parliament needs to put through a Budget quite soon. Our economy needs a boost, and we need to know whether we can have the tax cuts as well as the spending increases, but I suspect that the Government fear bringing a Budget to the House because they think there will be no co-operation as they do not have a majority and this Parliament will not allow a majority to be formed.

This Government have recently brought a Queen’s Speech to the House. It contains a number of good measures that I do not think were ideological or Conservative provocations to socialists and those of a more left-wing nature. They were chosen to build some consensus and address the issues that worry people. But again, I think the Government rightly fear that any one of those measures, if introduced, would probably meet with resistance and a lack of co-operation, in exactly the way that we have been experiencing with all these other measures.

But above all, this House needs to think what message it is sending to all our partners, friends and allies—countries around the world; the businesses that our businesses do business with; all those contacts we have around the globe. They see this country as a great beacon of democracy—a country of great experience in the art of democratic government; a country that has often led the world in putting forward and fighting for those freedoms and showing how they can improve the lives of those governed by them. But instead we are sending a message that we do not know what we are doing and can never agree about anything—that all we can do is

have endless rows in this place, for the entertainment of people here perhaps, but to the denigration of our country and the undermining of its position.

How can a Government conduct international negotiations when everything they propose is undermined or voted against by the Opposition, because we do not have a majority? Above all, how have we got to the point where this House decides that it is good legislation to say that the Prime Minister has to break his promises—where it has turned the demand that he break his promises into something that this House calls an Act of Parliament? No wonder we look ridiculous. No wonder we cannot resolve Brexit. No wonder we cannot have a Budget to promote our economy. No wonder we cannot govern with aplomb in the interests of the British people.

The Prime Minister is right that if this House cannot do better, it must dissolve and ask the people to choose a better Parliament. Either we need to be a better Parliament or they need to choose a better Parliament as soon as possible.

5.49 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I begin by thanking the European Union for granting the extension that this Parliament asked for under the Benn Act? We are not leaving Europe on 31 October, as the Prime Minister told the Conservative party and the United Kingdom we would be. The Conservative party and the Prime Minister have been defeated once again.

A general election on the terms offered by the Prime Minister is not and will not ever be acceptable to the Scottish National party, but doing nothing is not an option. The impasse cannot remain forever. We on these Benches do want an election, but not with the hand that the Prime Minister is delivering. Let us be clear about what he promises: he proposes to bring back his bad withdrawal deal; he knows that some Labour MPs will help him pass that Bill and then he would have us leave the EU at the end of November, before a general election. For Scotland, that would mean we would be taken out of the EU against our will, and we will never vote for such a proposition. It would give the Prime Minister a post-Brexit election, something we simply will not sign up to.

At the weekend, I and the leader of the Liberal Democrats wrote to Donald Tusk seeking a meaningful extension to article 50 that would remove the risk of no deal and give us time. The continuation of the flexextension, whereby the UK can leave at the end of any month in which it passes the motion, is not the complete safety and security we want. It demonstrates precisely why if we enable this motion to pass, we will be out before the Prime Minister’s election. We cannot allow this Prime Minister to railroad through this disastrous so-called “deal”: a deal that opens the door to a hard Brexit, with us outside the single market and the customs union; and a deal that would end freedom of movement, seeing Scotland’s working population decline—that is what the Conservatives offer the people of Scotland.

The people of Scotland have made their position very clear, because we voted 62% to remain in the EU. Where is the respect to the people of Scotland and to our Parliament? This is, after all, a deal that leaves Scotland at a disadvantage to Northern Ireland and a deal that will not have the consent of the Scottish Parliament.

[*Ian Blackford*]

Let me tell the Prime Minister that that consent is required, despite what he said at Prime Minister's questions last week. There must be respect towards the Scottish Parliament. This deal will cost each person in Scotland the equivalent of £1,600 compared with EU membership—or even more if no trade agreement can be reached.

So today, Scottish National party Members will not be supporting the Prime Minister in his motion. We will not be bullied by this Prime Minister. We will not play his games. And we know what he does not want: to face the electorate having missed his 31 October deadline. He has not delivered Brexit, and the people know he has failed. In his own words, it is time for the PM to look for the nearest ditch.

We will support the Liberal Democrat proposal for an election before Brexit can happen, with no reintroduction of the withdrawal agreement Bill, because given the way some Labour MPs voted, we cannot trust Labour to block the Bill in future. This is not an issue of three days between election dates; it is an issue of whether we are in the European Union or out of it. That is fundamental. We are ready for an election, but it must be on those terms, not—not ever—on the Prime Minister's. In that election, we want to see votes for 16 and 17-year-olds and for EU nationals. When that election comes, we will fight the Tories on Brexit, on the rape clause, on austerity, on the harm they have done to people's lives and livelihoods, and, yes, we will fight them on the right of Scotland to choose our own future, rather than be dragged through this Westminster mess ever again.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Does that mean that if the Prime Minister were to introduce a one-line Bill tomorrow, for example, in order to engineer a general election, the right hon. Gentleman would not be supporting that proposition?

Ian Blackford: I say to the Labour party that we and the Liberal Democrats have put forward a Bill that leaves us in control of the process and allows us to set the date for the election, and I appeal to Labour MPs to come with us, because this is about leadership. This is about the Opposition parties coming together and taking the keys of No.10 Downing Street away from a Prime Minister we cannot trust. My message to the Labour party is: let us face an election, let us do it on our terms, let us make sure that we take the Prime Minister and his toxic Tory Government out of office. We can do it—we can do it if the Opposition parties unite. We can stop the deal that the Prime Minister wants to drive through. It is in the hands of the Labour party to join us and the Liberal Democrats, to have the courage to stand up against the Prime Minister. But what are we going to find? We are going to find that the Labour party wants to sit on its hands and wait for this Government to deliver a Brexit. I say to the Labour party: do not be the handmaidens of the Prime Minister's Brexit. Let us put this back to the people now by coming together. It used to be said, including by Oliver Brown, a well-known Scottish nationalist, "A shiver ran along the Labour Front Bench looking for a spine to crawl up." The shiver is still looking for that spine.

The SNP is standing up for Scotland. We are standing up against Brexit and this Tory Government. The SNP has fought tirelessly alongside others in this House to

prevent Brexit, to secure the right to revoke article 50, to stop no deal and to limit the damage. We have delivered the votes, day in and day out. But we have to be realistic and we have to be honest with the public: we have repeatedly voted for a referendum with remain on the ballot paper but, regrettably, there is no evidence that the majority exists in this House for a people's vote. The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor are acutely aware that if the Bill comes back, some of their MPs will back it, the Bill will become law and Brexit will happen. The question for the Labour party is: can it get its act together? Do Labour Members actually want to stop this Prime Minister? Do they want to stop Brexit or do they agree that it should be imposed on Scotland against our will? Doing nothing means that this Prime Minister stays in power—it means he gets Brexit done, on his terms and in his party's interests, not in all our national interests.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I would like the right hon. Gentleman to clarify something he said earlier. He talked up his link-up with the Liberal Democrats on wanting to have an election on a different date in December. He went on to say that that would be conditional on 16-year-olds and European Union citizens having ballot papers. I wish to ask him a simple question: if there is no time to do that, does he still back the idea of an election in early December?

Ian Blackford: I would simply say that it is the right thing to do; our young people have a right to have a say on their future, just as EU nationals do. That is the principled position that we have long taken, and I am proud that my colleagues in government in Scotland have made sure that when it comes to our Scottish election, our young people and our EU citizens are given their rights. We want to see this happen here, but I understand the circumstances we are in, where we need to make sure that an election happens on our terms. That is the priority. It is the priority to make sure that we legislate that in future our young people and our EU nationals are given due respect, but the priority we face in the short term is to make sure that we come together to stop this damaging Brexit that the Prime Minister wants to put through.

Stephen Doughty: I listened carefully to what the right hon. Gentleman said about 16 and 17-year-olds. I certainly would bring an amendment such as that to any Bill and I would be interested to hear what he says, because this is what we now have the pleasure of having in Wales. He also mentioned EU voters, but does he agree that there is also an issue in respect of overseas voters, many of whom were excluded in previous elections? Does he also agree that crucial issues relating to spending on advertising on social media would need to be addressed before we could be clear that any election could proceed safely and democratically?

Ian Blackford: The hon. Gentleman raises issues that have been aired in this House and that he knows we support him on, but the fact of the matter is that we are in a constitutional crisis.

I ask the House to reflect on one thing. We have been granted an extension by the European Union until the end of January. It behoves us all to end this crisis. Time is of the essence. If we act now, in all our national interests,

without playing the games that the Conservatives want, we can have that election and put the issue back to the people.

I certainly want the people in Scotland to have their say—and, crucially, to recognise that if we want to protect our interests in Scotland that means we should not and cannot be ripped out of the European Union against our will. That means that Scotland has to complete the journey that we began with devolution 20 years ago and become an independent member of the European Union.

In conclusion—[*Interruption.*] Well, there we are. There is the message to the people of Scotland: “Sit down and shut up!” That is what we get from the Conservatives. That was absolutely loud and clear, and it comes over time and time again. I tell you this: people at home are watching this and they can see the disrespect that is shown. The day when this Union comes to an end is fast approaching.

The SNP will never—not ever—vote for Brexit. We cannot and will not trust this Prime Minister. The Scottish National party does not want to leave this Prime Minister with time in Parliament to do anything other than dissolve it, so we will not vote with the Government tonight. But make no mistake: the Scottish National party is ready to give people back their say, to stop this Tory Government, to stop Brexit and to demand the right to choose Scotland’s future as an independent country—our destiny.

6.1 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): The situation is very simple, and the bottom line is this. The Labour party is scared—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman, who is Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee and has served without interruption in this House for the last 35 years, must—and will—be heard.

Sir William Cash: The bottom line is this. I heard the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) talking about disrespect just now, and I heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about trust. What those who are abstaining or voting against the motion are doing is utterly disrespectful to their own constituents and utterly disrespectful to our democratic system. They are not trusting the people, they are not removing the uncertainty and they are not allowing the British people their democratic right to choose Members of Parliament whom they wish to elect in individual constituencies.

What the Leader of the Opposition and the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber are doing is denying democracy. That is completely and totally unacceptable, whether people are remainers or leavers. The democratic right of the British people is to have a general election in the situation we are in now. Yes, certainly we should be supporting leaving the European Union, but remainers, too, have the right to vote, and that is being denied them by the Leader of the Opposition and every single Labour Member of Parliament and others who are either abstaining or voting against the motion today. That is a total denial of democracy. When it comes to the general election, I trust that the people who know why they have been denied it will vote

against those Members of Parliament, to make sure that those Members themselves see the damage they have done to our democratic system.

6.4 pm

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): The Liberal Democrats want to stop Brexit. I appreciate that there are different views on different sides of the House on that matter, but I hope that people appreciate that at least we have been consistent on wanting to stop Brexit throughout this process.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Jo Swinson: I will make some progress and then give way.

We believe that the best way to do this is to put a specific Brexit deal to the public for a final say in a people’s vote. We have been leading the campaign for a people’s vote for three and a half years. We stood in the 2017 election on a manifesto that argued for a people’s vote and we have laid amendments for a people’s vote 17 times in this House, including an amendment to the Queen’s Speech last week.

The official Opposition have refused to back wholeheartedly a people’s vote—in fact, 19 Labour MPs voted for the Prime Minister’s deal last week. When it comes to the cause of remaining in the EU and of stopping Brexit, the Labour party has not delivered. We have put our best efforts in, but so far the House has not yet backed them in sufficient numbers.

Kevin Brennan: Not all the hon. Lady’s MPs have always been so unequivocal on this: the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) voted in favour of article 50, although he never tells the House that. I voted against it.

Why does the hon. Lady believe that a general election, using an electoral system that her party, like me, has always thought does not deliver a fair result, will solve this issue, rather than sticking to the point that we should be seeking a referendum? She could end up delivering a hard Brexit on only 38% of the vote, not 51%.

Jo Swinson: I always welcome any converts to the cause of electoral reform.

Kevin Brennan: I’m not a convert!

Jo Swinson: Or indeed long-standing supporters.

We are looking for the best way to protect our constituents and our place in the European Union. But MPs should not kid themselves that, by hanging on, there is somehow going to be a different outcome.

Lisa Forbes (Peterborough) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Jo Swinson: I am responding to the previous question.

The reality of the situation is this. We have secured an extension to article 50 until 31 January. It was not automatic, not guaranteed and not given by return of email. It was deliberated and agonised over by our EU friends, and certain members of the EU were pushing very hard for there to be a very short extension of article 50. They said very clearly that there needed to be a clear purpose for article 50. If the House of Commons

[Jo Swinson]

made it clear that the purpose would be to have a people's vote, I would be delighted. We have been campaigning for that for three and a half years. This afternoon, I tabled an early-day motion calling again for a people's vote. If MPs really want to demonstrate that the numbers are now there, go to the Table Office and sign it, but do not give me wishful thinking that the numbers are there when the real risk is that we could crash out on 31 January instead of 31 October. That is no better.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): If the election goes ahead and the hon. Lady is successful in stopping Brexit, would she share government with the Leader of the Opposition? I do not see how else it would work.

Jo Swinson: I have been very clear that I do not believe that the Leader of the Opposition or the Prime Minister are the right people to be in government and leading the country. I am crystal clear about that. In a general election, I will go to the country and make my case that there should be a Liberal Democrat Government. A Liberal Democrat Government would revoke article 50 on day one, and that is the best way to stop Brexit. We need to find a way forward. If it is not through a people's vote—if there is not the support for that in this Parliament—we need to look at the other way to do that, and right now, that is through a general election.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (IGC): The hon. Lady knows that I was a founding member of People's Vote and she knows, too, the cost that I and many others have paid for our belief, which, at the time, was certainly not popular or fashionable. She also knows—because of the meetings that she has attended—that there is no doubt that, across the House, there is a majority, at the right moment, for that confirmatory referendum. Does she agree that—[*Interruption.*] The right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey), who has not attended those meetings, has obviously not been informed. Does the hon. Lady understand that the best way forward is to allow that process to continue, because it is obvious that that moment is coming when there will finally be that majority for a people's vote, and that she is pre-empting that? Nobody needs to be told—especially not me and others who have been so courageous and brave, and I pay tribute to them—that this is the time not for a general election, but for a people's vote, and it is within our grasp.

Jo Swinson: The right hon. Lady and I have worked together well on the people's vote campaign, and I pay tribute to her for the courageous decision that she took earlier this year to leave her party and for the work that she has done on this campaign, but I say to her that I dearly wish it were the case that we were at a majority situation for a people's vote. If we are at that situation then MPs can sign the motion and demonstrate that that is the case.

Anna Soubry: I never sign early-day motions.

Jo Swinson: Perhaps the right hon. Lady would make an exception for this particular early-day motion.

In the absence of that support being clearly demonstrated, we have to act; we cannot just wait. My fear is either that the Government push ahead with their withdrawal

Bill and it is delivered, and Brexit is delivered on the back of Labour votes, or that we end up in January, a couple of weeks away from the deadline of crashing out without a deal, in the same precarious position, but that time the EU says, "I am sorry, but we have extended and extended again and we cannot keep doing so if you do not find a path to resolve this."

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind) *rose*—

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD) *rose*—

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (IGC) *rose*—

Jo Swinson: I will not give way. I want to make some progress.

That is why, in the absence of those numbers for a people's vote, the way forward now is to have an election, but to do so responsibly, not letting the Prime Minister force through his bad Brexit deal in a small number of days without proper scrutiny, which is what his plan is and why we will not support his motion tonight. We know that the Prime Minister's Brexit deal will be bad for workers' rights, bad for environmental protections, bad for the economy, bad for jobs, bad for our public services, bad for our security and bad for our United Kingdom. It should not be left to the Government to have carte blanche to set the date of the election after the House of Commons has dissolved. We cannot trust what the Prime Minister says.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Jo Swinson: No, I am making some progress.

We cannot trust what the Prime Minister says. We have no guarantee that he would not try to crash us out of the European Union. He said that he would not prorogue Parliament; he did. He said that he would not send a letter to request an extension of article 50, and he did. We cannot trust what the Prime Minister says. That is why the plan that we have put forward with the Scottish National party for a general election on 9 December takes no deal off the table with the extension to article 50 and means that we have no withdrawal agreement Bill and that there is no wriggle room on the date for the Prime Minister. We have worked together on a cross-party basis. We do not agree on everything, but we do agree that we want to stop Brexit. We have worked together, which has been important. The European Union did not grant that extension on Friday when it said it might, and our EU friends have told us that the letter and the Bill that were published were instrumental in making sure that they were able to grant that extension.

Stephen Doughty: The hon. Lady set out three conditions, which I noted very clearly. The leader of the SNP mentioned the issue of 16 and 17-year-olds getting the vote in such a situation. He also mentioned EU electors, overseas voters and a number of other issues. Does she support efforts to ensure that those things are attached to any election, and would she support a Bill that did not a guarantee that those rights to vote were respected and available?

Jo Swinson: I thank my hon. Friend—and I do count him as a friend—for that intervention. We have also worked together well on the people's vote campaign,

and I welcome the cross-party nature of that work. I have campaigned for votes at 16 from the moment that I came into this House. We have votes at 16 for most elections in Scotland, and it works well. The sky has not fallen in. I think that votes at 16 should be introduced across all different elections. But I say to my hon. Friend that the worst thing we could do for 16 and 17-year-olds is to crash out and leave the European Union. We are in a situation where there is no guarantee of an extension beyond 31 January, and we need to do everything that we can to stop Brexit. If that means having an election to stop Brexit to protect the rights of those 16 and 17-year-olds, we need to deliver that, because leaving the European Union is the thing that will wreck the future of those young people.

Gareth Snell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Jo Swinson: I have given way plenty of times.

The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition say that they want a general election. If that is the case and they are not just playing games, then the Government will give time for the Bill that we have published, and the Leader of the Opposition will ask his MPs to support it. I relish the opportunity to take both of them on in a general election and share with the country the Liberal Democrat positive vision to stop Brexit and build a brighter future.

6.16 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I am delighted to make a short contribution to this very important debate. I shall be supporting the motion tonight, because it is absolutely clear to me that the only way out of the current situation is a general election. This House is in stalemate. We are in lockdown. We cannot move forward with Brexit; we cannot move forward with anything else. That is not good for the country. It is not good for the businesses in our country, which are fed up with the uncertainty and the challenges that they are facing and want to know what the way forward is. The current state of this House is not good for our democracy.

It is also essential that we have an election as soon possible because, in the eyes of many voters across the country, this House has lost all legitimacy to sit. It has lost the trust that was invested in it by the British people in 2017. Let me start with the Liberal Democrats. I note what the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) said about an election manifesto for a second referendum. The Liberal Democrats have only half a passing acquaintance with keeping manifesto promises, but at least half of their members currently sitting in this House were elected on a manifesto to respect the referendum and deliver Brexit, and they have switched parties without any reference to their constituents. Their constituents voted for an MP to represent them as a member of a party to deliver Brexit, and those constituents have had no say—they have not been consulted—about their MPs' change of position.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that many young people were duped on tuition fees? The horse-trading then went on in coalition. There was no straight answer about who the Liberal Democrats would prop up in the next coalition.

They are milking that 16 and 17-year-old vote because they are promising a future that they do not necessarily intend to deliver—just as they never delivered on tuition fees. They traded them away.

Steve Double: I am very grateful for that intervention. I agree with my hon. Friend wholeheartedly. I do not believe that the Liberal Democrats have always held the position of wanting a second referendum, because I distinctly remember, after the referendum in 2016, Liberal Democrat after Liberal Democrat coming on the media and saying, “We must respect the outcome of the referendum. We must deliver this outcome.” I do not believe that a second referendum has always been their position.

Just under 600 Members were elected in 2017, on a clear commitment to respect the referendum and deliver Brexit. It is a sad reflection on our democracy and on the politics in this country today that, as we sit tonight, as far as I can make out, only about 300 Members are committed to that end. Over half the MPs who were elected to deliver on the referendum have reneged on that promise since the 2017 general election. This House no longer reflects what people voted for in 2017. People voted for something they thought they were going to get, and as things stand right now, they are not getting what they voted for.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): My hon. Friend is talking about the sad state of democracy in our country. When we go around the world and say, “The United Kingdom stands for respecting democracy and the rule of law,” other countries say, “Well, you had a referendum where the majority of the people wanted to leave, and your Parliament will not deliver on that.” It is quite clear that not being able to deliver on that result weakens our position in pushing for democracy around the world.

Steve Double: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, about which I know he has a great deal of experience and knowledge. The eyes of the world are looking on this place to see whether we will be true to what we said we would do and whether we will respect what the voters told us to do.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribbles Valley) (Con): My hon. Friend talks about Members of Parliament being elected at the last election on a promise of delivering Brexit and reneging on that promise. Did he notice that 217 Labour MPs voted against the withdrawal agreement Bill on Second Reading? Had they voted for it, they could have amended it how they wished, but they actually voted to stop Brexit.

Steve Double: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to take no deal off the table, there are two very simple ways to do that: vote for a deal and secure a smooth exit from the European Union; or vote for a general election and take no deal off the table if he wins. The fact that he will not support a general election betrays the real reason that Labour Members will not support an election, which is that they are afraid of the British people, they are afraid of what voters will vote, and they are afraid that they will lose seats and we will be in government.

[Steve Double]

I will be supporting this motion tonight because I believe that this House has sadly lost all legitimacy. We have lost the trust of the British people, and the only way to recover it is for the House to be dissolved as soon as possible, to have an election and to let the British people elect a Parliament they can trust to represent them.

6.22 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The Prime Minister has claimed that anyone who does not support his demand for an early election is, first, trying to stop Brexit and, secondly, running scared of the electorate. The Democratic Unionist party will not be supporting this motion tonight, but not because we are scared of the electorate. In fact, I can tell the House that the Unionist electorate in Northern Ireland are so angry at, so despairing of and so bewildered by the way in which the Prime Minister has broken his promises to the people of Northern Ireland that they would return 100 DUP MPs if they had the option.

We are not scared of a general election and we are not trying to stop Brexit. In fact, we have been pilloried in this House because we have been seen to be some of the most determined people to deliver Brexit. But the Brexit on offer is not a Brexit for the United Kingdom; it is a Brexit for part of the United Kingdom. It would leave Northern Ireland still within the single market and under the EU customs code. It would mean that any goods coming into Northern Ireland from GB would be subject to customs checks, customs declarations and tariffs. It would mean that we would have to sign export declarations when we sent goods to another part of our own country.

All these things would add costs and delays to the economy of Northern Ireland and would be a huge imposition on the thousands of small firms that currently trade freely with the rest of the United Kingdom. They would suddenly find themselves having to treat the country to which they belong as a third country when it comes to trade. Despite what the Prime Minister has said, the withdrawal agreement makes it quite clear that we could not take part in trade deals that our country does with other parts of the world if they went against the protocols in the agreement.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): The issue of additional bureaucracy for business between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is all the more stark when we look at the statistics, which show that Northern Ireland trades more with Great Britain than with the Republic of Ireland, the European Union and the rest of the world put together; putting up a barrier to our biggest market by far would be hugely significant for the economy of Northern Ireland. Does my right hon. Friend agree?

Sammy Wilson: My hon. Friend is right, but sometimes statistics can go over people's heads. Let us also bear in mind that the agreement goes totally against the promises made by both the former Prime Minister and the current Prime Minister—that there would be no impediments to trade between our part of the United Kingdom and GB, and that there would be no danger of the Union being imperilled.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Ind): Would the right hon. Gentleman accept that this dreadful border down the Irish sea would be avoided if the whole United Kingdom left the customs union and left the single market, which I think his party has always supported? But now that the Prime Minister has gone back on and abandoned that position, would the DUP be prepared to accept the entire United Kingdom staying in the customs union and the single market during the transition period, leaving the whole thing to be negotiated over the next two or three years during that transition period? That would rescue Ulster from the absurd proposal of putting these barriers between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Sammy Wilson: Of course the right hon. and learned Gentleman will know that that is only half the answer, because under this agreement we would still be within the rules of the single market, still subject to the European Court of Justice making adjudications about whether we adhere to those rules, and still subject to the EU being able to deny the United Kingdom Government the ability to apply changes to the law made here in Westminster to Northern Ireland.

There are very good reasons why we oppose this deal, and the motion does not offer any hope of change. In fact, if anything, the Prime Minister is quite openly saying, "And, by the way, I now want Democratic Unionist party MPs to vote for the accelerated passage of the Bill"—a Bill that would facilitate the agreement, which would have such detrimental effects on Northern Ireland. We do not want the accelerated passage of the Bill. We do not want 24-hour scrutiny. We want to ensure that nothing happens in this House that enables the Prime Minister to deliver on a deal that he promised he would never, ever do.

Of course, if the Prime Minister gets his general election, what platform will he be standing on? What mandate will he seek? What strategy will he put forward? What will be in his manifesto—that he wants to come back here with a majority to deliver the death deal to the Union in Northern Ireland, as he made clear to my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley)? The offer of the accelerated passage of a Bill that would facilitate the agreement and an election that the Prime Minister would use to justify breaking his promises to the people of Northern Ireland is an offer that we can refuse and will be quite happy to refuse.

Although we want to see Brexit delivered, we want to see it delivered for the whole United Kingdom. We want it delivered in the form that the Prime Minister twice—he changed his mind the third time—voted for in this House. We will not be prepared to facilitate him moving the goalposts and affecting Northern Ireland in this way. Although we do not fear a general election and we want to see Brexit delivered, if it is not going to be delivered for the whole United Kingdom, I do not think that anyone in this House could possibly condemn us for standing up for our constituents, who will be damaged economically and constitutionally.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): May I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that if we were to have a general election, that would simply be a de facto referendum part 2, because there would be no other subject under debate during that general election than Brexit? Would it not be an absolute dereliction of duty were we to

allow something as important as a general election to be hijacked and simply to be a weak, ersatz version of another referendum?

Sammy Wilson: The hon. Gentleman is trying to draw me into saying that this should be decided by a second referendum. I do not believe that it should be decided by a second referendum, because, of course, the first referendum has not been delivered on. We want to see the first referendum delivered on, and delivered on for the whole United Kingdom.

The argument has been put forward here tonight that we need a general election because this has now become a zombie Parliament—the Government cannot get their business through. We are not wreckers. We do not want to see the United Kingdom ungovernable. Indeed, the reason we voted with the Government on the Queen's Speech last week was that they had a programme to get through and we wanted to give it support. We do not want to see the United Kingdom made ungovernable. But the one thing we are not prepared to do is to see the United Kingdom divided and the Union destroyed, and that is why we cannot give our support in the vote tonight.

John Redwood: Would it be a way through if the Government went to Brussels now and said that they would like to initiate free trade talks immediately so that we could leave with no tariffs and new barriers, if such talks were agreed to, rather than signing the withdrawal agreement?

Sammy Wilson: We are wandering a bit from the motion now, Mr Speaker, but I hope you will indulge me just to answer this point. That is one of the arguments that the Prime Minister has put forward—that surely all this will just disappear if and when we have a free trade arrangement. But the withdrawal agreement makes it very clear in section 13(8) that—this would have to be agreed with the EU so it would have a veto; so much for the claim that we have got our sovereignty back—the EU could still have a free trade arrangement that would leave Northern Ireland fully or partly within the protocols in the agreement.

While I would love to think that that would be a way out, and we would love to see it be a way out, unfortunately the agreement that the Prime Minister has signed does not allow it to be a way out. That is yet another reason why we have to get this right, and yet another reason why we do not believe that debating, scrutinising and accelerating the passage of the Bill through the House, and an early general election to get a mandate to implement it, is correct.

6.32 pm

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): We find ourselves in Alice in Wonderland politics today. I am in my 28th year in Parliament, and I have never seen anything as incredible as the events I have seen since the British people voted in 2016 to leave the European Union. We made that contract with them. Project Fear did not quite work and they were not quite scared enough to vote to remain in the EU. Actually, they said, “No, we’ve heard what everybody has said is going to happen—that the sky will fall in—but we are still prepared to vote to leave the European Union.” In many cases, they simply did not believe some of the scare stories they were told.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just people who voted to leave, but people like me who voted to remain, who want this done?

Mr Evans: Absolutely. I did a two-day tour around my constituency last Friday and Saturday, and I spoke to a number of people. There were three hardcore remainers who would do almost anything to remain in the European Union. However, the vast majority of people who come up to me in Ribble Valley say either, “I voted leave: get on with it”—they are quite angry that we have not left the European Union—or, “I voted remain, but I can’t believe that we are still in the European Union. I am a democrat. I believe in democracy, and when we have a referendum I believe in carrying out the wishes of that referendum.” We all remember what was written on the back of that pamphlet: it said that we would follow the instructions of the British people in that referendum.

Even better than that, of course, we had a general election in 2017 in which we said that we would deliver Brexit. Labour Members stood in that general election and said they would deliver Brexit, but what do we find? Ever since that general election, we have seen dither and delay, dither and delay, and anything—anything—but vote for the Brexit that they promised. It was either, “It’s not the right deal”, or “We have to get no deal taken off the table.” Well, we had an opportunity last week to take no deal off the table, and that would have made it possible for Labour Members to have fulfilled their promise in that general election two years ago by voting for the deal that the Prime Minister brought back from Brussels. But no—the vast majority of Labour MPs voted against Second Reading. That meant that they did not want it to go any further. There was no possibility of their amending the legislation to have a customs union, to get workers’ rights or to get higher environmental standards. No, they decided they wanted to stop Brexit in its tracks, and that is why they voted against Second Reading. Only 19 of them voted to give it a Second Reading.

My constituency, Ribble Valley, is in the heart of Lancashire. In fact, on an Ordnance Survey map one of my villages is actually in the very centre of the United Kingdom. My constituency voted 57% to leave the European Union. Every constituency in Lancashire, whether it has a Labour MP or a Conservative MP—thankfully, we do not have any Lib Dems—voted to leave the European Union.

What we are seeing tonight is quite remarkable. Labour Members said that they would deliver Brexit, and they are now clearly not doing that. Then they said that they wanted more time to scrutinise the withdrawal agreement Bill, even though the vast majority of them voted against its going any further. They wanted more time, and so tonight we are offering them more time. Then they said that they wanted an early general election. Well, the way they get an early general election is by voting for the motion tonight. They will get more time to scrutinise the withdrawal agreement Bill so that they will at least fulfil part of their promise two years ago, and then get their early general election on 12 December whereby they can put forward the programme that they wish, and see where the people go.

[Mr Nigel Evans]

On the other hand, we have the Scots Nats, who are at least saying that they want to go for 9 December. They do not want to deliver Brexit—they never have—but none the less they are being consistent on that. We hear time and again that Scotland voted not to leave the European Union. More than 1 million Scots voted to leave the European Union. There is no reaching out to those 1 million Scots. More people voted to leave the European Union in Scotland than voted for the Scottish National party, so we see where that is going.

Then there are the Lib Dems, who just want to revoke article 50. They are called the Liberal Democrats. I do not know what aspect of them is democratic, because we had a referendum, the people said they wanted to leave, and that is not being fulfilled.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): As I understand it, the leader of the Liberal Democrats said that if we had a second referendum, she might not agree with its result. I wonder whether that is true.

Mr Evans: That was a previous position. However, we are in an even more bizarre position with Labour Members, because they say that if they win the election they will go to Brussels, renegotiate Brexit, then put that to the British people in a second referendum and campaign against the deal they just negotiated. That is the most Alice in Wonderland politics that I have seen in 28 years. Now we have an Opposition, who have been calling for an early general election, running scared. The last thing they want to do is face the electorate, and, quite frankly, I can see why.

6.39 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (IGC): We are apparently approaching the season of good will, when we are supposed to have Christmas parties in our primary schools and wish each other season's greetings. I hope that people who want a season of good will have not been watching these exchanges.

They say that turkeys do not vote for an early Christmas. That is probably true, but it is also apparent that some people have been on chicken runs from one constituency to another. [Interruption.] No, I am standing in Ilford South; I am not running anywhere. I am standing in my own constituency.

Kevin Brennan: I respect the hon. Gentleman. Was he referring to former members of the Independent Group for Change when he talked about those who were on chicken runs from one constituency to another?

Mike Gapes: The people who are doing it and who perhaps will do it know who they are; I will not name them.

The only way we are going to end this rancorous, divisive politics is by being realistic. If there is a general election and a party gets a big majority—35% or 40% of the vote—that will still leave a majority in this country extremely unhappy with the outcome. The referendum, in my view, was misguided. It was an advisory referendum, but former Prime Minister David Cameron nevertheless said that it would be binding. He then made his reckless gamble and ran away, leaving his successors to clear up

the mess. That referendum got us into the mess. The only way we will get closure in this country is by putting the withdrawal agreement to a confirmatory vote by the people and legislating for the referendum to be legally binding, and unambiguously so.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): Is it not somewhat ironic that we are now being offered the third general election since the referendum, with no sight of a confirmatory referendum?

Mike Gapes: Absolutely.

There is a dire need for us to think about the long-term consequences. If 16 and 17-year-olds are not allowed to vote, that generation will be extremely unhappy for many years to come. We also need to look at the role of social media. The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee has highlighted the problems with social media's involvement in election campaigning. If there is an election in a few weeks' time, it will not be properly regulated and will be open to abuse.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): I was going to raise that very point. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need new legislation on data and electoral law, to ensure that any future election is not interfered with by people committing criminal offences?

Mike Gapes: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising that. He has done a fantastic job in highlighting that issue in the House, and I wish him well for the future.

6.43 pm

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind): I supported remain in the referendum. My constituents voted to leave. My country voted to leave. The mandate and instructions that I have as a Member of this House are clear. Each and every one of us has that same instruction, and we should execute it and do the right thing. It is clear that this House is at an impasse. Those on the Government Benches want to get Brexit done and move forward, while those on the Opposition Benches want us to cancel Brexit and go back into the European Union. This impasse can only be solved in one way: by the people in a general election, making the final determination. That is why I will support a general election tonight, and so should each and every one of us.

One and a half hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the motion, the Speaker put the Question (Standing Order No. 16(1)).

The House divided: Ayes 299, Noes 70.

Division No. 13]

[6.44 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Bacon, Mr Richard
Afolami, Bim	Baker, Mr Steve
Afriyie, Adam	Baldwin, Harriett
Aldous, Peter	Barclay, rh Stephen
Allan, Lucy	Baron, Mr John
Amess, Sir David	Bellingham, Sir Henry
Andrew, Stuart	Benyon, rh Richard
Argar, Edward	Beresford, Sir Paul
Atkins, Victoria	Berry, rh Jake
Austin, Ian	Blackman, Bob

Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinanage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Frank
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike

Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, rh Zac
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollingbery, Sir George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, rh Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John

Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Sir David
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic

Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, rh Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Woodcock, John
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Colin Clark and
 David Rutley**

NOES

Allen, Heidi	Lake, Ben
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Lamb, rh Norman
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Lammy, rh Mr David
Beckett, rh Margaret	Lee, Dr Phillip
Berger, Luciana	Leslie, Mr Chris
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Lloyd, Stephen
Brake, rh Tom	Lucas, Caroline
Cable, rh Sir Vince	Lucas, Ian C.
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Lynch, Holly
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Malhotra, Seema
Clwyd, rh Ann	Maskell, Rachael
Coffey, Ann	McMorrin, Anna
Coyle, Neil	Murray, Ian
Creasy, Stella	Owen, Albert
Daby, Janet	Rowley, Danielle
Dakin, Nic	Ryan, rh Joan
Davey, rh Sir Edward	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Debbonaire, Thangam	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Dodds, Jane	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Drew, Dr David	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Dromey, Jack	Smith, Angela
Edwards, Jonathan	Smith, Owen
Ellman, Dame Louise	Soubry, rh Anna
Esterson, Bill	Stevens, Jo
Farrelly, Paul	Stone, Jamie
Farron, Tim	Sweeney, Mr Paul
Gapes, Mike	Swinson, Jo
Gill, Preet Kaur	Umunna, Chuka
Gyimah, Mr Sam	Western, Matt
Hermon, Lady	Whitfield, Martin
Hobhouse, Wera	Williams, Hywel
Huq, Dr Rupa	Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Jardine, Christine	Zeichner, Daniel
Jones, Graham P.	
Killen, Ged	
Kyle, Peter	
Laird, Lesley	

Tellers for the Noes:

Bambos Charalambous and
Jeff Smith

Question accordingly agreed to, without the majority required under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011.

The Prime Minister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition literally and figuratively has run away from the judgment of the people. For the third time, he has turned down our offer to get Brexit done, in spite of the fact that he and every member of the Labour party stood on a promise to deliver Brexit in this Parliament. I think, frankly, that the electorate will find his behaviour utterly bewildering.

As I said when moving the motion, however, we will not allow the paralysis to continue, and one way or another we must proceed straight to an election. So, later this evening, the Government will give notice of presentation of a short Bill for an election on 12 December, so that we can finally get Brexit done.

There is no support in the House, as we heard earlier from those on the Opposition Benches, for the withdrawal agreement Bill to proceed, but this House cannot any longer keep this country hostage. Millions of families and businesses cannot plan for the future, and I do not believe that this paralysis and this stagnation should be allowed to continue. Now that no deal is off the table, we have a great new deal, and it is time for the voters to have a chance to pronounce on that deal and to replace this dysfunctional Parliament with a new Parliament that can get Brexit done so the country can move on.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Ian Blackford: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

It is clear that there is a desire on the Opposition Benches to bring forward a Bill that can give us an election, but we do not trust this Prime Minister—and we do not trust him for good reason. So if the Prime Minister is going to bring forward a Bill, he must give an absolute cast-iron assurance that, up until the passage of that Bill and the rising of Parliament, there will be no attempt to bring forward the withdrawal agreement Bill. Of course, the SNP will do its job and scrutinise any Bill that comes forward.

It is absolutely demonstrably the case that we want an election. We want the people of Scotland to be given the opportunity to have their say. We will fight that election on the right of the Scottish people to determine their own future. We will not, under any circumstances, consent to being taken out of the European Union against our will. That election campaign will make it clear that the right to determine our future will be in the hands of the Scottish people.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. We have just had an hour and a half of a slightly out-of-control student union debate, and it sounds as though we might have a rather similar farcical performance tomorrow. Is there any chance of you, as the Chair of the House, persuading the usual channels to resume their meetings and produce a sensible timetable for the Bill we have before us, so that this House can resume discussion of these serious matters in a grown-up fashion and come to a resolution on the deal, which—I repeat—I will vote for if it reaches Third Reading, as I think it will? It could well be that we get back to orderly government, which I think the general public are dearly wishing we would rapidly do.

Mr Speaker: I take careful note of what the Father of the House has said, and I am certainly open to any such discussions, but it does require willing participants, and it remains to be seen, with the passage of time, whether that be so. But I think everybody will be attentive—on this occasion, as on every other—to what, on the basis of 49 years' experience in the House, the Father of the House has had to say to us.

Jeremy Corbyn: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise to you and to the Prime Minister for not being here at the point when he raised his point of order. I was detained outside the Chamber; I am now back here.

I understand that a Bill will be tabled tomorrow. We will obviously look at and scrutinise that Bill. We look forward to a clear, definitive decision that no deal is absolutely off the table and there is no danger of this Prime Minister not sticking to his word—because he has some form on these matters—and taking this country out of the EU without any deal whatever, knowing the damage it will do to jobs and industries all across this country.

Mr Speaker: That point stands in its own right.

Stephen Doughty: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As you know, I believe in correcting things when I get things wrong, and I want to apologise to the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight)—a very

honourable gentleman—for incorrectly referencing his seat in the point I made earlier. I understand that he has in fact been readopted by his association. I apologise to him for mistaking his seat for another. For that, I truly apologise.

Mr Speaker: That was typically gracious of the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I have a sense that his apology will be accepted readily. Let us hear a response in the form of a point of order from Sir Gregory Knight.

Sir Greg Knight: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I accept the very gracious comments just made.

Mr Speaker: I am greatly obliged, as the hon. Gentleman will be, to the right hon. Gentleman.

Environment Bill

[Relevant documents: Fourteenth Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Session 2017-19, Prelegislative scrutiny of the Draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill, HC 1893, and the Government Response, HC 95; and Eighteenth Report of the Environmental Audit Committee, Session 2017-19, Scrutiny of the Draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill, HC 1951, and the Government Response, HC 238.]

Second Reading

Mr Speaker: Before I invite the—it says here the Minister, but this is no mere Minister—the Secretary of State herself to move the Second Reading, I must announce my decision on certification for the purposes of Standing Order No. 83J (Certification of bills etc. as relating exclusively to England or England and Wales and being within devolved legislative competence), with which I am sure colleagues are keenly familiar. On the basis of material put before me, I certify that, in my opinion, clauses 1 to 18, 23, 52, 78, 84 and 88 to 121 of the Environment Bill and schedules 15 to 19 to the Bill relate exclusively to England on matters within devolved legislative competence, as defined in Standing Order No. 83J; and—I know colleagues are keenly hanging upon this—clauses 56, 61, 63, 65, 73 to 75, 77 and 86 of the Environment Bill and schedule 11 to the Bill relate exclusively to England and Wales on matters within devolved legislative competence, as defined in Standing Order No. 83J.

7.7 pm

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

This is a Government who recognise the profound importance of the great environmental challenges of our time. We are the first Government to set the goal that this generation should leave the natural environment in a better state than it was bequeathed to us. This is the first Government to make a legally binding commitment to become a net zero carbon economy. We have cut greenhouse gas emissions by 25% since we returned to office, while growing the economy at the same time. We have pledged more funds than ever before to help the developing world reverse the decline of nature and tackle climate change. We are determined to respond to the grave public concern about these threats, so a new Cabinet Committee will co-ordinate work on climate change across Government, under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister.

Our action is guided by the mounting scientific evidence of the inextricable link between climate and nature. Wildlife habitats are crucial carbon storage systems. Protecting those forests, peatlands and natural open spaces is vital if we are to have any chance of averting disastrous climate change.

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. Will she confirm that it is Government policy that green belt land should be built on only in extenuating circumstances? The proposals to build on the green belt in Radcliffe, Unsworth and Simister in my constituency will devastate entire green belt areas and completely destroy the character of the village of Simister. Does she agree that that is not acceptable in any community?

Theresa Villiers: I agree that it is vital that we protect our green belt and that green belt rules are abided by. The Government are absolutely determined to defend the green belt as part of our environmental policy.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend. This is a very welcome Bill, which builds on much good work that the Government have already done. Does she recognise, however, that in suburban parts of London, like hers and mine, there remains a concern about particulate pollution? Will she consider, as the Bill progresses, what more we can do to strengthen the fight against particulate pollution—for example, by seeking to strengthen our commitment by joining the World Health Organisation guidelines on particulate pollution by 2030?

Theresa Villiers: My hon. Friend will be aware that clause 2 sets out the ambition to set a legally binding target on fine particulate pollution, responding to exactly the concerns of his constituents—and indeed of mine in Chipping Barnet.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Planting more trees would make a great contribution to a more beautiful environment and have other good consequences. Will my right hon. Friend say a little about how that can be done, and can some of them come to Wokingham, please?

Theresa Villiers: The Government have been involved in planting about 15 million trees, but we are determined to expand the programme because trees are crucial storage mechanisms for carbon and we will never get to net zero unless we plant a lot more.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): My constituents, who, like me, care about nature, are absolutely delighted with the Bill. I am thrilled to be able to support it, particularly for rural communities blighted by fly-tipping. However, will my right hon. Friend watch out for the water abstraction element? It seems uncharacteristically mean.

Theresa Villiers: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his praise for the determination expressed in the Bill to protect nature and reverse the decline in biodiversity. We will listen carefully to his concerns and those of his constituents with regard to water abstraction to ensure that the Bill's provisions are implemented in a way that is sensible, proportionate and fair.

Adam Afriye (Windsor) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Windsor is a beautiful constituency with a lot of active people campaigning on the environment. One of our biggest bugbears is Heathrow airport and any expansion of it. Will she confirm that the Bill contains measures on fine particulates that could well have an impact on Heathrow's ability to expand?

Theresa Villiers: It will certainly be vital for the expansion programme at Heathrow, if it goes ahead, to comply with the exacting environmental requirements that have already been placed on it. Naturally enough, it will also have to comply with any new requirements introduced to meet the target on fine particulate pollution, to which we are committed.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): We have all received briefs from the Countryside Alliance and various other countryside bodies. They are very clear that the countryside is a place of great beauty and a habitat for wildlife. It is also a place of work and is home to millions of people. Will the Government ensure that the farming community, who own the land, look after the land and have managed it for years, will continue to do so, and that any new legislation will not disadvantage them?

Theresa Villiers: We believe we can support farmers in their environmental stewardship and in caring for our natural environment through our replacement for the common agricultural policy. That will allow us to go further and faster in providing support for farmers conducting their crucially important role in protecting our natural environment.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. For everybody's constituents, including mine in Gedling, the Bill is very important. It contains a lot of very welcome measures. If we are to have an election in the next few weeks, will she look at what can be done to preserve those measures so that they are not lost? I know that that is a matter of process, but it is extremely important to all of us and our constituents.

Theresa Villiers: I agree that this landmark proposed legislation needs to continue regardless of when Parliament dissolves for a general election. It is vital that the Bill comes back to the House as soon as possible to ensure that we can embed in legislation the important protections it contains.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Theresa Villiers: I will take one more intervention and then I will make some progress.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. I was encouraged by her answer on Heathrow. She and I were on the same side of this argument for many years. I wondered whether we still agree. In 2017, she said, "this is a hugely expensive project and one that will create significant economic damage."

Her constituents and my constituents agree. Does she still agree with those words today?

Theresa Villiers: As the hon. Lady points out, my reservations about the Heathrow expansion are on the record for everyone to read. The fact is that the House has voted by a large majority to give outline planning permission to this project. It is now for the scheme's promoters to demonstrate that they can come up with a scheme that meets the exacting conditions on the environment that Parliament has set.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene. Like many Members, I am one of a team of species champions, each representing an individual species that is in some way endangered. Does she agree it is very important that, as we tackle the housing challenge, we ensure developers build houses and create estates in a way that is sustainable for the surrounding countryside and allows those who move into such areas to live side

by side with nature in the neighbouring area? Otherwise, we will lose more of the species that are so valuable to us.

Theresa Villiers: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right and that is a core aim of the Bill: to ensure we deliver the homes we need in a way that safeguards our environment and nature.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Theresa Villiers: I have taken a lot of interventions and I need to make some progress.

We are determined to seize the environmental opportunities that come with leaving the EU, including: the opportunity to create a better, more sustainable means of managing our fish stocks and a fairer deal for the communities who have lost out under the common fisheries policy; and the opportunity to support our farmers to cut emissions and pollution, and protect nature with a new system of farm support based on public money for the public goods.

The Bill will help us to realise the bold vision set out in our 25-year environment plan for urgent meaningful action across society towards long-term environmental targets, so that global Britain can go further and faster for our natural environment. Nine consultations underpin the proposed legislation. They received over 400,000 responses. Over half the Bill's measures extend beyond England. I want to thank the devolved Administrations for working with us on the Bill, so that we can benefit the environment right across our United Kingdom.

The Bill will enshrine environmental principles in UK law for the first time, ensuring that the environment will be placed at the centre of Government decision making. The following principles are on the face of the Bill: the polluter should pay; harm should be prevented or rectified at source; the environment should be taken into consideration across Government policy; and a precautionary approach should be taken.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Would my right hon. Friend like to congratulate the Isle of Wight on becoming, earlier this year, a part of UNESCO's biosphere network? Will she work with me to ensure that our precious landscape, both on the Island and elsewhere in the UK, is increasingly protected under the Bill to make sure we do not lose it?

Theresa Villiers: I do indeed pass on my congratulations on that tremendous achievement.

Clauses 1 to 6 require the Government to set legally binding, long-term evidence-based targets to deliver significant environmental improvement in resource efficiency and waste reduction, biodiversity, air quality and water. We will become the first country in the world to do this. Future Governments will be required to publish plans to meet the targets that they have set themselves, reviewing milestones every five years and making existing targets more demanding or setting new ones if they fall short. All future Governments will be required to report annually on progress on delivering an environmental improvement plan.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Before the Secretary of State gives way to the plethora of people who wish to intervene, at present the number

of people who wish to speak means that speeches will be limited to between three and four minutes. If people intervene and take more time during the Secretary of State's speech, that time limit will go down significantly.

Theresa Villiers: I will take a point of information from the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck).

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State very much. On air quality, will she join me in congratulating the Mayor of London on the success of the ultra low emission zone, which has seen such a dramatic fall in polluting vehicles moving into inner London? Is she also conscious of the fact that 83% of reporting zones across the country are still in breach of air pollution limits? However much she tells us that the Government will be doing better, does she recognise just how scandalously short we have fallen in recent years? We have very serious doubts about what the Government are—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have this, because the hon. Lady has just spoken for half as long as most people who wait here till 10 o'clock will get.

Theresa Villiers: I will take the hint and make progress, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I reassure the hon. Member for Westminster North that we have made significant advances in cleaning up air quality across the country. There are still significant issues with roadside exceedances. There is more that we need to do and that is why the Bill will set out those demanding targets.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Theresa Villiers: No, I will make some progress.

I want to highlight clause 2, which contains one of the most ambitious elements of the legislation: namely, a duty to set a legally binding target for PM2.5 fine particulate matter. As Members will be aware, this pollutant has the most significant impact on human health. Poor air quality is the biggest environmental threat to public health. It is shortening lives and causing illness, and this Government are determined to step up our efforts to clean up the air that we breathe—an issue that I know concerns my constituents in Chipping Barnet, and I am sure that that view is shared by many across our nation.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Ind): Many of our constituents will be so relieved to hear the House discussing a positive piece of legislation. As a former public health Minister, I know that our clean air strategy was described by the WHO as an

"example for the rest of the world to follow."

Will the Secretary of State say a word about how the Bill will enable and help local government to meet their responsibilities in improving air quality across the country?

Theresa Villiers: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we will not be able to succeed in our ambition to clean up our air quality without strong action by local government. There are important provisions in the Bill to help local government to address air quality challenges, for example, in relation to domestic burning.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Theresa Villiers: For the sake of Back Benchers' speeches later on, I will have to make some progress. Just as this nation acted successfully to curb the air pollution dangers of the past, we now need to address this major environmental harm that we face in the modern era.

Clauses 19 to 38 will establish the Office for Environmental Protection as a powerful new independent watchdog on the environment. It will provide expert independent advice to Government on environmental plans; scrutinise policy and progress; investigate if public authorities fail to live up to their commitments on the environment; and, where necessary, take enforcement action. The OEP will have a role in enforcing climate change law as well, complementing the functions of the much respected Committee on Climate Change. This addition to the Bill was one for which both the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the Environmental Audit Committee called. As a non-departmental public body, the OEP will be independent of ministerial control. It will have a free-to-use complaints system for the public, and multi-year funding settlements will give it financial stability.

The second half of the Bill will empower environmental improvement across a range of sectors, encouraging businesses to innovate and invest in meeting the crucial environmental challenges that we face as a nation, and creating additional powers for local government on waste, nature, air quality and water. I think everyone in the House would agree that we need greater efficiency in the way we treat resources and waste. Our constituents are fed up with litter and fly-tipping and appalled by plastic pollution. This legislation will help us to crack down on the blight of waste crime and fly-tipping that costs the taxpayer over £600 million every year. It contains a powerful new set of measures to tackle plastic waste.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that making the producers responsible for the plastic that they make will drive a step change in ensuring that products are no longer just chucked away, but are made to last and be repaired and recycled, bringing an end to this plastic pollution nightmare?

Theresa Villiers: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the extended producer responsibility provisions in the Bill will help to deliver the results for which she is calling.

Our "Future of the Sea" report estimates that 12 million tonnes of plastic are currently entering the ocean and that that could treble by 2025. Our constituents are demanding change. We must act to address the shocking levels of plastic in the marine environment, and the Bill will make it easier to reuse and recycle so that we build a more circular economy at home to conserve and better use our precious natural resources.

Clause 49 grants the power to set up a deposit return scheme for products such as drinks containers. Clause 50 enables the plastic bag charge to be extended to other items—the charge has seen bag use drop by 90% since its introduction. We believe that these provisions will be widely welcomed by many who want concerted action to tackle the tragedy of plastics pollution. The suite of measures on plastics in the Bill is further strengthened

by powers to make those who produce plastic packaging pay for its whole lifetime cost, including disposal. This will incentivise a switch to more sustainable forms of packaging and, crucially, provide an income stream to fund improvements to the way we tackle waste and recycling. Stronger standards for a wide range of products and clearer labelling will enable consumers to identify more sustainable products. A consistent set of materials will be collected from every household and business to help us all to recycle more, and the Bill also includes measures to encourage businesses to waste less food and help to ensure that surpluses reach those who need them.

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): I am a very old-fashioned man, and I come from an age when we mended things if they broke. I hope that my right hon. Friend agrees that the Bill will encourage people to go back to the days when we actually fixed things rather than threw them away at the end of use.

Theresa Villiers: That is one of the outcomes that we hope the Bill will help to deliver.

As well as wide-ranging plans on plastics, the Bill has at its heart an extensive package to protect nature. The net gain provisions in schedule 15 will make a 10% boost for biodiversity a compulsory part of plans for new development. I believe that this will generate tens of millions for investment in nature and give more people better access to green space.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I am quite sure that the right hon. Lady, as a former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, will be deeply concerned that we have no functioning Assembly and have not had one for almost three years. If we do not have the Assembly restored in the forthcoming weeks, will she commit to extending much more of this—I use her word—"landmark" Environment Bill to Northern Ireland? Many people in Northern Ireland would be very pleased if she could make that commitment.

Theresa Villiers: I cannot give that commitment today, but we work very closely with the Northern Ireland civil service, and the hon. Lady will be aware that many provisions in the Bill are ready to apply to Northern Ireland; for the moment, they need Ministers to switch them on. We will continue to keep the question of governance under review, and I would love to see many more of these measures extended to Northern Ireland, but we have to respect the constitutional settlement.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Theresa Villiers: No, I am going to make some progress.

The Government have already strengthened the protections for ancient woodlands, veteran trees and irreplaceable habitats, and the Bill helps us to go further. Schedule 16 will help to combat illegal deforestation. We are also legislating to give communities a say when local authorities plan to remove treasured trees from urban and suburban streets.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): On the subject of engaging communities, will the Secretary of State take note of a recent report from the Environmental Audit Committee, on which I sit, on invasive species which

calls for an army of volunteers across this country to help identify invasive species so we can help to eradicate them?

Theresa Villiers: I agree that volunteers getting involved in the fight against invasive species is very productive. There is an example in my own constituency, where a group is helping to remove invasive species from Pymmes Brook.

The Bill will strengthen and improve the duty on public authorities to make sure that the way they carry out their functions both conserves and enhances biodiversity and enables landowners to enter voluntary conservation covenants with responsible bodies, such as charities, that would bind subsequent owners of the land to sustainable stewardship long into the future. It also provides an important statutory underpinning for the nature recovery network we outlined in our 25-year plan—for example, by mandating the creation of local nature recovery strategies to map nature-rich habitats.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): As chair of the all-party group on ocean conservation, I want to thank the Secretary of State on behalf of all of us who care about our seas for the measures in the Bill to reduce plastic waste. We also welcome the additional powers to hold water companies to account. Can she confirm that these extra powers will help to reduce the number of sewer overflows during heavy rain and hold water companies to account if they fail to reduce and eventually eradicate them?

Theresa Villiers: My hon. Friend is right that the Bill contains measures that will make it easier to maintain the pressure on water companies to do more to combat pollution. We want them to do better when it comes to tackling these completely unacceptable instances of sewer overflows and pollution.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Theresa Villiers: No, I am going to wind up now.

Clean, safe and abundant water for all is a fundamental focus of this Bill. The provisions in part 5 will improve the way companies operate to meet current and future demand, help to ensure improved, long-term water resources, help with wastewater planning and enable more resilient solutions to drought and flooding.

In conclusion, just as the Bill seeks to put nature and climate at the heart of government decision making, so the Government are placing these environmental goals at the heart of our efforts to relieve poverty around the world. We are doubling our international climate finance funding and investing £220 million to protect international biodiversity. Working with overseas territories, we are on track to protect over 4 million sq km of the ocean by the end of 2020, and we are leading a global ocean alliance determined to protect at least 30% of the ocean in marine protected areas by 2030.

As we look ahead to co-hosting COP 26, we want this country to lead the global ambition for international targets on climate, ocean and biodiversity. I hope that in years to come people will look back on 2020 as a turning point—as a time when we came together, both nationally and internationally, to start to reverse the disastrous erosion of nature and wildlife. There can be no doubt that reversing the tragedy of biodiversity loss

is a massive task, but the Bill sets up a vital framework to enable that process of recovery to accelerate. It is a truly landmark piece of legislation, enshrining environmental principles in law, requiring this Government and their successors to set demanding and legally binding targets and creating a world-leading environmental watchdog to hold them to account.

In my maiden speech in this House, I extolled the beauty of the open spaces of my Chipping Barnet constituency. I emphasised the crucial importance I placed on protection of the green belt and our natural environment. Fifteen years on, I remain convinced that there can be few things more important for a Member of this House than to be able to say that in their time in elected office they played a part in conserving the stunning landscapes, wildlife and natural habitats of this great country. In its 232 pages, its 130 clauses and its 20 schedules, the Bill will help us all to do that. I commend the Bill to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Before I call the shadow Minister, I should warn hon. Members that there will be an initial time limit of four minutes and that that is likely to reduce very soon to three minutes.

7.36 pm

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): I begin by thanking the Secretary of State and her civil servants for meeting me last week, and by acknowledging all the work put into the Bill by civil servants, non-governmental organisations and others who have brought it to this stage. We can all acknowledge that it contains improvements on the original draft.

That said, Greener UK, the organisation representing environmental NGOs, has said that the Bill is “in need of significant amendment before it is capable of guaranteeing that we do not fall below current standards.”

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that leaving the European Union, or the risk of leaving it, puts many of these environmental protections at risk?

Sue Hayman: It is vital that as we leave the EU all the necessary environmental protections are in place and equivalent to what we have now.

The Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), has also raised concerns. He said:

“Despite the Government attempting to establish a robust framework for environmental governance, it appears to have fallen short in its own ambitions.”

It is clear that improvements are still needed. Nature is in a worse state than when the Conservative Government came to power. That is shown in the latest RSPB state of nature report, which found that 41% of UK species studied had declined and that no real improvements had been made since its report in 2016. Greener UK is also concerned about the Government’s commitment to resourcing vital environmental work, saying:

“For the bill to succeed, it will require a step change in resourcing of local government, the Office for Environmental Protection and frontline delivery agencies such as Natural England and the Environment Agency.”

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Ind): I would be grateful if the hon. Lady could confirm that she welcomes the ambition in the Bill to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than it inherited, but does she also agree that that means that the Bill should reflect a non-regression principle—in other words, that our environmental standards should not fall below what we currently have?

Sue Hayman: The hon. Lady makes an important point. I shall come to non-regression later.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The hon. Lady is making a powerful case. The Secretary of State talked a lot about how the Bill would put in place a long-term vision. Does she share my concern about what it says about biodiversity net gain? It says that the net gain sites are guaranteed for only 30 years. They could be ploughed up after 30 years. Does that reflect a long-term vision?

Sue Hayman: What the hon. Lady has said reflects some of my own concerns. I also have concerns about backing everything on to net gain, which has not proved as effective as would have been hoped in other countries, such as Australia.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Sue Hayman: I am going to make some progress. I am aware of the shortage of time.

We will discuss the details of the Bill in Committee, but I want to touch on a few aspects of it now: the principle of non-regression, targets, and the independence and powers of the Office for Environmental Protection. I also want to mention, briefly, some of our concerns about biodiversity net gain, water, nature recovery strategies and recycling.

The *Financial Times* has reported that an official paper proposed to deviate from green standards set by the European Union, and that the UK was open to significant divergence despite the Prime Minister's promise that standards would not fall. Can the Secretary of State shed any more light on the content of that official paper? The Government have missed four chances to guarantee equal environmental standards after Brexit. Will the Secretary of State now commit herself to an amendment to legally ensure non-regression on environmental standards? According to Greener UK, the environmental principles constitute

"a significant and unacceptable weakening of the legal effect of the principles."

May I ask the Secretary of State how that can be justified?

We know that the Government have missed a number of environmental targets, and that the number of serious pollution incidents recorded in 2018-19 rose to the highest level since 2014-15. A leaked document from last year showed that the Government had actually abandoned agreed targets for conserving England's sites of special scientific interest, and we know that air quality targets have also been consistently flouted.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making some important points. Along with many other residents, I am currently

opposing the building of an incinerator in Rumney, Trowbridge and St Mellons, in my constituency. My constituents are worried not only about the air quality implications of what comes out of the incinerator but about traffic particulates from heavy goods vehicles which, potentially, will be bringing waste to the site from all over the UK. Does my hon. Friend agree that that needs to be looked at?

Sue Hayman: I agree that we need to look at such issues extremely carefully when making planning decisions.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): If the Government are really serious about air quality, surely it is time for them to adopt a 100% standard, to include carbon capture and storage, in any environment Bill that they may introduce, and to give our industry an opportunity to thrive and survive.

Sue Hayman: It is a shame that funding for CCS was stopped some years ago. If that had not happened, we might be quite a bit further ahead.

All the targets in the Bill, including the interim targets, must be legally binding, and must be set to be achieved as soon as possible. It is commendable that the Bill confirms the creation of statutory environmental improvement plans to ensure legally binding environmental targets in areas such as air, water, waste and biodiversity by 2022, but Greenpeace has pointed out that it does not contain any provisions to hold the Government to those legal commitments until 2037. Given the climate and environment emergency that we face, can the Secretary of State explain why she is allowing a delay of nearly two decades before the Bill can have any real bite?

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): This weekend the River Ouse flooded yet again, and, four years after the floods that devastated the city of York, the Government have failed to address the serious need for upper catchment management to improve the diversity of the moorlands. Does my hon. Friend agree that that should be centre stage in the Bill?

Sue Hayman: As I am sure my hon. Friend knows, flooding is an issue that is close to my heart as well, and we certainly need to ask why it is not included more fundamentally in the Bill.

Although the Bill sets out responsibilities for improving air quality, it does not commit the Government to reaching the World Health Organisation's goal of 10 micrograms per cubic metre by 2030 at the latest. The hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) mentioned that earlier, but he is no longer present, so I will ask the same question: will the Secretary of State agree to enshrine that target in the Bill, given the public health emergency caused by illegal air pollution?

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Sue Hayman: I really think that I need to make some progress.

Let me now say something about the independence of the proposed Office for Environmental Protection. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) has said, the only reason the Government have made any movement on waste, landfill and air quality is the threat of EU fines, so it is disappointing that the OEP will have no powers to issue such fines. Will the Secretary of State agree to consider enabling it to do so, in order to give it real teeth? I welcome the change enabling it to conduct investigations on its own initiative, but we should like it to be empowered to conduct broader inquiries into systemic issues, to make recommendations, and to issue guidance.

Greener UK has said:

“The bill includes several measures which could seriously undermine the water environment”.

Another hon. Member who has now left the Chamber mentioned abstraction. The proposed new powers for the Environment Agency to revoke abstraction licences would not come into play until 1 January 2028, although England’s water supplies are already under severe pressure. There are also no water efficiency commitments, although British water consumption is the highest in Europe. Can the Secretary of State explain how that omission can be in line with the Government’s pledge in their 25-year environment plan to reduce water use and halve water leakages by 2050?

I am pleased to see that the Bill includes a commitment to nature recovery networks, but it passes more powers and duties to local councils without attaching adequate funding.

Tracey Crouch: Like me, the hon. Lady will have seen many plans for housing developments in her constituency featuring lovely pictures of trees and shrubbery, and will know that the reality turns out to be very different. Does she, like me, welcome the commitment in the Bill to requiring developers to ensure that their developments improve biodiversity by at least 10%, either on site or nearby?

Sue Hayman: I agree that our planning and development should be much better in terms of environmental impact, and I think it important for us to set targets for that to be achieved.

The Bill does little to ensure that nature recovery strategies properly influence policy and decision making in areas such as planning—we may need to go further in some instances—environmental land management, and biodiversity net gain. In respect of biodiversity net gain, can the Secretary of State give us the rationale, in the context of a climate and environment emergency, for the exemption of national infrastructure projects, although they are often the most environmentally damaging development schemes? Can she also tell us why biodiversity net gain does not apply to private organisations?

Labour will seek further assurances that legally binding targets on waste minimisation will be introduced. Does the Secretary of State agree that the waste and resource efficiency measures are far too focused on end-of-life solutions to waste and recycling issues? The fact that potential single-use charges will apply only to plastic is a significant missed opportunity that could result in unintended consequences.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): Labour-run St Helens Council is the leading English local authority investing in new technology, new vehicles and an innovative single-use recycling point. Does my hon. Friend agree that that burden should be shared between national and local government, particularly at a time when local authorities have been so financially constrained? Should the Government not concentrate on supporting authorities that are acting now, rather than waiting to fund those that are not at a later stage?

Sue Hayman: My hon. Friend has made an excellent point.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Does she agree that we could cut out much of our waste through a system like the one that was introduced in Germany 20 years ago, the Grüne Punkt system, under which people leave packaging in supermarkets? That would quickly change the way in which producers supply products to our stores.

Sue Hayman: My hon. Friend gives an excellent example, and I thank him for that.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that we need 100% responsibility from the producers themselves, from the creation of waste right through to the clean-up, and that the recycling must also be looked at so that waste is not just shipped overseas, which is where it is going at present? We need to be conscious of all this. My Back-Bench Bill in the last Session addressed some of these areas, and I am pleased to see that some of it has been taken on board, but not all of it has been; we need to see that from the beginning of the life cycle to the end, so that when people go into the supermarkets they can actually make decisions based on this information.

Sue Hayman: That is right. It is important that we look at it right across the piece, from manufacturing down to what happens after we have finished using something.

Tellingly, waste recovery company Biffa has said that it is disappointed in the lack of ambition in the Bill, and it has called for plastics to be recycled domestically in the UK to restore public confidence in recycling and to boost UK jobs and investment. That will require a commitment from Government to further invest in UK recycling infrastructure, which is long overdue.

In conclusion, despite this being a move in the right direction it is clear that the provisions in the Bill are not sufficient when we consider the scale of the environmental and climate crisis we face. We need radical, targeted measures, and I ask the Secretary of State to work with the Opposition in Committee so that we can achieve this goal.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. There is an immediate time limit of four minutes on Back-Bench speeches.

7.51 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I am very pleased that the Government have introduced this Bill; the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has conducted prelegislative scrutiny, and I am glad the Bill has moved towards our recommendations. I welcome the fact that the Government will set a multi-annual budget for the Office for Environmental Protection and include climate change in the remit. However, I do want to make three points.

First, the Bill must not allow for any regression from our current high environmental standards; the Committee will look at this very carefully. The Committee will also examine how and when the Government can be held to account if they fail to meet the targets. In relation to air quality, while I welcome the Government's plan to set a target, this target only needs to be set before 2022, and it is not clear how ambitious it must be. We must move much more to using electric cars in our inner cities and make sure they hold a lot of the renewable energy at night when recharged, to help use up and store our renewable energy. I ask the Government to match the World Health Organisation guidelines for dangerous emissions such as particulate matter. I appreciate that the Government might not want to mention WHO targets, which can change; however, committing to an actual figure so that it is a legal target is very important.

Secondly, the Government have proposed that the environmental principles currently enshrined in our legislation under EU law should be a policy statement. That has caused a great deal of concern. Principles such as the polluter pays are vital to environmental protection. A policy statement is much weaker and easier to revise, so I shall be interested to hear what the Secretary of State has to say about a much stronger commitment, as proposed in our report.

Thirdly, we need the OEP to be independent of the Government and sufficiently powerful. The previous Secretary of State foresaw that, and I hope that the current Secretary of State sees it in the same way. This new watchdog might need to be given sharper teeth than is proposed. There are already better models, such as the Office for Budget Responsibility.

To sum up, while I welcome the Bill, there certainly does need to be just a little improvement. That is why my Committee has just announced a new inquiry into the Bill so we can make constructive recommendations to the Government and ensure we achieve all we want, which is to leave the environment in a much better state than we found it, and we have made good progress. I also welcome the Secretary of State's comments today about how we will deal with the Agriculture Bill: we can have a much better policy for agriculture than the common agricultural policy; it can be better for the environment and for food production, and we can do all the things that we really want to do.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): I will be brief as many Members want to speak.

I have been out and seen one of the high-level stewardship schemes. Will my hon. Friend's Committee consider whether the schemes could be administered locally, to look at fauna and flora locally instead of on a national basis?

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend makes a good point, because one thing we can do with the new stewardship schemes and with our agriculture and environment policy is to have a much more localised system of management, so we create greater biodiversity: we can manage in a way whereby we improve that. I would be very happy to look at what my hon. Friend asks for in the future, because we can link this Bill and the Agriculture Bill in so many ways, and we can have good healthy food along with a better environment. We can also help with flooding—a point made from the Opposition Benches—and manage land better, such as by holding back the water in certain places.

I also want to make a brief point about fisheries policy and environment policy. The one thing that Norway does so much better than the EU is to manage its fish stocks; it is able to shut down areas that are overfished overnight and can open up areas where fishing can be allowed. We can learn a great deal from the Norwegians and what happens in the Faroes. One thing we must not be absolutely convinced of in this place is that the EU is the fount of all wisdom; it certainly is not. So as we move forward with our Environment Bill and agriculture and fishing Bills, I hope we can bring in some great common sense, reducing bureaucracy but also delivering a better environment, better agriculture and better fisheries.

7.56 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I am afraid that I see this Bill as, at very best, representing a failure of ambition. I suspect that it is not at its best, however, and that actually it represents a failure to understand the issues and the hope that a lick of paint on some old policies will make those annoying environmental folk just go away. Let us examine some of the Bill's shortcomings.

It relies on the Government's 25-year plan for the environment; Mao only had a five-year plan but here we have a Tory Government with a plan five times longer and far less ambitious. These are some highlights from it: 11 years to reduce five air pollutants by half—"Don't breathe yet, children; wait a while, and even then..."; the ending of the sale of fossil fuel cars and vans another decade after that; in the meantime, encouraging industry to follow some good practice guidelines on emissions—well, that ought to do it, but then it might not; and trying to get England's water companies to reduce the leaks from their pipes by 15% over the next six years—the other 85% can keep leaking, it seems.

There is a section on adapting to climate change—making sure that policies take the changing climate into account. That is like deciding to increase the size of the Thames barrier to take account of increases in sea level. I understand the planning for that has already started.

In my view, this is truly weak and limp-willed, hoping that a bit of light dusting will mean guests do not see the hole in the floor. Let me give a glaring example: in clauses 18 and 40—the clauses that compel Ministers to consider environmental effects—the Ministry of Defence is excused. In fact, the military are entirely excused from any obligation to think about their effects on the environment, in spite of being a major polluter. In the action plan with such a distant time for completion

there is a section that has the ambition of ensuring seafloor habitats are productive and sufficiently extensive to support healthy, sustainable ecosystems. For a century, however, the MOD was simply dumping large quantities of unwanted explosives and chemical and biological weapons into the seas around our coasts—and it also threw in a load of radioactive waste for good measure.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a good point about the MOD and its responsibilities. I remember doing a school project in the '90s about this, when there were things washing up on Scotland's beaches. Does my hon. Friend agree that the UK Government must be a lot more ambitious about cleaning up their own mess?

Deidre Brock: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. It is utterly inexcusable that one Department that has so much impact on our environment is excused from its responsibilities in this way. I certainly remember reading about the 1995 incidents when explosives were washed up on the Clyde coast—a shocking occasion. The largest of those munitions dumps, at Beaufort's dyke in the Irish sea, now has a gas pipe running through it, and none of it is even monitored, let alone tidied up. I know this because I have asked. How can that flagrant disregard for the marine environment align with this vague promise to look after the seabed? And how does that match up with excusing the MOD of any responsibility under the Bill?

There are other MOD sites, of course: the ship refuelling stations, the bases handling nuclear weapons and nuclear subs and the ranges where live firing is practised. We already know about the damaging health effects on former soldiers of some of the munitions they have dealt with, but we do not know anything about the weapons that are fired on those ranges. The MOD has told me that it does environmental audits with its "industry partner", whatever that is, but that it will not publish them. We are not to be told about the environmental impact of this massive polluter, and it is being excused responsibility under the Bill. I do not think that is good enough. There is no such thing as acceptable environmental damage, and there should be no such thing as a Department with an environmental "get out of jail free" card.

Of course, this thing will ultimately pass—no one is going to vote down an environment Bill—but it really is not what is needed. Serious action to limit emissions and clean up the messes that have been left would be more worth while. For example, what about legislating so that English water companies cannot pay dividends to their shareholders while they are still pouring a precious resource into the ground? Or even better, why not copy the Scottish system and have a publicly owned water company that can spend on infrastructure because it does not have to make a profit? How about taking the power to close down companies that refuse to comply with best practice? How about telling them that their days of pouring pollutants into other people's air and water are over? No soft touch, no more, "Come along now, play nicely"; instead, we need to say, "You do not get to do this any more." And here is another thought: what about refusing to allow the import of products that can be shown to have a poor environmental footprint? None of that is in the Bill.

There is some target setting in there, but no indication of taking any power that might allow those targets to be met. Just last week, Ofgem refused to allow a subsea cable to be laid from Shetland to the mainland to allow the output from a large wind farm to get to potential customers. That was refused on the basis that subsidies have been withdrawn by this Government under its previous guises since 2010. Where is the provision in the Bill to put those subsidies back or—given that Shetland would like to press ahead anyway—to force the provision of the connection to the grid? Where is the ambition?

The creation of a clunky and unwieldy Office for Environmental Protection is a major disappointment. It will involve enforcement provisions that give weakness a bad name. Where are the prosecuting powers it needs? Where is its ability to act independently and develop the principles behind environmental law? There is nothing in the Bill to protect the Aarhus convention rights. Back in July 2016, I asked the then EFRA Secretary, the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), whether the UK would continue to abide by Aarhus after leaving the EU, and she replied:

"Until we leave the EU, EU law continues to apply so the UK continues to comply with EU law that implements obligations in the Aarhus Convention. The UK remains a Party to the Aarhus Convention."

In November last year, I asked the next EFRA Secretary, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), whether he planned to maintain compliance with the Aarhus convention on access to information, public participation in decision making and access to justice in environmental matters after the UK had left the EU, and he replied, "Yes". So where are those commitments, and why are they not in the Bill? Will the Secretary of State undertake to bring forward amendments that will satisfy those commitments, and can we be assured that amendments will be tabled in Committee that will beef up the OEP? Can we at least give the tiger a set of dentures, if it is not going to have serious teeth?

I would like to ask some further questions about devolved issues. It would be helpful if Ministers set out how they developed their thinking on the need for the climate change measures and legislation to be covered by the OEP, and how they decided that this was needed. Also, do Scottish Ministers support the proposals? What consultation was undertaken with them prior to their inclusion? Will the Secretary of State set out what resource has been made available to date for the OEP? It is suggested that the OEP's remit covers all UK climate change legislation. Are the Government proposing that it has oversight of Scottish legislation, which is devolved? If there is a need for a UK-wide approach, would that not logically suggest that the remit for doing this should be given to the Scottish Government, given that they already have world-leading legislation and more ambitious targets in place? This is surely something that the UK Government should be seriously considering.

Every Member here will have had the same representations from environmental organisations that I have had. We all know that they are unhappy that there is no protection in the Bill against regression and that they fear that the legislation could be watered down in the future. I know that there will be armchair constitutional experts muttering into their port that one Parliament cannot bind another, but we all know that politics makes that a lie. We all know that confident,

[Deidre Brock]

positive action arising from having the political will to deliver has a binding effect on future Parliaments and Governments. If it did not, the NHS would have disappeared decades ago. Strong action now to protect and enhance the environment, and repercussions for those who transgress, will set a tone that a future Government or Parliament would find it hard to undo.

We need to see changes in the way we see waste. We must no longer think that we will deal with it when we come to it; rather, we need more planning not to create it in the first place. A bit of Government encouragement could do that, and plastics are not the only waste we should be concerned about. I am young enough to remember a time when aerosols were innocent cans that people used every morning, and most people never knew the damage that the gases could do. Well, we all ken now, and the question is: what else are we blithely ignorant of as we go about our comfortable, modern life? Cut the waste; do it in legislation; and do it now! Have courage! Take that courage in both hands and give us legislation that is fit for purpose. Do something stunning this year instead of something that could be described as stunningly stupid.

8.7 pm

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Ind): I always think that we get listened to better in this House if we can find something in what we say that is generous to the other side, so I will be generous and say that I welcome the Bill. I have come straight from the West Berkshire climate conference, which nearly 300 people attended. People from the community spoke with real passion about their interest in more than just dealing with greenhouse gases. They spoke about the need to reverse the declines in biodiversity, about addressing a resurgence in the value of our natural capital and of our rivers, about the wider aspects of land use that could see greater amounts of carbon sequestered, about flood protection and about policies with human wellbeing at their heart.

I see many positives in the Bill. I like the sound of the biodiversity net gain. I like seeing the 25-year plan being put on a statutory footing in the Bill. I also like the nature recovery strategies and many of the proposals on waste and plastic. I applaud my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for her introduction of the Bill. Having been involved in many negotiations with her Department, I know that clauses 16, 17 and 18 have taken a lot of work, and I am delighted to see how they have turned out. I implore hon. Members on both sides of the House and some of the organisations that are advising us to see the value of what is in here. It is this House and the national policy statement that the Secretary of State will make at the Dispatch Box that will be held to account, and that is crucial. That is in the wording of those clauses. It is this House and the democratic institutions that support us that will decide the future environmental direction of this and future Governments, rather than putting it in the hands of the courts, which would perhaps too often see it in a rather dry, legalistic sense. People can make these cases in Parliament with emotion and passion.

Clauses 73 to 87 relate to water, and I refer hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am a great fan of regulation in this

area. The water framework directive sets out demanding standards which, if not met, result in infraction fines from Europe. We are trying to encourage the Government to emulate that as best we can in this piece of legislation. It is worrying that England is behind on its targets to achieve good ecological status for all waterways by 2027, and the concern is that this Bill allows the Government to give themselves powers to amend difficult targets or the way in which they are measured. I hope that we will be able to tease out the Government's precise intentions during the Bill's passage, because there is bold ambition across the House to address the failings of past years on our waterways.

I also want the Bill to do more to tackle water consumption. We are able to have targets for reducing particulate matter, so why can we not have targets to tackle water consumption? Abstraction is a major problem for our environment, and I want greater measures to address it.

In totality, there is much to applaud the Government on, and I hope we will hear from Members on both sides of the House at least an acceptance that the Government are noble in their intention to create something that will have a lasting effect down the generations. I applaud the Secretary of State for bringing in this Bill.

8.11 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon). I share some of his concerns about the potential watering down of targets made by Ministers and then enacted or judged by a body that is appointed by Ministers.

It is important to remember why we are here. We are here because of Brexit. We are here because, in the 1970s, the UK was the dirty man of Europe—or the dirty person, as I think we should probably call ourselves—and we pumped raw sewage into the sea. Thanks, however, to the European Union's level playing field provisions, which allow no member state to race to the bottom and compete on the environment, we now have cleaner beaches, drive more fuel-efficient cars and have reduced our waste going to landfill.

I see Brexit as a clear and present danger to the UK environment. Yes, the Government have, through the original European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, copied and pasted some EU law into UK law. The danger is that it will become zombie legislation that is no longer monitored, enforced or updated. There is a troublesome third that cannot be cut and pasted that this Bill is designed to address, but there is nothing to stop those targets, as the right hon. Gentleman said, being quietly reversed by a future Government. Leaving the EU means that we risk losing those key protections and an entire system of the regulation of chemicals under REACH, which means that UK companies that sell right across the European Union that have already spent hundreds of millions of pounds registering thousands of chemicals with the European Union now face a double regulatory burden if and when the UK Government set up their own chemicals regulator.

Food safety could be compromised, and we could end up with higher pesticide residue in food if protections are negotiated away to secure a trade deal with the United States. Our farmers are the custodians of our environment—I pay tribute to the amazing farmers

doing such a brilliant job in Wakefield—but they face a triple whammy through loss of subsidies. For example, the CAP subsidies are only guaranteed by the Government until the end of 2022.

Jane Dodds (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): Many of the excellent farmers in my constituency of Brecon and Radnorshire are keen to do whatever they can to help the environment. Does the hon. Lady agree that the Government should ensure that measures for protecting the environment are joined up with land management policies that support our farmers?

Mary Creagh: I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Lady, and I pay tribute to the farmers in her constituency. We know how dependent their incomes are on CAP subsidies, but the Agriculture Bill, which Members spent many months debating, and the fisheries Bill were both frozen and then not carried over, so the Government are resetting the clock. There are no guarantees about what happens post 2022 and what farmers know—

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mary Creagh: I will not give way, because I want to make some progress. Farmers face tariffs and checks on their EU exports and increased competition from countries with lower food, animal welfare and environmental standards. The previous withdrawal agreement negotiated by the previous Prime Minister contained a level playing field non-regression commitment, but the new European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill, which was presented by the Prime Minister and then withdrawn in some sort of deal in order to get an early general election, contains no such comfort.

We are debating a Bill that may or may not progress into Committee and that my Environmental Audit Committee—I pay tribute to colleagues from across the House—spent many weeks and months examining and trying to make better. However, if there is no agreement between the UK and the EU about our future agreement by the end of the transition period in December 2020, there will be no legal requirement for us to maintain existing standards and protections. I am worried about the possibility of significant divergence, so I am concerned about what Brexit will do.

My Committee made several recommendations, particularly in the area of extended producer responsibility. We recommended a latte levy to reduce the 2.5 billion single-use coffee cups that are thrown away every year, but the Government said no. We wanted a 1p charge on every garment sold in the UK to tackle 300,000 tonnes of textile waste that goes to landfill or is incinerated every year, but the Government again said no. I am pleased that the Bill has adopted some of the recommendations of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and my Environmental Audit Committee, meaning that carbon budgets and targets are legally enforceable.

However, I am still concerned that the watchdog is toothless, the targets are too little, too late, and the environmental principles are not on the face of the Bill, and I look forward to quizzing the Secretary of State about the watchdog. This Government have more experience in shutting watchdogs down—they scrapped the Royal

Commission on Environmental Pollution and the Sustainable Development Commission—than in setting them up, and I hope to quiz her further tomorrow.

8.16 pm

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), on whose Environmental Audit Committee I served until March this year, when I was called back to the Front Bench, but here I am again back on the Back Benches.

For many years, our core environmental policies had been jointly agreed at EU level, with proposals from the European Commission being amended and confirmed by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. Indeed, I served in the European Parliament between 1999 and 2004 on the environment committee, so many of the directives and regulations currently in force were agreed when I was there. Indeed, I attended many of the conciliation meetings late into the night that hammered out the detail of much of this legislation.

Leaving the European Union gives us an opportunity to take back control and to move forwards, not backwards. The Bill will secure the progress that we have made on a wide range of environmental priorities and put in place the framework needed to keep pace with EU and global standards. It will also allow us to take the lead in setting new levels of performance: we will no longer have to move at the speed of the slowest.

Sir Greg Knight: I agree with my right hon. Friend's point. Does he agree that we could help to improve standards in food labelling by tightening up requirements?

Mr Goodwill: Indeed. We now have the freedom to do that.

The hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) was worried about incinerators being built in his constituency, but it is European policy to phase out landfill and replace it with clean incinerators that operate under the standards imposed by the large combustion plants directive. Leaving the EU means that we could go back to dirty, polluting landfill instead of having cleaner incinerators, but I do not believe that that is the way forward.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) talked about the military. When passing legislation in Europe on vehicle emissions, I recall that there was almost always an exception for military use for vehicles and for noise, particularly for aircraft.

The hon. Member for Wakefield made a good point about our progress in improving many of our environmental standards since becoming a member of the European Union. Our rivers are cleaner, we have salmon in rivers where they have never been seen before, and our bathing water is cleaner. Indeed, the new standards that have been brought in have often led people to believe that we are going backwards, because beaches that had passed under the previous standards then failed when the standards were tightened up. While we can set ambitious and challenging new standards, we must ensure that people are aware of when we have made progress, even if we fail to hit the higher standards. Legislation was introduced at the same time as privatisation and meant that investment in water quality did not have to join the queue behind

[Mr Goodwill]

hospitals, schools and the other priorities of Government. It was privatisation that allowed us to deliver on such great projects as the Burniston sewage works in my constituency, the £50 million storm water tank in Scarborough and the new Irton water treatment works that are being built. The real risk to our water quality is not from leaving the EU but from nationalisation, which would once again mean investment in water quality having to join the queue behind other priorities, such as the NHS.

While we were in Europe we passed the REACH regulations and the chemicals registration legislation, which meant that we tested a back catalogue of chemicals, at a cost of £6 billion, during the course of which 100,000 animals were tested. We must not have to redo all that work and test all those animals alone. Although we are transferring responsibility to the Health and Safety Executive, we should not go it alone. Indeed, in the political declaration on 10 October, we talked about exploring the possibility of co-operation. I believe that associate membership of the European Chemicals Agency is the right way forward, while at the same time retaining the right to independence, so that if political decisions are made on chemicals such as glyphosate, we can do our own thing.

I was pleased to see the compulsory recall of vehicles in the legislation. Having been a Transport Minister at the time of the Volkswagen debacle, I think that is important. Clause 50 and schedule 10, on plastic return, are important, so long as we ensure that any schemes put in place are carbon-negative. Schemes such as reusable bottles can look good at the outset but can often mean transporting heavy glass around the country.

There are concerns in urban areas about the restrictions on coal and wood for burning, particularly for steam vehicles—I own one—and about access to coal, and also in rural areas, where no gas is available. I was pleased to see clause 63, which deals with litter. Maybe council enforcement officers could do other work in that area—for instance, on parking.

I hope to be fortunate enough to serve on the Bill Committee. Leaving the EU is an opportunity for our environment. This Bill gives us the tools we need to fully exploit those opportunities.

8.21 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I, too, hope that I will be able to serve on the Bill Committee.

I welcome the direction of travel and the fact that we are discussing these issues in such detail. However, given that we have only a short amount of time, I want to focus on a few concerns about the Bill. The first is that, as others have said, there is no commitment to non-regression in environmental standards. We are being asked to take the Government's word for it that they will not lower standards in any future trade deal. I am sorry to say that I just do not believe that. The Government took non-regression out of the withdrawal agreement, and a recent leaked DEFRA briefing stated that the Department for International Trade would be putting it under significant pressure to lower standards. I served on the Public Bill Committee for the Agriculture Bill and tabled new clause 1 on Report, but we know from

the reaction we got when we tried to get something put in writing, that, frankly, if you like it, you gotta put a ring on it—as Beyoncé once said. I just do not accept the oral assurances. That measure needs to be enshrined in the Bill.

The environmental principles are not enshrined in law in the Bill either. Instead, Ministers only have to have due regard to them, which is a significant step backwards compared with the current EU arrangement. Long-term targets do not need to be set until 2022 and might not be enforced for almost two decades. We must have shorter-term milestones, perhaps in the same way that we have carbon budgets under the Climate Change Act 2008, because we need to know. There is no point getting almost to the deadline and realising that we have failed hopelessly to meet the targets. There has to be a way of monitoring progress more quickly.

I very much welcome the fact that the Office of Environmental Protection will be based in Bristol. I welcome the jobs that will come, but it needs the resources. We know from the Environmental Audit Committee and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee—I am a member of both—that the Environment Agency struggles to do its job in enforcing the laws that exist because it simply does not have the resources; the waste hierarchy, for example, is just not enforced. Everything becomes meaningless unless there is adequate staffing, resources and expertise, and the Office of Environmental Protection will also need the independence to act.

The EU water framework directive was agreed 20 years ago, and I am concerned that time is running out for the Government to meet their targets. The final deadline for the UK's rivers and streams to be in good condition—to achieve good ecological status—is 2027. At the moment, we are at 14%, which compares with an average of 40% in the EU. I am not convinced that this Bill alone will be enough to bring us up to scratch by the 2027 deadline.

Finally, the Bill is very much about what we are doing in this country. It does not address the role that the UK is playing in driving the destruction of nature overseas, which is something that we have discussed in Westminster Hall, both earlier today and in the debate a few weeks ago on the deforestation of the Amazon. We must look at reducing our international footprint, too. I completely support calls by the World Wide Fund for Nature and Global Witness to amend the Bill to provide for a due diligence obligation requiring businesses to assess what is happening through their supply chains and investment activities in other countries, and to take appropriate action to avoid and mitigate any negative environmental impacts. If they cannot avoid those negative environmental impacts, they ought to cease operations and investments in those countries. We cannot have UK companies paying lip service to the need to protect our environment at home, yet supporting the deforestation of the Amazon and all sorts of other environmental destruction in other countries.

8.25 pm

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): I support this Bill. It is ambitious in its scope and its aims, and it starts, quite rightly, from the viewpoint of natural capital—the realisation that natural assets underpin all other types of productive capital, whether manufactured,

financial, human or social. In a sense, the Bill builds on, and is analogous to, the successful Climate Change Act framework, with the environmental improvement plans and the Office for Environmental Protection.

This Government are determined to have a green Brexit. Notwithstanding what the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) said, it is nonsense to suggest that the European Union is the only thing that will keep this country on a path to a better, greener future. *[Interruption.]* The evidence for that—as she knows, despite her shaking her head—can be seen in, for example, what has happened on climate change, with our leadership on offshore wind, with this country being the first major nation to set an end date for unabated coal and, of course, with our legislating for net zero. These are all things that happened over and above EU frameworks—and all things, by the way, that happened with a Conservative Prime Minister.

There were concerns in 2016, quite justifiably, but they centred on the fact that EU monitoring and enforcement mechanisms would obviously be going and on the environmental principles underpinning legislation. This Bill addresses those points and sets the framework to go further. On one of those areas, air quality, the World Health Organisation target is more exacting than the UK target; in future we will have the opportunity to follow it. The Government have said that it is technically feasible for us to do that at some point, but it has to happen at a credible pace. We cannot just will the thing to happen. I hope that, during the passage of the Bill and beyond, we can get more detail on how the Government envisage that happening.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con) *rose*—

Damian Hinds: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will not give way because of the number of speakers.

I have a few asks of the Minister, not all of them legislative, some of them complementary to the legislation. The first is on fly-tipping, which has a huge cost for my constituency, in terms not only of the responsibility for landowners, who have this stuff visited upon them, but, increasingly, of the cost of putting in place gates and other infrastructure to try to prevent it. I hope we can see higher financial penalties and greater risk for the perpetrator, including the seizing of vehicles.

Trees stand at the intersection of what we are trying to do on climate change and on clean air, and the importance of the physical environment. I very much welcome the Bill's provisions on street trees, but we can do so much more. My local council has committed, over time, to planting one tree for every resident in the district, and I wonder what incentives can be given to others.

On engine idling, I know that the Department for Transport is currently reviewing its guidance on enforcement, but what more can be done on public information to persuade people not to idle their engines, particularly outside schools.

On electric vehicles, I hope the Minister will continue to work strongly with the DFT, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and others to make sure that the improved performance of electric cars and the way the costs have come down are more widely understood.

I pay tribute to local groups doing practical work: those doing litter picks and sorting litter to help to educate the public; the schools in my constituency that provide recycling for crisp packets; the repair cafés we have seen across the country, and so on. I welcome the principles and so many aspects of this Bill: those on resource efficiency and recycling; the single-use provisions; the deposit return scheme and the measures on waste crime; those on biodiversity and net gain; those on tree cover; and those on the most fundamental, elemental things of all—water and the quality of the air we breathe. If given an opportunity to vote this evening, I will be proud to vote for the Bill.

8.29 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): At a time when we needed a strong environmental Bill, this one regrettably goes backwards, not forwards, in a great number of areas. For example, on non-regression, as many other hon. Members have said, we have had countless promises that leaving the EU will not lead to backsliding on environmental protections, including from the Prime Minister just last week, but if those promises are genuine let us make it official, with a straightforward commitment to non-regression within this Bill.

The environmental principles need serious strengthening, including an unambiguous duty on all public bodies to apply them to policy and funding decisions. Crucially, that duty must be in the Bill, not relegated to a policy statement that we have not even seen, much less had an input into. We need stronger powers and real independence for the Office for Environmental Protection, for example, by giving Parliament a greater role in appointments. The setting of targets must be based on independent, expert scientific advice. The fact that the Bill currently would allow the Secretary of State unilaterally to weaken a target on a whim is completely unacceptable.

We also need legally binding interim milestones. We face an ecological emergency, and it is utterly unacceptable that the Bill could give the Government almost two decades before they are legally required to meet any new targets.

The Bill must also cover the enormous overseas environmental footprint of the UK's domestic consumption and economic activities. Just last week, statistics from the Office for National Statistics revealed that Britain has become the biggest net importer of carbon dioxide emissions per capita in the G7 group of wealthy nations, outstripping the United States and Japan, as a result of buying goods manufactured abroad. So that has to be part of this Bill.

There is, however, an even more fundamental problem with the Bill—a glaring omission. I refer to the economy, because if we are to truly turn around our relationship with nature, we must confront this elephant in the room: the current economic system, where the environment is too often just an afterthought, and the wellbeing of people and nature comes second to the pursuit of economic growth. Too often we see that at the national level, especially in Treasury decisions, yet the Bill exempts “taxation, spending and the allocation of resources within government”

from the environmental principles and from the scrutiny of the Office for Environmental Protection. We see the results of this already at a local level, where the prioritisation

[*Caroline Lucas*]

of economic growth means that projects such as the Oxford-Cambridge expressway are strongly supported, even though they mean the destruction of stunning wildflower meadows, ancient woodlands, hedgerows and so forth.

The Government clearly believe in the infinite ability to decouple economic growth from environmental impacts, but if we look at the evidence, we see that there is no case in respect of absolute decoupling at the scale and speed we need, and it is simply fanciful to assume that that is going to be possible. The UN report on the declining state of world nature from IPBES—the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services—which was published earlier this year explicitly identified the growth of the global economy and, specifically, the growth of material consumption in affluent nations as one of the major driving forces behind these 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”

to include other indicators that are better able to capture more holistic, long-term views of economics and quality of life. It means that we have to shift beyond standard economic indicators such as GDP.

Although there are some things in the Bill to welcome, overall it is going in the wrong direction. Crucially, it is not accepting that an economy based on infinite economic growth is never going to be sustainable. We have to change the way our economy works, as well as the way our environment works.

8.33 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I do not like to totally contradict the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (*Caroline Lucas*), but I think that there is so much in the Bill to welcome. I applaud my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (*Rebecca Pow*), the Minister sitting on the Front Bench, as well as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the whole Department for their work to demonstrate how we can lead the way on environmental issues outside the EU.

I turn briefly to three aspects of the Bill. First, there is recycling. At the moment, every group of young people in Basingstoke whom I speak to want to talk about the plastics deposit scheme—an idea that has captured the imagination of young people, who want us to go further with such practical ways to help protect their environment for the future. I wholeheartedly applaud the Government’s ambition for all plastic packaging to be recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025.

However, will the Minister touch on the National Audit Office’s concern about the lack of checks on what happens to recyclable material when it is exported abroad? My local authority has taken a principled approach: it does not allow recyclable plastics from Basingstoke to be exported. That means, however, that we are finding it difficult to secure a domestic contract for the disposal of mixed plastics, which has had an impact on our recycling rates. We need an ethical approach and a level playing field, so that local authorities such as mine are not penalised for taking a strategic decision not to export their plastics.

The second issue that I was delighted to see in the Bill was that of air pollution, on which I have been campaigning with my local authority for a number of years. I particularly applaud the long-term target on particulates in the air, which affect not only the climate but the health of our constituents more directly. I urge the Government to look specifically at the British Lung Foundation’s proposals for tailored interventions around schools and nurseries. They should look no further than Basingstoke and the rest of Hampshire for a lead. Hampshire County Council is taking a lead with the My Journey project, which goes into schools to raise awareness of the impact that the idling of engines can have on air quality outside schools. The Clean Air campaign in Basingstoke aims to stop idling that might increase pollution in any area. All this is not because we have pollution problems in Basingstoke, but because we want to prevent such problems from starting in the first place. I urge the Minister to keep a close eye on the impact of those campaigns.

On water supply, I welcome the measures in the Bill to encourage transfers between regions rather than over-abstraction, which damages wildlife. However, a significant cost is associated with that, and I urge the Minister to be clearer on how that will be met.

In conclusion, the Bill is about what we can all do to tackle environmental issues in our constituencies; I shall take one small example from my own. Back in 2007, a water cycle study identified a significant problem with water pollution in the River Loddon. As a result of fantastic work by Thames Water, our local environment agency, our catchment partnership and others, we have managed to tackle the problem through groundbreaking technology. There has been a step change in our water quality because local people have acted, and local people have cared.

8.37 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Our environment is the most important resource that we have—no amount of money or social capital can replace the rivers on which we rely for irrigation and water, the soil that we need to grow food, and the air that gives us life. We need to get the Bill right if we want to look our children and grandchildren in the eye and truly say that we have left them with a better future through our actions.

Under this Bill, the Government could sit on their hands for three whole years before setting legally binding, long-term environmental targets that would be due at the very least 15 years after the target was set. Why is there a need for such a long delay? There is a need to get the targets right, but time is fleeting in the race to save our environment, and in many cases the earlier action is taken, the less work is needed overall to hit environmental goals in long-term strategies. Can the Minister confirm tonight that the Government plan to bring forward targets long before then, and certainly so that we are not left with no environmental targets when we leave the transition period?

Even if the Government miss their own targets, the enforcement method mooted to replace the EC in judging the Government on their environmental record is not fit for purpose. A letter from the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (*Mary Creagh*), who is not currently in her place, highlighted how little progress had been made to deal with the concerns raised by both the Environment,

Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the EAC about the lack of independence of the proposed Office for Environmental Protection and its legal enforcement powers. They are, in the words of Professor Maria Lee of University College London, “strikingly weak” for those who fall foul of protection of our environment.

Will this enforcement body have the tools necessary to carry out its functions? Given that a report by Unchecked highlighted the slashing of the Environment Agency budget by more than 60% under Lib Dem and Conservative austerity Governments resulting in an 80% drop in prosecutions, despite weekly serious pollution incidents, may I ask the Minister whether she shares the concerns of the Institute for Government and Prospect that the current funding mechanism could leave the proposed Office for Environmental Protection similarly vulnerable to underfunding by Governments who simply want to avoid environmental scrutiny? The Prime Minister promised a world-class watchdog to improve on current standards, but what we have is a lapdog and a Prime Minister who cannot be trusted to keep his promises, even when the livelihoods of the next generation depend upon it.

This is the latest in a long line of warm words from the Conservatives on the environment while we have seen the end of solar subsidies and support for biomass, no support for onshore wind, the sale of the Green Investment Bank, and the end of funding for the Swansea tidal lagoon. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield, who is no longer in her place, prevented those on the Government Benches and the Liberal Democrats from selling off our precious woodlands to the highest bidder. We have also moved away from revolutionary zero carbon homes.

We really do need a Government who will put the environment at the heart of everything that they do, not a Government who, sadly, see a cheap photo opportunity while they sell the prospects for prosperity of the next generation down the river.

8.41 pm

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I join colleagues—at least those on the Government Benches—in welcoming this groundbreaking Bill. The Opposition’s position on this Bill is illustrative of the fact that even though they may not be prepared to vote for a general election, they are demonstrating, from the contributions they are making to this debate, that despite the wide cross-party consensus in favour of an environmental Bill and the many measures that have been included in it, they cannot bring themselves to congratulate the Government on bringing it forward.

It is timely that today we are talking about an environment Bill. It is a day when parts of the Welsh Marches, including much of Shropshire and my constituency, are recovering from a significant water event—something like 50 mm of rain fell in 36 hours on Friday and Saturday leading to widespread flooding, because it landed on saturated ground. The River Severn has barricades up in Shrewsbury and Ironbridge. The Rivers Clun and Teme in my constituency burst their banks. The town of Clun has been cut in two, and some roads around my constituency are impassable. Vehicles have been flooded and are abandoned, and the road network between Cardiff and Manchester has been held up as a result of ballast being washed away. My point is

to illustrate how significant it is that we have started to take measures to address the climate emergency. We cannot stop the rain falling, but we can do things about it when it arrives. What I want to spend my few moments talking about are some of the important water measures in this Bill.

I am a member of the Environmental Audit Committee, and I very much hope to serve on the Bill Committee because I want to press the Government to use the opportunity of this Bill to do more to raise the ecological status of our rivers. It is not acceptable that 84% of our rivers are not meeting current standards. We need to raise those standards and ensure that all our rivers meet them. I will be urging the Government to consider proposals for water companies that I have raised previously in this House with the Secretary of State to see whether there are alternative means to try to use current technologies—novel technologies and, frankly, less intrusive technologies, such as integrated constructed wetlands—as a way to treat and improve the effluent and the consequence of flooding, with run-off foul waters getting into our rivers through such mechanisms.

I wish to touch briefly on governance. The Government have raised targets in the Bill in a number of areas: water, air, biodiversity, resource efficiency and waste reduction, which are all welcome. There have been complaints that the targets are not tough enough and that it is taking a while to introduce them, but it is a step forward and reflects some of the recommendations made in the prelegislative scrutiny by the EAC that there will be five-yearly interim milestones for the targets and that they will be annually reported on by both the Government and the Office for Environmental Protection. That provision was sought by our Committee and is therefore welcome.

I share the desire across the House that we should see measures to prevent the regression of the standards, and I think that is something we should be pressing for in Committee; that may rule out my serving on the Bill Committee, but I make the offer none the less. As far as the Office for Environmental Protection is concerned, it is important to have a pre-appointment hearing to ensure independence, and I endorse the suggestion that it is jointly reviewed by the EAC in addition to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

8.45 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I welcome this legislation, which is long overdue, but of course it is only necessary because this Government want to leave the European Union, which has for a long time been a force for good when it comes to environmental protection.

Environmental degradation is at an all-time high and we need to be bold to safeguard our natural world for our children and our children’s children. It is important to enshrine standards in law, especially if the EU legislation becomes no longer relevant. But the targets that this Bill sets out are deeply inadequate: 2037 is the first year that the Government would be required to meet their targets, which will not even be set until 2022. We are living through a climate emergency and we need climate action now, not in 18 years’ time.

The year 2037 is far too late to start holding the Government to account. We need to undertake a 10-year emergency emissions reduction programme, seeking to cut emissions as much as possible by 2030. The Liberal

[Wera Hobhouse]

Democrats have a credible plan to cut most emissions by 2030 and get to net zero by 2045. Targets are meaningless on their own. We must ensure that local authorities, under the new Office for Environmental Protection, are empowered to hold the Government to account. If they are not, we risk this fundamentally important legislation being reduced to a Christmas wish list.

One of the key features of the legislation is the new Office for Environmental Protection, which seeks to replace the current protections we enjoy under EU bodies. This proposed organisation, however, has extremely limited independence, relying on central Government for funding, appointments and target setting. In addition, it lacks the power to fine Governments. It is a toothless version of our current provisions, which come from the EU and can hold the Government to account through hefty fines. This is exactly what happened with the air pollution problems. Only when ClientEarth came along and actually threatened to fine the Government did the Government finally act. This Government's fixation on leaving the EU will cause untold damage. We are facing a true climate emergency and our environment is in the firing line. Now is not the time to abandon international co-operation.

The Government's focus on plastics and clean air is welcome. However, the proposed actions once again fall short. Single-use plastics need to be part of a wider policy around recycling and waste. We need to improve recycling across the country by improving consistency, so that people can become familiar with how to separate waste and do not have to adjust to a new regime every time they move to another area. Local authorities should be able to set their policy, but they should be supported by the Government and manufacturers, which should make products easier to recycle. Our European neighbours set a very good example in this regard. For instance, Norway has only 18 different categories for recycling; this country has many, many more. Restricting the plastics we use is very important.

Clean air is a big priority for my constituents in Bath, and I am personally disappointed by the lack of ambition on these issues. We need a new legal limit for air quality that matches those set by the World Health Organisation; a duty on public bodies to do their part to tackle air pollution; and a right to clean air enshrined in domestic law.

We can all talk about wanting to do something about the environment and say, "Yes, there's a climate emergency", but it is ambition that matters and this piece of legislation definitely lacks ambition.

8.49 pm

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I very much support this ambitious, landmark Environment Bill.

In the short time I have available, I want to make just two points. The first is about the replacement for the common agricultural policy payments that go to farmers at the moment. Obviously, farmers play an incredibly important role in the stewardship of our natural environment, and I would like to see those payments replaced with much more straightforward financial payments to landowners that incentivise carbon sequestration and improve water management and quality.

Focusing on those two areas will lead to healthier soils, better quality, more nutritious food, and nature recovery. I have seen myself from visits to many farms in Cornwall that nature recovery goes hand in glove with producing more high-quality food. Stewardship of the land undertaken by farmers can be just as important as that undertaken by our much loved wildlife trusts such as Cornwall Wildlife Trust.

Secondly, while Parliament has been taking world-leading action on climate and nature recovery, too few people know where to go to find out what is actually going on and what they can do to help. This needs to change, and quickly, because far too often I see misrepresentations of the facts, or even lies, being spread. It is not just our air, our water and our soil that is being poisoned—it is our politics too. Information is power. The Government need to invest in easily accessible, independent and expert information on what action is being taken across all sectors of society to deliver our net zero and new nature recovery targets. This will help to increase confidence and trust in politics.

Leaving our environment in a better condition for the next generation is something we can all agree on. In the creation of the groundbreaking Climate Change Act 2008, this House came to a radical political consensus. I hope and pray that as we approach the general election, all of us, and all political parties, will do everything we can to maintain this consensus, because, as the Secretary of State rightly said, what could be more important for any Member of Parliament than to do that?

8.52 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): It is good to be able to participate in this crucial debate tonight.

We need everyone in this House to be working hard to ensure that we are the generation that stopped the rot and left this country in a better state than when we started. We must put in place strong policies and ambitious but achievable targets, not just for ourselves but for our children and their children, and we must act now—we cannot delay as that will spell disaster for our planet. I recognise that this Bill includes what would seem at first glance to be relatively comprehensive legal targets, but it can and should go further. I will be working with colleagues to ensure that the Bill is amended and, importantly, strengthened to ensure that the United Kingdom does not fall behind European Union standards.

I am concerned that the Bill does not set itself a target for air quality and only requires the Secretary of State to set a 15-year target for particulates based on expert advice and subject to economic analysis. The Local Government Association, speaking for local authorities across the United Kingdom, is calling for more powers to be given to councils to tackle air pollution, and I hope that the Government will think about going further. That is important because poor air quality contributes to the early deaths of up to 40,000 people in the UK each year. This is not just a devastating and avoidable loss of life; it is costing the economy too. Research from the British Heart Foundation found that diseases attributable to air pollution in the UK result in over £20 billion-worth of economic costs.

I would like to pay particular tribute to all the children and young people across the United Kingdom who are speaking out and standing up for action to protect our

environment and their future. I have had a number of letters from schoolchildren in Newport West. I am very grateful to each and every one who has written to me asking me to ensure that their voices are heard and their views are shared. It was also good to meet local members of Extinction Rebellion, to talk about what more we can do to mitigate climate change at a constituency level.

The UK is set to miss its target of achieving a 50% recycling rate by a country mile, which is evidence that this Government have failed to provide the rapid response required to tackle the environment and climate change emergency. We have had enough of the hot air; now it is time to deliver. In Wales, we are currently working towards a 70% recycling target of household waste by 2025, and we are well on track to achieving that. It is an ambitious target, but if we all work together, we can achieve it. Wales is leading the way, and it would be good to see England following.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): The hon. Lady is talking about targets. Unfortunately, in Scotland we have missed the landfill target set back in 2012. Does she agree that the new Office for Environmental Protection should have a UK-wide reach, with the power to share best practice from all parts of the UK and ensure that standards and our international obligations are met?

Ruth Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that excellent point, which I hope the Government will take on board.

Important stakeholders such as Greenpeace UK, Friends of the Earth and Asthma UK are all disappointed at the limitations of the Bill. A recent Royal Society for the Protection of Birds “State of Nature” report says that the UK is among the most “nature-depleted” countries in the world. The Environmental Audit Committee, on which I sit, has called the Bill

“a missed opportunity for taking a holistic approach to environment and climate change, placing them at the heart of Government policy.”

I share the Committee’s disappointment at the short-sighted, limited approach that the Government have taken with the Bill. We had the opportunity to be truly groundbreaking with this Bill and show bold leadership to the rest of the world. Instead, it looks as though we are trying to minimise climate change on the cheap, which is demeaning and lets down future generations.

Our country finds itself at a hugely important juncture. I welcome the fact that we are discussing these incredibly important issues, and I look forward to playing my role in helping to strengthen the Bill and ensuring that this legislation will deliver for our constituents now and in the future.

8.56 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am not sure what your plans are in the next few weeks—you may be busy—but I want to invite you to west Cornwall, where you will find areas of outstanding natural beauty, sites of special scientific interest, nature reserves, special protection areas and marine conservation zones by the dozen. They are on the increase, not because of European legislation but because of the work of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Natural England and other fantastic organisations. There is an appetite to protect further our beautiful part of the world.

I welcome the Environment Bill, especially the nature recovery strategies. Many good things have been said this evening, which I will not repeat, but I want to raise a few issues that are particular to my constituency, such as the Cornish chough. In 2016, a review of special protected areas found that they are inadequate for the Cornish chough and choughs across the UK. I would love the Secretary of State to look at that, to ensure that the Cornish chough, which is already in good recovery, has ample opportunity to recover further. It requires grazing land, so we need to be careful, as we progress with decarbonisation, that we do not get rid of cattle altogether.

I am the species champion for the Manx shearwater, a ground-nesting bird that has recovered remarkably on Scilly because we have been able to cull rats and get rid of plastic and other litter. I would welcome the Secretary of State looking at how we can fund such recovery programmes, because the Manx shearwater provides an excellent example of communities working together with the proper funds—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order.

8.58 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Constituents of all ages tell me of their concerns about the environment, climate change, plastics, waste and recycling, wildlife habitats and noise from planes, neighbours and cars. I see no mention of noise in the Bill, which is a worrying omission, but because of my limited time, I will focus on one issue of particular local concern, which is air quality.

Air pollution causes early deaths, with spikes of emergency calls and acute illness on days when it is bad. It is a major issue in my constituency, which has inadequate public transport and an over-dependence on car travel, with major roads running between London and Heathrow. More than 38 million people live in areas where air quality breaches legal limits, and my constituents are among them. Although there is not yet enough data, many of my constituents are concerned about the air pollution from aeroplanes.

The Central Office of Public Interest has a website with postcode links showing nitrogen dioxide air pollution levels, using data from Kings College London. The tool shows that my home in the middle of my constituency has significant air pollution from nitrogen dioxide, with an annual average of 36 micrograms per cubic metre, which is just under the World Health Organisation legal limit of 40 micrograms per cubic metre. This allegedly leads to an 11% increased risk of disease-related mortality for me and my family. By the way, here in Westminster we are exposed to almost 49 micrograms per cubic metre.

The London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, has been taking the lead on air pollution. By taking action in introducing the ultra low emission zone, we have seen a 35% cut in nitrogen dioxide emissions, with over 13,000 fewer polluting cars in central London. He has commissioned zero and low-emission buses for the fleet, which has seen a significant cut in NO₂ emissions on Chiswick High Road. He has launched a £25 million car scrappage scheme so that individuals can trade in dirty and polluting vehicles. Owing to his package of air quality measures, the number of schools in London in illegally polluted areas will reduce from over 450 to zero by 2025.

[*Ruth Cadbury*]

If only we could see the Government take such a bold approach and not just leave it to local authorities, which, with this Bill, are faced with being required to do more with less money. One example the Government could follow to address both NO₂ and fossil fuel emissions, as well as carbon emissions, would be to encourage a shift from fossil fuel to electric vehicles in a robust way. They could possibly do even more to support people out of cars and on to e-bikes, as in France and Germany, where e-bike sales have shot through the roof.

However, this Environment Bill offers neither bold nor meaningful action to help my constituents. In this Bill, we have three years until targets must be set, and we have no binding commitments to match WHO guidelines, while the fine particulate PM 2.5 targets do not have to be met until 2037. On top of this, we have provisions that allow Ministers to brush aside air quality breaches. We need a Bill that protects environmental targets from being watered down in future. Leaving the EU removes a significant weapon for people to be able to take legal action against the Government, as has been done successfully in a number of air quality cases recently. We need a much bolder and more significant approach from the Government, and we need them to legislate for a legal right for everyone to be able to breathe clean air.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Because of the problems with the clock, I call Derek Thomas for another two minutes. I want to hear more about shearwaters.

9.2 pm

Derek Thomas: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker—and I thank the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (*Ruth Cadbury*) for her intervention. [*Laughter.*]

For the Environment Bill, Rewilding Britain has made some incredible observations about what could be achieved with public money for the public good. It says that 6 million hectares of rewilding—regenerating woodland, peatlands and species-rich grasslands—would actually sequester 10% of our UK greenhouse gases. This is a real opportunity. It would cost us £1.9 billion, which is £1.1 billion less than the common agricultural policy costs us at the moment. In Cornwall, we have a commitment to a forest for Cornwall in my constituency, and we are working to plant 20,000 trees.

With this Environment Bill, there is a real opportunity for us to work together to reduce greenhouse gases, but also to improve the environment for generations to come. With that, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will sit down.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is really good of you. Thank you.

9.3 pm

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): It gives me great pleasure to complete a trio of Ruths on the Opposition Benches.

My constituency of High Peak shows just how important this Environment Bill is, and I welcome the measures in it. The Secretary of State will know from her visit to Toddbrook reservoir this summer how important it is for my constituents in particular that we manage to get

to grips with serious rainfall and have the infrastructure to deal with it. As my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (*Rachael Maskell*) said in an intervention earlier, that includes dealing with upper water catchment areas, and making sure that areas such as those surrounding the Goyt and the Toddbrook reservoir can be rewilded and forested again so that they can deal with the water that is coming down at a much faster rate, given some of the rain we have had recently.

I am also particularly concerned about development impacting on areas in the catchment zones of rivers such as the Goyt, which are prone to flooding. Even if development is in a flood zone 1 area, it can have a heavy impact downstream on areas that are in flood zone 3. That does not seem to be fully mitigated in the national planning framework, and local actions seem incapable of preventing it.

In other areas of the constituency, we have moorland. Last summer, we saw the devastating burning of the moors above my constituency. I have been out with the RSPB and seen how the rewetting and revegetation of that moorland can stop such fires in their tracks. I commend the work that Moors for the Future has been doing for many years, using funds largely from the European Union, to revegetate square kilometres of our moorlands that were previously bare peat, emitting carbon and not sequestering it again. I hope we will be able to look at measures in the Bill to make sure that that work continues.

I also hope we can take action on grouse moors, which are some of the least diverse areas for wildlife. We have serious concerns about the protection of raptors over grouse moors. In my constituency, they have actually disappeared; despite there being some nests, the young have not come to fruition.

As well as the uplands, we also have the towns and the lowlands. In some of my towns, asthma is a third higher than the UK average, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is 50% higher, because we have areas of high traffic congestion, with roads and traffic travelling through valleys. Although there is a clean air zone in Greater Manchester, we are concerned that, being on the edge of the city, we will have polluting vehicles travelling more in areas of High Peak that already see high levels of fuel emissions.

It is therefore important that we have a UK-wide strategy, as well as UK-wide targets and action, on clean air. It is also important that we make sure that there are real consequences for failing to meet those targets and that there is the funding in place—which there is not for Greater Manchester—to support the cleaning up of our diesel vehicles.

9.7 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): There is no doubt that the UK is leading the world when it comes to tackling climate change. This Bill allows the Government to map out our path to be net zero by 2050. Progress is so important, as issues such as air quality are really impacting people's lives today.

The World Health Organisation's advice is that annual average particulate matter should not exceed 10 micrograms per cubic metre. I was shocked to learn that we in Chichester averaged 9.09 in 2017. For those who do not know Chichester, we are a very protected area. Some 66% of the constituency is protected either via the area

of outstanding natural beauty in the coastal area to the south or via the South Downs national park. Despite that, my constituency ranked 268th worst in the UK for air quality, so we need to do more to clean up our air.

Although I welcome the devolution of environmental protection plans, the national guidance needs to take into account the local environment. For example, Midhurst in my constituency is a small town in the heart of the South Downs. The area has poor air quality due to traffic, and it has failed indicative nitrogen oxide tests since 2015. Now the council is implementing air quality management areas, and a much needed action plan is in place, but the levels needed to meet the requirements are too high for rural areas. Therefore, moving forward, I hope the Government will lower the thresholds required to get designation for rural areas.

Steve Brine: One reason for the poor air quality levels in my hon. Friend's constituency could well be the A27, which blights the lives of many people there. In a similar way, we have junction 9 of the M3 in my constituency. It seems counterintuitive to have road change plans, but having traffic flowing properly would increase air quality, because that traffic would not be sitting idling or pummelling through residential areas.

Gillian Keegan: I completely agree. There are huge blockages in traffic flow on the A27 and at the junction on the M3. That needs to be sorted out. I hope the £25 billion that is being invested in road infrastructure will address both of those issues and both of those roads.

Chichester is also famous for its harbour and the Chichester Harbour Conservancy, led by Richard Craven, who does a fantastic job. However, despite its efforts there are still concerns about water quality. I therefore hope that the Secretary of State will use the powers in the Bill to work with industry to address issues such as sewage water leaching and storm drain discharge into pristine marine environments. I hope she will work with boating communities like mine to better develop a network of waste water collection sites for leisure boats, as boats releasing sewage directly into our waterways increases harmful bacteria and nitrate levels.

Chichester harbour's importance is not just about biodiversity. Recent analysis by the RSPB shows that areas such as the harbour and Pagham nature reserve, which is also in my constituency, are massive carbon sinks, with up to 310 tonnes per hectare. Maintaining such carbon-rich natural environments to a high standard not only benefits nature but helps us to mitigate climate change.

The Bill rightly brings forward the ability of the Secretary of State to withdraw water abstraction licences in an effort to protect the natural environment after 2028. This is vital to protect biodiversity, especially in times of water shortage. I urge the Government to continue and further develop a water resource management grant scheme so that growers and farmers are less reliant on water sources from their surrounding environment, and so that as a nation we are resilient in times of drought.

The Bill brings a sense of hope. It is the foundation from which we can develop a comprehensive environmental policy that will enable us to meet our net zero target. The sooner we act, the sooner we can become a world-leading net zero economy.

9.11 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): We only have one planet, and we must leave it in better shape than we found it. We all know what we need to do: tackle greenhouse gas emissions that lead to climate change; tackle the loss of habitat that is driving out our wildlife and birdlife; tackle the pollution in our air and water; and reduce waste and plastics. What many people do not know, however, is what we are doing: leading the world in cutting emissions; leading the world in committing to net zero; and leading the world in our passion to eradicate coal and deliver renewables, especially offshore. Our tiny island has committed that we will protect a third of the world's ocean. We in Britain are leading the global effort to protect the poorest countries from climate change. There is much to be proud of.

There is, of course, more we can do. The Bill will mean that the emissions targets we set will be met. It will mean that there is a step change in how we deliver clean water and clean air, and how we deal with traffic problems such as the Army and Navy roundabout in Chelmsford, which is creating so much pollution. In areas like Chelmsford, where builders are delivering the homes we humans need, builders will now have to deliver the homes that our animals, wildlife and birdlife need.

Many Members have spoken about planting trees. I commend the great work of the Beaulieu Park development in Chelmsford, set under the Conservative leadership of the local council, where 90,000 trees, whips and shrubs were planted. As the Minister is in her place, may I remind her that 595,000 people have signed the petition asking for hedgehog highways, so that where we have new developments gardens will let hedgehogs in and not lock them out?

Finally, on plastic pollution, the Bill will allow us to take on the scourge of plastic waste, which is choking our rivers, our seas and our oceans. I was delighted this autumn, when I took part in my own river clean-up in Chelmsford, to notice that the amount of rubbish people had thrown by the river and in the river had reduced since people became aware of this issue, but they want us to do more. By making producers pay for the damage their products cause, we can end a throwaway society and make sure that products last longer, are more reusable, are more repairable and are more easily recycled. As far as all the people I meet are concerned, especially schoolchildren in Chelmsford, the deposit return scheme for plastic bottles cannot come soon enough.

9.14 pm

David Warburton (Somerton and Frome) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak on a subject that I hope transcends party politics, to some extent, and on which a consensus, at least on the underlying principles, can be assumed. There can be no doubt about the severity of the crisis that the planet faces. At a time when political divisions undoubtedly seem to be hardening somewhat, it is worth repeating that there is no challenge more universal, both in its scope and solutions, than that of mitigating climate change.

It is vital that our concerns about climate change are woven into the fabric of governmental decision making, as this Bill seeks to achieve, and that depends directly on the success of the green economy. The low-carbon sector and its supply chain are providing nearly 400,000 green collar jobs in the country—more than aerospace—and

[David Warburton]

growing far faster than the main economy, with estimated exports of more than £60 billion by 2030. The Bill's provisions aim to release this enormous potential, as well as stimulating the new economic markets that will result.

Nature is built on a fragile set of relationships, and our drive to protect it requires the same. I have had the experience—echoed, I am sure, by Members across the House—of being heartened by the enormous commitment and passion that I hear from constituents on these issues. Before the House did the same thing, Frome in my constituency officially declared a climate emergency, setting ambitious aims to be entirely carbon neutral within just 11 years. Somerset County Council and Mendip District Council have followed suit, and these examples have been echoed by parish councils across my constituency. The measures in the Bill to enhance the powers of local authorities are particularly welcome. We must embed environmental needs into Government and local government culture.

There is a lot more that I could say, but time is short and I need to mention something that is rather more local to Somerset. The Bill's provisions on water management are very welcome and I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), for her kindness, both in writing to me about the Somerset Rivers Authority and for her assistance in ensuring that the Government will continue to be active in supporting its vital work in Somerset.

Despite Government and Opposition support, my Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill fell, or rather, was brought down at the final hurdle in the other place when Royal Assent was tantalisingly close. My Bill would have put the Somerset Rivers Authority on a statutory footing, allowing it to plan ahead, ensuring that the future of Somerset would have been free of the terrible floods that we saw just a few years ago. Ministers are well aware that there is local disappointment about that, and I am extremely keen that the Government include the measures in my Bill in legislation very quickly indeed. I ask my hon. Friend if she will meet me at the earliest opportunity to discuss how we can move forward with these measures, so that we can give Somerset the same kind of confidence in the future as this Bill offers to provide the whole country.

9.18 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I welcome this groundbreaking Bill on environmental issues. It takes us very many good steps forward. For me, one of the highlights is the governance provisions. The concept of the Office for Environmental Protection is an excellent one, as are the environmental improvement plans and the concept of target setting. Like other speakers, however, I have some concerns about the teeth that such bodies—particularly, the OEP—will have, because I have had experience of the ombudsman framework. It is long, tedious and, at the end of the day, often does not offer results. Judicial reviews are frankly too slow and tribunals are very slow. Damage to the environment can be quick and irreversible, so we need to look more closely at deterrence and speed. The introduction of fines is one small measure that will be very helpful.

The water abstraction and pollution provisions are equally welcome, but I have concerns that the Bill does not properly address water quality testing. The existing regime is not fit for purpose. In my own constituency, the Marine Management Organisation has offered a licence for dredging. The waste is to come from Exmouth harbour to Sprey point in Teignmouth. My concern is that the parties affected were not properly consulted—there is no statutory duty to consult—and that the concordat that is supposed to ensure they agree simply does not work. There is no joined-up action. We need proper statutory consultation and a process to get people working together.

The water quality standards, which are set by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, were woefully inept at dealing with my problem. When measuring samples, it looked only at 1.5 metres in depth, but the dredging was to take place much deeper. Likewise, the extracts were not analysed; in fact, they contained clay and silt, not just gravel. The Government need to consider proper mechanisms to review the decisions of bodies such as CEFAS and the MMO, because, if they are left as they are, poor decisions will be made that, in my constituency, could impact tourism and beach quality. Natural England and the Environment Agency do not use even the powers they have. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 requires an environmental assessment—in my case, we have seahorses—but that has not happened. The EA did not look properly at some of the blue flag and other quality issues.

Air quality is also key. Two towns in my constituency are currently over the limit. Clearly, we need to measure more, so I am glad that we will be measuring more of the pollutants, but we need more clarity about how this will be delivered. We also need to recognise the importance of local authorities in providing support. Many, including mine in Teignbridge, want to be carbon neutral, but they need Government assistance. There needs to be a joined-up plan. Let us help them, and let us help local generation. Regen is trying to do this in the south-west, but the Government do not seem to be playing ball and allowing bodies such as fire stations and hospitals to benefit from having solar panels and so on. We need a clean air Bill.

So well done, Government. This is a groundbreaking start, but unless this action is joined up, we will not succeed. I also put in a final plea for young people to be involved. The previous Prime Minister established a group to properly review this, but it has never met, and many of my constituents from Torquay Grammar School have gone viral on YouTube because they want it to happen.

9.22 pm

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): It is a great honour to speak in this debate, and I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), who mentioned hedgehog superhighways. I look forward to those because there is a hedgehog living in my garden at present that is providing an interesting if prickly object for my dogs to look at.

This is an important Bill. Many constituents have contacted me asking that I speak on it. I am pleased to say that I support it. As a sailor, walker and erstwhile forest resident, I care deeply about our environment, and I know that the Bill delivers in several key areas.

Of these, I consider the creation of the Office for Environmental Protection to be a most important step forward. As we know, this new and—incidentally—world-leading regulator will scrutinise policy and law, investigate complaints and take enforcement action when necessary, and about time, too.

These actions and powers will be used to ensure that we leave the environment in a better condition than we found it. As the Secretary of State said, we will be the first generation to do so, and I am proud of that. While the OEP will be a national body, however, we must also focus on the individual to reduce our collective impact on the environment. Encouragingly, the Bill does that in several ways, especially when it comes to tackling plastic waste. No doubt plastic waste is a global problem. I believe that recycling and reusing plastic products should be central to any response. Concerningly, the numbers are not good. Of the 6.3 billion metric tonnes of plastic waste ever discarded, only 9% has been recycled. That is, of course, a worldwide figure and this is a truly global problem, but our “use once and discard” approach to unrecyclable plastic cannot have helped. It is good news that plastic straws, drink-stirrers, cotton buds and the like will be banned from April 2020, but there is so much more to do.

I am pleased that the Bill builds on that ban by making packaging producers liable for the full net costs of dealing with their products at the end of life—a financial penalty that should lead producers to begin to design their products with reuse and recycling in mind. If we do this, we will get our approach to plastic packaging right, which is crucial given that, of the 5 million tonnes of plastic used in the UK every year, nearly half is packaging.

The Bill also introduces, or reintroduces—I remember them well—deposit return schemes, which will further reduce our plastic waste output. Those schemes are proven internationally, as I saw during a recent visit to Berlin. They will increase recycling and reuse, and reduce littering.

As for consumers, I believe that the Bill will start to change our approach to plastics. Primarily, it will be influenced by the new charge for single-use plastics, which seeks to mirror the success of the plastic bag charge that led to a 90% decrease in plastic bag use. I have no doubt that, because of that new charge, we will reduce our dependence on single-use plastics, or find a sustainable alternative. These changes will almost certainly lead to a tangible reduction in our plastic waste output. As someone who has spent many hours trawling the Walton backwaters in my wonderful Clacton constituency and picking up plastic flotsam and jetsam, I could not be happier. Our water is precious.

We led and engineered our way into our present position. It is not beyond the wit of man to engineer our way out, and I believe that it is incumbent upon us in the UK to lead that way out.

9.26 pm

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I rise—and I think that virtually all Members on both sides of the House have risen—to support the principles of the Bill. It is a groundbreaking Bill which will enable us to make long-term environmental improvements between 2025 and 2030, generational improvements that will make our country better, cleaner and safer for all of us for many years to come.

As I read the Bill, I noted ways in which it would improve the lives of my constituents, and I thought that the Minister would be interested to hear about them. The first involves air quality. At last there will be a legally binding target in relation to fine particulate matter, and in my constituency that will help us with the work that I am doing to establish clean air zones around schools. It will also help the fight against the expansion of Luton airport, which would mean much fine particulate matter in some of the most rural parts of my constituency.

The Bill will also improve waste resource management. As any Member who represents a rural constituency will know, fly-tipping is a scourge in rural areas. In my constituency, the work that will be done by local regulators and local authorities will strengthen the fight against it.

The Government clearly envisage a change in our economic model. A more circular economic model will enable us to keep our resources in use for much longer. Not throwing those resources away quickly will benefit all of us in the long run, and will also help our economy. Let me give a shout-out to some young guys in my constituency who have set up a business called @BambuuBrush, which makes 100% biodegradable toothbrushes containing no plastic. I urge every Member to buy them, because they are really good, and they are great for our environment. That is the sort of business that the Bill will strengthen.

The Bill will also improve water management. The chalk streams in my constituency, such as the River Mimram, will benefit from it, because the Government recognise the need to reform abstraction licensing so that we can help chalk streams to improve and thrive. I am working closely with the Ver Valley Society, and I hope to continue to do so over the coming weeks, months and years, with the Government's help.

The last thing I will say is about nature. Biodiversity net gain as a concept is groundbreaking: it is important and it helps us deliver more housing more sustainably over the long term and helps our wildlife. I think all of us can recognise that, and a very good example again happens to be in my constituency. The Heartwood forest, built by the Woodland Trust just north of the village of Sandridge, is a very good example of the sort of new forest that could be envisaged and helped and strengthened by the measures in the Bill.

In her summing up I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on the climate change conference I held recently in my constituency at Rothamsted Research in Harpenden. It was attended by well over 150 people, including experts and constituents, who came up with some of the very measures that we now find in this Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Time is up.

9.30 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It is always sad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami) cut off in full flow, but full flow is what is happening to parts of the River Severn close to my constituency of Gloucester, and therefore this debate on the environment comes at a very appropriate time.

Earlier in the debate we heard various Opposition Members make a number of complaints about the Bill. There are of course two ways for the Opposition to

[Richard Graham]

criticise any Bill: the first is to say, “This is a missed opportunity”; and the second is to say, “It hasn’t gone far enough.” The second, of course, normally comes with a corollary along the lines of, “The targets should be tougher; Britain can be more ambitious; we would have done it better.” But to be fair, today the shadow Minister acknowledged that this Bill is incredibly important in a whole number of ways and does some groundbreaking work in terms of establishing targets on water, air, plastics, biodiversity and so on. It is the first time in our country’s history that we have tried to be this ambitious and tried to tackle these things with genuine measures that will be measured by a new Office for Environmental Protection. I think everybody across the House recognises that that is a significant step forward.

So this is a vital Bill that tackles some key areas and has some Select Committee input. There is much to applaud, but it would be disingenuous to pretend that there is not always something more that could be done. Therefore, let me first commend the Government and, secondly, say to Members of the Opposition that those who criticise the Government for their environmental performance need to look at the world’s environmental performance index. We have moved from 12th in 2016 to sixth in 2018, and during the four years from 2014-18 the amount of coal produced for electricity went from 30% to 5.4%. Those are remarkable statistics.

What are the areas where we could do better? First, it would be practical for the Government to recognise that there is widespread support across the House for the principle of non-regression in environmental standards, so I hope that that will be changed in the next stage of the Bill. Secondly, the Government have an opportunity to go much further in their approach to some forms of energy generation. For example, we should simply drop the idea that fracking is ever going to happen in this country: I do not think there is support for it; I do not think it is practical; and I think we should recognise that.

Then there is the business of onshore wind. We should at this stage establish two different tiers of contracts for difference and auctions for green energy. We should have onshore wind and offshore in tier 1. Then we can allow marine energy to bid for, as it were, the more innovative and newer sources of energy under tier 2. That would be a great step forward for green energy sources.

I also think that, as the Transport Secretary has suggested, we could bring forward the date for getting rid of diesel cars, but we will need incentives to do so for all of us, and incentives to buy electric cars as well. That, in turn, will trigger a planning requirement for electric charging points, which I hope the Government will be looking out for from all local authorities. We will need more powers on air pollution for local authorities as well, and ultimately we will need a Minister to bring all these things together and be responsible for the net zero carbon targets. I can think of no better candidate than the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, once he has fulfilled his current obligations on Brexit.

Lastly, it would be wrong not to mention the ecopark in Gloucester, which I hope very much to develop with Enerva, the owner, the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and other interested parties, with solar panels, biomass,

huge numbers of new trees and a biodiversity park as well. I hope the Secretary of State will support this, with a little bit of help from Government.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. May I suggest three minutes each for the next two speakers?

9.34 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; I shall be as brief as I can.

I welcome the provisions in the Environment Bill, and I particularly want to talk about the move towards a circular economy in which products and materials are reused and recycled. I will focus particularly on the provisions in respect of plastics, and I want to talk about them from a different perspective—that of someone who spent 25 years in the packaging industry and who is currently the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the packaging manufacturing industry. The industry has not been oblivious to its responsibilities in protecting the environment, and that represents a sea change compared with the attitude that existed a few years ago. It is committed to measures to simplify the process and to investing in innovative sorting and recycling.

I want to talk briefly about the practical considerations relating to four of the Government’s proposals. On the extended producer responsibility, we must remember that in addition to our producers being responsible, consumers must be responsible. It is not businesses that put packaging in the wrong place and cause problems; it is individuals. We must consider that. In respect of taxing packaging products that do not contain at least 30% recycled content, we need to be careful with medical products, which are not allowed to contain recycled material. It is also worth noting that 85% of plastic packaging is being recycled anyway.

The deposit return scheme is an area of some concern, and I hope that the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) will recognise the benefit of a UK-wide system rather than wanting Scotland to go off on its own. Britvic in my constituency manufactures soft drinks, and it does not want to have to carry two sets of stock for two different markets. That would have an effect on consumers through prices. I also request the Minister to ensure that our home kerbside collection schemes are consistent across the UK, because the confusion between different authorities is restricting the amount that is being collected. There are many other points I would like to make, and I hope that I will have the opportunity to make some of them in Committee.

9.36 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I welcome the Bill and will briefly home in on three issues. The first is the Office for Environmental Protection, which in some respects is equivalent to the Committee on Climate Change. It is a good idea, but for the OEP to be as effective as the CCC, it must have teeth and independence. I ask the Minister to consider two improvements in order to achieve this. First, will she consider introducing a duty to achieve five-yearly interim targets similar to the carbon budgets set out in the Climate Change Act 2008? Secondly, will she commit to a principle of non-regression in environmental standards?

My second point relates to air pollution, a problem that is creating significant health challenges in Lowestoft. The Bill provides a framework for removing this blight by setting a legally binding target to reduce fine particulate matter. Consideration should be given to being more ambitious and making a commitment to achieve the World Health Organisation's current limit values, as well as to giving further powers to local authorities to tackle local sources of air pollution.

My third point relates to the need to empower local communities, and it is important that the Bill does this. In and around Lowestoft, there are some environmentally rich and diverse areas that are bringing, and could bring, much benefit to nearby residents and local people. These include Bonds Meadow, an historic landscape in a now urban area run by a local community group, and Carlton Marshes, an exciting and ambitious project promoted by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust to recreate a unique Suffolk—not Norfolk—broads landscape right on the edge of the town. There are provisions in the Bill that will promote and help such initiatives, including the strengthened duty on public authorities to take account of biodiversity in their decision making, and the requirement for local authorities to produce local nature recovery strategies. These measures are to be welcomed.

In conclusion, this is a good Bill with plenty of good proposals. We have heard them described as groundbreaking; I will call them innovative. Let us get on and give the Bill a Second Reading, then work together to make it even better: a great Act that stands the test of time.

9.39 pm

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): Members have made many excellent speeches. Unfortunately, time has been far too short for everybody to say everything they wanted, but I want to highlight a few of the points that were made. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) questioned how the Office for Environmental Protection would hold the Government or other public bodies to account, and that sentiment was shared by the right hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) and the hon. Members for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) and for Waveney (Peter Aldous).

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) described how far we have come as a member of the European Union and talked about the danger of regression from EU standards. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) pointed out that having due regard to standards does not constitute accountability. The hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) talked about the need for objective information, which is so important if people are going to make these provisions stick. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) talked about the need for more powers and resources for councils. The hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) talked about it being time to drop fracking, with which I strongly agree.

We have had less than three hours to debate the Second Reading of this mammoth Bill. It is a Bill that covers so many areas in which radical change is needed if we are to deal with the climate crisis and hand on to our children an environment that is fit to live in. The Government have been promising an environment Bill

for years, and we have been demanding it for years. I hope everyone recognises the vital importance of enshrining the environmental protections that we currently enjoy as part of the EU in a British legislative framework that will safeguard that protection when we leave. As the Bill stands, however, it does not afford the environment the protection that it will need if and when we leave the EU, let alone provide a course towards sustainability and net zero emissions, which are critical if we are to survive. There are huge omissions to be filled and huge inconsistencies to be ironed out if it is to have the effect for which so many campaigners and hon. Members have been hoping.

The basic premise underlying the Bill—that we can and must replace the external arbiter of the EU with our own Office for Environmental Protection—depends on the OEP having the independence and the powers to hold the Government of this country to account, to prevent our law and our institutions from undermining our environment, to rule out actions that the Government might want to take and to impose fines for breaches. How can that be done by an OEP that has been appointed by the very Secretary of State that it is meant to be holding to account, without any meaningful involvement from anyone else?

Before EU regulations started to change the practice in this country, we were the dirty man of Europe. It was only because the Labour Government went beyond what EU regulations required that we now have protections that may sometimes go further than other European countries. It is a matter of regret that we will no longer be able to lead on EU environmental protection once we are no longer a member. How much of that protection will survive in the face of demands from US agriculture or multinational chemicals giants while we try in desperation to agree one-sided trade deals with much larger economic blocs?

Timing is another issue. Far too much in the Bill envisages decisions that will not take effect for years. How can we secure clean air for our children when many of the proposed measures will take 15 years to have any effect? There is no indication of the powers or resources that will be needed to take fossil fuel vehicles off our roads, but some 35,000 to 40,000 of our citizens die prematurely every year. This is an emergency, and rapid and radical action needs to be taken now.

On waste, where is the mechanism to end the export of plastic waste to countries that do not have the facilities to deal with it? Where is the commitment to resource our local authorities to enable the recyclable materials collections envisaged in the Bill? Where is the Government commitment to invest in recycling and composting infrastructure in this country? Where is the commitment to reducing waste in the first place? All the initiatives proposed in the Bill appear to depend on the private sector providing the finance, the investment, the facilities and even the administrators and scheme enforcement. Have the Government learned nothing from the fiasco of packaging recovery notes, which have done nothing to reduce waste or boost recycling?

Part 5, on water, makes no firm commitments to reduce water consumption or the carbon use of the water industry. The right hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill) talked about the improvements made in our water services since privatisation, but there has been a massive increase in the amount of money

[Sandy Martin]

that households pay for their water since privatisation. Clearly some of that has gone into improving the water infrastructure, but a great deal has gone into profits for shareholders and massive pay cheques for executives.

Any Government that view the profit motive, rather than the best interests of people, as the most effective driver of policy is likely to see lower environmental standards. Without proper investment in the public sector, we will not achieve the step change that we need in tree planting, protection of our wildlife habitats, waste and resource efficiency, reducing the impact of water consumption or protection from chemical pollution. This Government do not have a good track record in investment in the public sector. They are introducing this Bill because they realise that they have to be seen to be doing something. We will hold them to what they say and use this opportunity to push for amendments that we believe could strengthen the Bill and make it genuinely effective. For that reason, we will not oppose Second Reading.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): It is not over-egging the pudding to say that I am genuinely honoured to be closing this debate on what I consider to be a landmark Bill that will transform our approach to protecting and enhancing our precious environment. Importantly, and as the Secretary of State clearly outlined at the start, the measures in the Bill will not just maintain what is in place but enhance it. They will truly enable us to leave our environment in a better place than we found it.

It was tremendously heartening to hear such support for the Bill tonight. I have been an ardent environmental campaigner pretty much all my life, growing up on a farm, studying the environment at university and working as a journalist and broadcaster in this field. However, as a journalist, I began to realise that while one can highlight the problems, the only way to get the paradigm shift that we need on the environmental agenda is to influence policy.

That is where this Bill comes in, and that is why I and everyone working on it believe that it will be so significant. With the shocking decline in nature, which is so starkly obvious, coupled with the impacts of climate change, this Bill is now urgently needed, as Members have said. Leaving the EU gives us the opportunity to grasp the environmental agenda with both hands and develop a tailor-made framework that will make this world better for us all.

Mary Creagh *rose*—

Rebecca Pow: I will not give way because I have so little time.

I am delighted that so many stakeholders have expressed their support for the ambitions of the Bill. For example, the Aldersgate Group, a green business group, has said that

“businesses have backed the introduction of an ambitious and robust environmental governance framework that includes...legally binding environmental improvement targets to support investment in the natural environment over the long term.”

I hope that that gives the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) the assurance that businesses have looked at the content of the Bill. Far from the negativity that we have heard this evening, they see great benefits to the economy from sustainability. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (David Warburton) also referred to the business benefits of the Bill. While I am on the subject, I will be very pleased to meet him to talk about the Somerset Rivers Authority, although I will not go into that now because it is quite detailed.

Many of the Members who have spoken are clear about the benefits of the Bill, as am I. We have heard a great deal of positive comments, so I will shoot through just some of them. My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) said that the improvements on biodiversity will help the Manx shearwater. My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), who is a massive campaigner for the environment, talked about hedgehog highways. My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) said that her children wanted the deposit return scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) talked about the benefits for healthy soil that the Bill will enable us to deliver. The hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George) talked about the wider catchment work that we can do under this Bill and other measures. The hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) talked passionately about the children in her constituency, and this Bill really will introduce things that our children want for the future of their environment.

Many points were raised tonight and I will not be able to get through them all, but a lot of colleagues mentioned environmental non-regression, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), who does such a great job chairing the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the equally excellent Chairman of the Environmental Audit Committee, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh). I was also a member of that Committee, so I know how detailed her work is.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) also mentioned non-regression, because there are concerns in this area. I wish to be clear that our EU exit does not change the UK's ambition on the environment. The UK has no intention of weakening our environmental protections; the Prime Minister has recognised the strength of feeling on this issue and he is committed to a non-regression provision on environmental protection in legislation.

A lot of comments were made about the OEP, not least by the hon. Members for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) and for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), who is a passionate and ardent campaigner on the environment. I hope she is really going to get behind this Bill, because she has so much to input.

Like them, my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) raised issues about OEP independence, and it will be independent. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has been asked by Government to conduct a pre-appointment hearing on the appointment of the chair of the OEP, and there will also be a legal duty on Ministers to have regard to the need to protect the independence of the OEP.

Deidre Brock *rose*—

Rebecca Pow: I said I was not going to take any interventions because there are just so many comments to get through.

The issue of resourcing and how the OEP was going to be funded was raised, particularly by the hon. Members for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) and for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock). The OEP will have the resources it needs to hold the Government and other public authorities to account—that is absolutely essential. Under the Bill, the Secretary of State is required to provide the OEP with sufficient funding to enable it to perform its functions. It has to be properly functioning, otherwise it will not work, and it needs to work. The OEP will also have a five-year indicative budget that will be ring-fenced for each spending review period, giving it a long-term financial outlook and security.

The issue of fines was also raised, with various Members, particularly the shadow Secretary of State, saying that the OEP cannot leverage fines. I value her comments hugely. We had a very constructive meeting the other day and I honestly hope we will work very constructively in our domestic framework once we leave the EU; they would simply shift resources away from the environment. We want the money to stay on the projects—on the environment. There are clear requirements in the ministerial code for Ministers to comply with the law, including court orders.

Targets were another area mentioned by many Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton, and the hon. Members for Bristol East, for Brighton, Pavilion and for Newport West. Clause 10 requires the Government to set five-yearly interim targets and report annually on whether the natural environment has improved and whether progress has been made on these vital targets. So a real structure is in place to make sure that we meet these targets and that improvements are being made. If they are not being made, there will be recommendations on how they should be made. That is very strong and important.

Air quality was rightly mentioned by a number of Members, and air quality targets are in the Bill. The Government are committed to evidence-based policy making, and we therefore want the target to be ambitious and achievable. It is crucial that Parliament and stakeholders have a chance to comment on the process of developing this target. I met Dr Maria Neira from the World Health Organisation this week and discussed this with her, and she was fully supportive of taking this approach to setting the targets.

A number of colleagues mentioned the issue of engine idling—people sitting in their cars with the engines running. I came across it myself the other day; I had to ask the gentleman to kindly turn his engine off while he was waiting for me to come out for an event. It is an important issue that affects our air quality, particularly around schools when parents are waiting to collect their children. Local authorities can already issue fixed penalty notices for unnecessary engine idling, but guidance is being reviewed and the Government are planning to reissue it to local authorities in the coming months. People are rightly concerned about the issue.

I did not think that I would get through all those comments, so I shall carry on with a few more, Mr Speaker. We much value the experience and expertise of my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon),

who has been involved in DEFRA for so long. He mentioned the whole issue of water consumption. The Government recently consulted on personal consumption targets and measures required to achieve them. My right hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that the Government will publish a response in the new year, which will set out intended next steps. We should look at how much water we actually use, aside from water efficiency and any water wastage.

A number of colleagues, particularly my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke, mentioned exports of plastics and suchlike. The measures in the Bill will support local authorities to collect a consistent set of recycling materials. That has been much consulted on and much raised, particularly in the Tea Room—people often talk about why we cannot get enough recyclable plastic material and why more is not used in products. If we had a more consistent collection system and more of the products were itemised, industry would know that it could get hold of particular plastics and use them in its products.

Caroline Lucas *rose—*

Mary Creagh *rose—*

Vicky Ford *rose—*

Rebecca Pow: I will very quickly give way to my hon. Friend.

Vicky Ford: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way on the really important issue of plastics recycling. Does she agree that one of the benefits of the producer tax will be to force manufacturers to put more recycled plastic content into plastic products? That will mean less use of virgin plastics and therefore less use of fossil fuels.

Rebecca Pow: That is absolutely right. There are many measures to encourage the use of more recycled plastic in products. Ultimately, we will get into the producer-responsibility circular economy, in which less plastic is actually made in the first place.

Caroline Lucas *rose—*

Mary Creagh *rose—*

Rebecca Pow: I am going to conclude now.

The substance of this debate is the greatest issue of our time. The Environment Bill will make a much needed step change to protect and enhance our environment. I am sorry that I have not been able to deal with every single comment, but I will be happy to meet colleagues later—my door is always open. There are big ambitions in the Bill, and rightly so. We must talk about all the issues in Committee, and I hope that everyone will join in. This is a transformative Bill that will give a whole new approach to environmental protection and enhancement.

I hope that colleagues will indulge me for a couple of moments. I just wanted to mention the fact that, this summer, my husband died. He knew that I had personally campaigned on this environmental agenda pretty much all my life. I believe that he would be very proud to see the Government putting the environment at the top of the agenda, with what I hope will be cross-party support.

[Rebecca Pow]

I very much hope that, as the Bill passes through its various stages, we will eventually all be singing from the same hymn sheet—recycled, I hope. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

ENVIRONMENT BILL (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Environment 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 19 December 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.—
(Nigel Huddleston.)

Question agreed to.

ENVIRONMENT BILL (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Environment Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(1) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State; and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(Nigel Huddleston.)

Question agreed to.

ENVIRONMENT BILL (WAYS AND MEANS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Environment Bill, it is expedient to authorise:

(1) the imposition of requirements to pay sums in respect of the costs of disposing of products and materials;

(2) the imposition under or by virtue of the Act of fees and charges in connection with—

(a) the exercise of functions, and

(b) biodiversity credits.—(Nigel Huddleston.)

Question agreed to.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 41A(3)),

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to an early parliamentary general election and the motion in the name of Secretary Julian Smith relating to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019.—
(Nigel Huddleston.)

Question agreed to.

Business of the House

10 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a short statement regarding the business for tomorrow.

Tomorrow, the House will be asked to consider a business of the House motion followed by all stages of the early parliamentary general election Bill. I shall also make a further business statement tomorrow regarding the business for the rest of the week, but I can assure this House that we will not bring back the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for the statement. Can he say whether the Bill will be published shortly, or, in fact, when it will be published, and when it will be available in the Table Office? Will he tell us the scope of the Bill, and whether any amendments will be allowed?

It is quite strange, because the Government have just voted on a motion under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, but they now seek to bring forward a different Bill. [*Interruption.*] It is very strange.

Finally, is this just another of the tick-box exercises that the special adviser has had on his decision tree?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As the Prime Minister has said, and as Lady Thatcher memorably said, advisers advise and Ministers decide. Therefore, everything that is decided is the responsibility of Ministers, and that is as it should be. [*Interruption.*] I am glad that this is creating such hilarity on the furthest reaches of the socialist Benches.

The right hon. Lady asked specifically when the Bill would appear. The Bill will be introduced and published tomorrow. It is extremely short, simple and limited in scope: to have an election on 12 December to ensure that this House can come to a decision—something that it has failed to do on Brexit. It has reached a point of stalemate. It has voted to have an election, but not by a sufficient majority to ensure that the consequences of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act are met, and this seems the best way to ensure that the business that the country wants us to get done can be done.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): May I ask the Leader of the House what we are to say to constituents and others about the fact that we may be able to find time for a five to six-week general election campaign and then the rigmarole of forming a Government and yet not for bringing back the withdrawal Bill? That is despite the fact that, against all the odds, including my expectation, the Prime Minister played a blinder. He got a new deal and secured for the first time in this House a cross-party majority for it. My hunch is—my fear is—that many people in the country will be slightly perturbed by the course of events that my right hon. Friend has set out before us.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I do not think my hon. Friend's point is really the right one to be making on this occasion. The withdrawal agreement Bill did indeed achieve its Second Reading, and then lost its programme motion. My hon. Friend will be aware that without a programme

motion, or an allocation of time motion coming forward subsequently, the Bill remains simply in limbo. But the reason for not bringing forward an allocation of time motion is that the House has made its mind clear: it does not want to deal or engage seriously with the withdrawal agreement Bill. That means that the only sensible option remaining is to go back to the British people to see what they have to say—to trust the people and democracy, and in so doing ensure that we can stop this stalemate.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for this short statement. Scottish National party Members look forward to meaningfully engaging with the piece of legislation that is to be brought forward. We will be scrutinising it very closely in the course of the morning before it is presented to the House. I have just a couple of questions for the Leader of the House. Will we be able to see the draft Bill soon so that we can properly consider it? When will it be made available to us? The date of 12 December is mentioned in the information that I have received from the Leader of the House. Will he explain his thinking behind that particular date? We look forward to engaging with the Government tomorrow, and will look very carefully at what is included in the Bill.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his enthusiasm for an election, and pay credit to the Scottish National party for actually wishing to engage with its own voters, unlike some socialist parties that I can think of—[*Interruption.*] Other socialist parties; I am corrected.

The hon. Gentleman asks a very specific question about the date proposed for the general election. It is customary, though not established by law, that we have our elections on a Thursday. The reason that the date of 9 December did not work is that it would have required Parliament to dissolve just after midnight on Friday 1 November in order to provide the statutory 25 working days to prepare for an election. That would have made it very tight to get Royal Assent for the Bill that is to be introduced tomorrow, but we also need to pass the Northern Ireland budget Bill before Parliament dissolves to ensure that the Northern Ireland civil service has access to the funding it needs to deliver public services in Northern Ireland. There are therefore technical reasons why that earlier dissolution would not actually have worked. I also think the British people are very comfortable with elections on Thursdays as a matter of routine.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for his business statement. It seems to me that this afternoon we have heard from Opposition Members that they have no confidence in the Prime Minister and no confidence in the Government, but they were not willing to will the means by calling a general election. The Government have taken their decision and are right to do so. Although I was a remainer, the simple fact is that we cannot continue to discuss Brexit forever and a day.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. A decision needs to be made, and if this House will not make a decision, a new House needs to be formed to make one. That is the absolute bread and butter of our constitution.

Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us some indication of whether he intends to lay a programme motion tomorrow? If he does, can he give us some indication as to what the terms of that motion will be?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The programme motion is already in the Table Office.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Mr Speaker, I would like to ask about business other than Brexit, unless you are looking very wearisomely at me. I would like to ask about Huawei, because climate change, Brexit and whether we allow Chinese high tech into 5G are the big, critical decisions that we are going to be making in the next decade or two, but there has been no public debate and no parliamentary debate to speak of on these very important issues. Will the Leader of the House address my point?

Mr Speaker: I am extraordinarily grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The matter he raises is indeed a big and important issue, and I completely respect the fact that the hon. Gentleman, who speaks with some knowledge on these matters, is dissatisfied with the amount of debate that there has been. However, his business question suffers from the notable disadvantage that it does not relate to the terms of the business for tomorrow, upon which the statement has focused. However, he has perhaps given an augur of his intent for any business statement that might take place on Thursday, in the course of which I feel sure he will ventilate his concerns further. I hope that is helpful.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I have to be honest with the Leader of the House: when, last week, Parliament rejected the programme motion but not the withdrawal agreement Bill on Second Reading, it was not an invitation to get quicker with programme motions. How can he publish a programme motion for a Bill that he says is going to go through all stages in the House in one day tomorrow but not the details of the Bill so that we can properly scrutinise it? Does he not understand that the biggest challenge that this House is giving to this Government is that we want to see the detail before we do the deal?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This Bill will be so short that it will be very easy to scrutinise in the limited time available. The Benn Act and the Cooper-Boles Act were both passed in a very short time and they were longer Acts.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Over the past couple of weeks I have sat on many delegated legislation Committees that are meant to scrutinise our legislation, and the Opposition have been frequently absent. They were also absent tonight for a whole hour on the Environment Bill. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is time to move on?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is noticeable that when we had the Second Reading of the withdrawal agreement Bill, there were no Opposition speakers at the end of the debate. They say they are so interested and need hours for scrutiny, and then, when the time comes, they have run away.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): The Leader of the House has shown himself to be rather skilled at bringing forward impromptu business statements. Therefore, it would not be beyond his considerable grasp of his brief to bring forward a new programme motion for the withdrawal agreement Bill. He says that he is not going to do so. Should the Bill he intends to bring forward tomorrow not pass, will he allow this Parliament appropriate scrutiny and the opportunity to consider, in full and in all its parts, the withdrawal agreement Bill?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank my hon. Friend—the DUP still are our friends in many, many ways. Our shared desire for Unionism is very strong, and all our Unionists are friends, if I may say so. However, the House rejected the programme motion, so it seemed to will the end but not the means. Ultimately, this House needs to make a full decision, and it is deeply reluctant to do that.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): In these deliberations, has my right hon. Friend given full consideration to early-day motion 57 in the name of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field)? Many Conservative Members see this as a way forward, and I would urge my right hon. Friend to give it proper consideration.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his point. It would indeed be a historic occasion if an EDM were actually something serious that could be given proper consideration.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (IGC): In a supreme act of petulance, even though the Leader of the House and the Government got the Second Reading they so craved, they are now deciding that they are so fed up with this—their determination to put a border in the Irish sea is such—that they are just going to ram this Bill through in extra-unusual, atypical time when there is no time pressure requiring them to do so. Will we be able to table amendments before 10 am tomorrow? Will we have sight of the Bill? How on earth can this be a way to effectively repeal such a key constitutional piece of legislation?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is not repealing a key constitutional piece of legislation; it is amending that piece of legislation to allow, under these exceptional circumstances, for an early general election to take place. That is a perfectly normal legislative process. We legislate to amend Bills and Acts of Parliament the whole time. This is not petulant; it is a decision that has been come to reluctantly because the House will not come to a conclusion, and this House has to come to a conclusion. We have been arguing for three and a half years about this subject in trying to deliver on Brexit—on what the British people voted for. This Government are determined to ensure that that happens, but in a general election others will put forward their case. The hon. Gentleman can try his luck at putting forward his case and will be able to see how well he does.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Can I just enjoy a little gloat? I am one of the few Members of this House who actually voted against the Fixed-term Parliaments Act and warned my then colleagues that many would rue the day they put this piece of

legislation on the statute book. Does not the fact that my right hon. Friend is now telling us that the Government are going to introduce a Bill to allow a simple majority to cause a general election rather point the direction in which the Fixed-term Parliaments Act should perhaps be going in future?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I join my hon. Friend in his gloat, because I too opposed the Fixed-term Parliaments Act as it went through the House of Commons. Indeed, I had only just got into the House at that point and was considered to be a rebel for the way I approached it. The lines from Gilbert and Sullivan,

“I always voted at my party’s call,

And I never thought of thinking for myself at all”,

did not, on that occasion, apply to either of us.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): The people want us to get on with the job. The withdrawal agreement Bill has passed its Second Reading. We should just agree a sensible programme motion, which is on offer. Why are we not getting on with the job and getting the job done?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman knows that he is somebody in this House whom I admire and think extraordinarily highly of, but on this occasion his argument falls a little bit flat, because he did not vote for the programme motion, nor did his party take up my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister’s offer to make as much time as possible available, even sitting 24 hours a day. What the hon. Gentleman says today does not quite match how he voted last week.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I very much regret to say that my right hon. Friend is being less convincing as he goes on. As he said, this House passed the Second Reading of the withdrawal agreement Bill, which was an enormous achievement by the Government. Surely the fact that the House rejected the programme motion on offer means that the sensible course of action—which, frankly, voters on all sides would expect of us—is to have a different programme motion and put into effect the Bill that has already been given a Second Reading.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend is rarely and uncharacteristically naive about this. The House did not wish to pass the Bill. It rejected the programme motion, and then the Leader of the Opposition would not take up my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister’s offer of much longer sittings, of 24 hours a day—providing the equivalent, I think, in our terms of 24 sitting days to consider the Bill. That was all rejected, so I fear that those who now object to the course that the Government are taking are not following through the consequences of what happened when the programme motion failed.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): When this Parliament makes a decision, the Government should follow it through—what part of that do the Government not understand? They are again treating Parliament with contempt. This Parliament passed the withdrawal agreement Bill on Second Reading but did not agree with the Government ramming it through in three days. Today’s programme motion—of which, incidentally, there is one copy in the Table Office—suggests that the entire early general election Bill will go through tomorrow in just six hours. What is wrong with this Government, and why are they frightened of scrutiny?

Mr Rees-Mogg: There is an irony, to put it at its mildest, about people who voted for the Benn Act and the Cooper-Boles Act now complaining about undue haste on a Bill that is even shorter. Time is only right when it is the time they have asked for. When it is their time it is perfect, however short. When it is the Government’s time it is always wrong, however long. No, the Government are not treating this House with contempt. This Government, of course, only exist because they command a majority in this House, but this House is treating the British people with contempt. It is failing to deliver on its promises and its manifesto commitments. We must bear in mind that both the Conservative party and the Labour party said that they would deliver on the referendum. That is not happening. Enough—we must go.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Some no doubt voted against the programme motion for the WAB because they will never vote for it in 1 million years, but others voted against it because they had concerns—not unreasonable ones—that we needed additional time. Surely the proportionate and sensible thing is to offer the House more time. If it does not vote for it, the Government will take their course, but surely they should at least try.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The efforts of the Government to try have become extremely trying to the patience of the British people. We now need to go back to the British people, and they can decide, in their wisdom, how they wish us to proceed.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Legislation goes through this House all the time. For those of us who wax lyrical on the Committee corridor about secondary legislation, there is an assumption that the Government will bring their Bill forward, otherwise why are we spending all this time on secondary legislation? Surely the Leader of the House should be protecting the House, not undermining it.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we will be bringing forward a Bill tomorrow, and the House will have a chance to vote on it. We can then have a general election and bring forward lots more Bills—exciting Bills, new Bills and shiny Bills—delivering on what the British people vote for. Trust the people.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): It cannot have escaped the Leader of the House’s quite significant intellect that the amount of time the Government have used to avoid tabling a programme motion is actually longer than the time that most of us who voted for the Second Reading of the WAB were asking for scrutiny of it in the first place. Given that I understand his role constitutionally is to be this place’s representative in the Cabinet, may I ask the Leader of the House what representations he has made to Cabinet about the House’s desire to have another programme motion, and what discussions has he had? May I ask him, quite bluntly, why is he now blocking Brexit?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Oh, Mr Speaker, that was a great witticism at the end. I think we are all splitting our sides on the Government Benches. The point is that, from this very Dispatch Box and standing here, the colossus in front of the House of Commons, the Prime Minister himself,

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

said that he would make as much time available as the Leader of the Opposition wanted—24 hours a day. Did the hon. Gentleman beg or beseech his leader to accept this offer? Did he knock on the door of the shadow Cabinet and say, “Please, sir, we want some more”? Or did the Labour party just spurn it and ignore it so that it could complain and stop Brexit, because it is a remain party, in spite of many of its Members—including the hon. Gentleman, who nobly voted for Second Reading—representing leave seats?

Sir David Lidington (Aylesbury) (Con): Is not the flaw in my right hon. Friend’s argument that rather than gifting to the Leader of the Opposition only the choice about whether he might agree to a particular revised programme motion, the Government should instead have given the House as a whole that opportunity? Is it not the Government’s refusal to give the House as a whole that opportunity that is causing the criticisms that my right hon. Friend is hearing today, and will he not undertake to reflect further on this matter?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I have the greatest admiration for my right hon. Friend, who was a very distinguished Leader of the House and has held so many high offices in the Conservative party. He has been a great servant both of the state and of his party. I am afraid that on this occasion I disagree with him, because such an opportunity was given. The way this House works is that, when allocations of time are given, it is usually discussions between the two main parties that are determinative. This is a sensible way of running things, because then we can have the certainty that is needed.

Graham P. Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): I note that the Liberal Democrats are absent from this debate, but perhaps they are in the rose garden having a discussion.

May I ask the Leader of the House why we are going to spend six weeks talking about Brexit in a general election, rather than spending six or 16 days discussing the WAB, which is his Government’s policy?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman’s reluctance to face his voters. Surely the most important thing for all of us is to report back to our voters to show them what we have done and what we are proud of this Parliament having achieved, or to show them what we have failed to do and ask for a new mandate. Going back to the voters is the right thing to do.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I feel I cannot be alone in being completely and utterly confused, so perhaps the Leader of the House could just explain this to me. Did the Government pass the Second Reading of the withdrawal agreement Bill or not? Did the Government succeed in winning on their Queen’s Speech? I cannot understand why, after just two weeks, this Government seem to be throwing in the towel, rather than getting this really important legislation through—having the discussions, having the battle and sorting it out here in Parliament where it ought to be done.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for her question, and also for her courage in supporting the Second Reading of the withdrawal agreement Bill. The problem is that the Government’s programme in

relation to Brexit was stuck. We had a near theological discussion last week about where the Bill was, and matters concerning purgatory, limbo and the variations according to that and how this could be done. [Interruption.] The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is wagging his finger at me in a schoolmasterly fashion. No doubt if he seeks to catch your eye, Mr Speaker, he will be successful. We had that discussion, and we came to the conclusion that the Bill was not likely to proceed in this House.

Bear in mind that this is not just about what has gone on in the two weeks since the Queen’s Speech; this has to be taken in the context of a House that has consistently said what it is opposed to and has never been willing to say what it is going to accept. As soon as it said it would accept something, it voted down the means of getting it through. This continues the succession of governmental defeats and inability to proceed with their programme. Under those circumstances, it must be right to go back to the voters so that they can select a new Parliament.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): The Leader of the House will correct me if I am wrong—it was before my time—but the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 was introduced to bring stability at a time of crisis. Surely, at a time of real crisis in our country, we should be using our time to explore the options—to take back control, as we were promised. We, as representatives of the public, should be there to scrutinise. What we are asking for across the House—whether it is the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green), the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir David Lidington), the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) or others—is more time. Will the Leader of the House grant us more time?

Mr Rees-Mogg: We offered more time.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): It seems strange that the Government are seeking the third general election since the last referendum, when the idea of a confirmatory vote seems so alien to them. However, my question is this: on the off-chance the Government’s programme motion falls tomorrow, will this two-line Bill drift off into obscurity like the withdrawal Bill?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Let us have a question session on Thursday when I go through the business of the House, and then we can discuss whether we should have a debate on parliamentary procedures and Standing Orders as to where Bills go when they do not get a programme.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): The Leader of the House says discussions have been had, but another programme motion has not been put to the House offering a reasonable amount of time to scrutinise the Bill properly. Anyone would think the Government were scared of that scrutiny and concerned that amendments might be passed, such as one allowing for a people’s vote that actually put the Government’s agreement to the people and allowed them to vote on it. What is the reason for that?

Mr Rees-Mogg: First of all, more time was offered—24 hours a day. We would have gone through the night. That was offered to the Leader of the Opposition, and it was not accepted. It has to be said that if anybody is scared, it is those on the Opposition Benches. They are

terrified of meeting their own voters, terrified the electorate will not thank them for their obstruction of Brexit and terrified that the stalemate that this House of Commons—this addled Parliament—has got into is created by their refusal to deliver on their manifesto promise to deliver on the result of the referendum. We on the Government side want to deliver on the referendum result, and we need another election so that the British people, whom we trust—unlike the socialists—can have their say.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The Leader of the House dodged this question earlier, so I will ask it again: is the Bill amendable? Yes or no?

Mr Rees-Mogg: All Bills are amendable.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I was just having a quick look at the business of the House motion that has been put down, and there does appear to be some sort of chicanery going on in it. Can the Leader of the House confirm whether amendments will be able to be made in the Committee stage of this Bill? Yes or no?

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I first thank the hon. Gentleman for his most charming remarks earlier to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight)? I think everybody in the House really appreciated the tone and the rareness of it, and you, Mr Speaker, indicated your appreciation at the time.

All Bills are amendable. The stage at which amendments are taken and received is a matter for the Chairman of Ways and Means when it gets to Committee stage.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I just want to put on record the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) has been re-selected this evening, despite an appalling attack by members of our party. I am delighted she remains a Labour candidate at the next general election.

Mr Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair, but the hon. Lady has registered that point about a senior, long-serving Member, and it is on the record. I thank her for doing so.

Stephen Doughty: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Further to the question I just raised with the Leader of the House, he indicated that the Bill has not been made available and will be published only tomorrow, which obviously gives Members little opportunity to look at it and to craft amendments in ways that might make them selectable or considerable at the stage at which that is appropriate. Will you confirm, first, that you and the Deputy Speakers will consider manuscript amendments at the appropriate points? Secondly, I make an appeal to you and the Deputy Speakers. A number of amendments have already been discussed today, including votes at 16, which is certainly an issue I would like to address, and a growing number of Members from across the parties wish to support it. Will we have opportunities to put amendments down and to have them considered in the proper way?

Mr Speaker: The short answer to that is yes, that must be so. The Leader of the House indicated that the procedure in this case at Committee stage is a matter for the Chairman of Ways and Means, and others taking the Chair. However, the principle that amendments should be able to be considered is entirely valid. In the light of the timetable, or rather the shortage of notice, it is perfectly reasonable, as far as I am concerned, for colleagues to submit manuscript amendments. I think it would be helpful if those were submitted as early as possible and certainly before the expected start of that proceeding, which the hon. Gentleman and others can guesstimate. Clearly, it would not be until after Question Time and any urgent questions or statements, but it would be wise for Members to press on with the submission of any amendments that they wish to table. Those will and must be dutifully considered at the appropriate time.

Stella Creasy: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Further to your exacting interpretation of what good scrutiny is, I think it is worth placing on record that the programme motion the Government have tabled tonight explicitly excludes amendments being tabled by Members who are not members of the Government and Ministers, because it does not include one of the normal parts of our Standing Orders. Could you, Mr Speaker, perhaps give some guidance to those of us who are deeply concerned to see the Government play this trick yet again, having seen them play it with Northern Ireland legislation in months gone by, on how we might remedy it, so that the House can come to a view tomorrow as to whether changing something as serious as the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 in this way will be done with effective scrutiny?

Mr Speaker: Tabling is one thing; selection for a separate decision is another. If the hon. Lady has a concern about the latter, which I think she has and am advised that she has, then she can table an amendment accordingly in an attempt to protect that potential for separate decision. This has all happened very quickly, but I am sensitive to what the hon. Lady has said, and a view will have to be taken by the Chair as to what is orderly and in the interests of Members of the House.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (IGC): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. There is, in a sense, a developing theme here. I do not know whether you have had sight of the Bill. The Table Office has had no sight of the Bill. The Leader of the House has beetled off, so we cannot ask him about these things and he has not said when the Bill will be available. If proceedings are to start tomorrow at 11.30 am, at what point will hon. Members have the opportunity to actually see the clauses that we are being invited to supposedly amend with only a couple of hours' capability to do so? May I urge you, Mr Speaker, to please make representations to the Government that they publish the Bill this evening, so that at least we can digest it overnight and try to figure out what potential there is for amendment and where that is necessary? I cannot remember, in all my time since coming into Parliament in 1997, a Bill being not available the day before being rushed through in this way. I do not know whether you can recall such a circumstance, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I cannot recall such a circumstance, but what I would say to the hon. Gentleman is that it is possible, as I have just been reminded, for the Bill only to be presented tomorrow. However, there is no bar to its being made available to colleagues before then if the Government are so minded. I would add in that context that if the Bill is as short as has been suggested, it should be perfectly possible for it to be made available to Members well before the start of business tomorrow. Given that we are likely to have other business tonight, it would be perfectly possible for the Bill to be made available to colleagues tonight. If the hon. Gentleman is asking me whether I think it would be helpful and solicitous to Members for it to be made available tonight, the short answer is that I do.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you for allowing us to make points of order on this very important issue. The Leader of the House did say that amendments would be allowed at Committee stage. Is it your view that amendments will also be allowed on Second Reading? If they are allowed at Report stage, there will be an adequate amount of time between Second Reading changes, potentially, and laying amendments at Report stage that may be required as a subsequent measure to Second Reading.

Mr Speaker: There are two points there. In relation to Second Reading, I do not have sight of the Bill, but as the Leader of the House pithily responded to one inquisitor, all Bills—or virtually all Bills—are amendable. Is it possible for someone to table an amendment to the Second Reading of the Bill? The answer is that it almost certainly is—I use that caveat only because new precedents can be created from time to time, but I should certainly imagine that it would be possible for an amendment to be tabled to Second Reading.

So far as Report stage is concerned, I simply advise the hon. Gentleman—I made this point to the Clerk of Legislation, who immediately confirmed it—that amendments at Report stage are perfectly imaginable, but there is a Report stage based upon a Committee stage at which amendments have been made. Amendments at Report stage are imaginable in circumstances in which there is such a stage, and that is contingent upon the sequence of events at Committee stage. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman and clear to colleagues. I recognise the concern in the House that has been expressed, to which I am sensitive, and in relation to which I think I have given explicit answers.

Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019

10.36 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Julian Smith): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Report pursuant to section 3(5) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, which was laid before this House on Wednesday 23 October.

On 23 October, I published a report setting out the latest position on progress on Executive formation, transparency of political donations, higher education and a Derry university, presumption of non-prosecution, troubles prosecution guidance and the abortion law review. This is the third report published on these issues in line with the Government's obligations under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019.

I was disappointed on Monday to have to extend the period for Executive formation to 13 January 2020. I extended the period because the parties have still not been able to reach an accommodation to get Stormont back up and running. Failure to extend the period would have meant removing from the Northern Ireland civil service what limited decision-making power it currently has. That would not be in Northern Ireland's interest and it would have precipitated an early Assembly election.

While the political parties continue to be unable to reach an accommodation, public services in Northern Ireland continue to deteriorate, hospital waiting lists get longer and frustration continues to grow. I have been in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry in the past few weeks for discussions with all five main political parties. That contact will continue over the coming weeks, as will my close working relationship with Simon Coveney, the Tanaiste, in line with the three-stranded approach.

The issues that remain between the parties are few in number and soluble in substance. It will take real commitment for the main parties to reach a compromise on those issues, but just this weekend, both the largest parties said that they wanted to restore the institutions as soon as possible. I say to the two major parties, the Democratic Unionist party and Sinn Féin: I stand ready to facilitate further talks if and when they are genuinely willing to move forward, but it is a compromise that they must be ready to reach themselves, and it cannot be imposed from this place.

Continued failure to restore the Executive will bring about extremely difficult choices about how to ensure effective governance in Northern Ireland. The Government will need to consider the appropriate next steps, including considering the duty that will be placed upon me as Secretary of State to set a date for an Assembly election.

A restored Executive and Assembly remain the best way forward for Northern Ireland, not least in the light of the UK's impending exit from the EU. Northern Ireland needs Stormont up and running, a restored Executive and the political leadership that would bring, and I will continue to do my best to make that a reality.

Turning to abortion, I recognise that this is a sensitive and often divisive issue and that we will continue to hear representations from both sides of the debate as we move towards laying the regulations, but Parliament has spoken and the duty under section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 has now come into effect, the Northern Ireland Executive having

not been restored by 21 October. Immediate changes to the law have now resulted: sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 have been repealed and there is now a moratorium, meaning that all prosecutions and investigations that were under way will now be stopped. We have had confirmation that on 23 October the one live prosecution in Northern Ireland was dropped and that the woman is no longer facing criminal charges.

We will consult on the proposals for the new legal framework and the regulations, which are to be made by 31 March 2020. In the meantime, women seeking access to services in England can do so free of charge, with all costs of the procedure, including travel and, where needed, accommodation, being paid for by the Government. Arrangements can be made by contacting a central bookings service, and we have made this number and the services provided known on gov.uk. We continue to engage with health professionals in Northern Ireland and will reach out to the widest possible range of stakeholders to hear their views on the consultation proposals over the coming days and weeks. We are also working with health professionals to ensure that the appropriate services can be established in line with the new legal framework. It is crucial that we get the legal framework right, and we are confident that service provision in Northern Ireland can meet the needs of women and girls.

On the presumption of non-prosecution and troubles prosecution guidance, reforming the legacy system in Northern Ireland remains a major priority for the UK Government.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): On the subject of abortion, it is interesting that the Secretary of State has not yet referred to something that has occurred since he last gave a report: the fact that the Assembly in Northern Ireland did actually meet. There was a petition, and Members did turn up, including all the Members for our party and those from other parties, seeking to do the business of the Assembly and to get a Speaker elected, but others, including Sinn Féin, were not prepared to take part and take responsibility for these decisions. First, why has he not referred to this development? Secondly, what does he think about parties that talk a lot about wanting to get devolution up and running but that, when there is a legally constituted meeting of the Assembly ready to do business, refuses to participate?

Julian Smith: My right hon. Friend is right that the Assembly was reconstituted last Monday. I took some hope from the fact that people were speaking in the Assembly, but we needed it to run for longer than a day. I repeat what I said earlier: we need all parties to be present and standing ready to get the Executive up and running.

Last year, the Northern Ireland Office consulted extensively on the Stormont House agreement. This consultation ran from May to October 2018 and revealed wide support for the broad institutional framework of the Stormont House agreement and a consensus among the main parties in Northern Ireland that the UK Government should push ahead with legislation. At the same time, the consultation process revealed a number of areas of public concern about the detail of the proposals, including how the institutions interacted, how their independence could be preserved and the overall timeframe and costs.

I firmly believe that we must now move forward with broad consensus. It will be essential to demonstrate that any approach we take is fully capable of facilitating independent, effective investigations into troubles-related deaths and providing Northern Ireland with the best possible chance of moving forward beyond its troubled past.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): The Secretary of State will be well aware—because, of course, he wrote it—of the statement in the foreword to the consultation paper on the victims payment scheme that

“as a society we have a moral duty”

—a moral duty—

“to acknowledge and recognise the unacceptable suffering of those seriously injured in the Troubles”.

Surely to goodness, the Secretary of State accepts that we as a society have a moral duty to acknowledge and recognise the unacceptable suffering of those seriously injured in the appalling Omagh bombing, which took place four months after the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. Will he make a commitment tonight, and agree and accept that those seriously injured in the Omagh bombing will qualify under the victims payment scheme? Please will he give a fair commitment tonight, and not put them through all the waiting for the consultation to be completed?

Julian Smith: The consultation paper makes very clear that we have not set a timeframe. We have talked about the period of the troubles ending with the Good Friday agreement, but I am not prejudging the decision. Omagh is one atrocity, but there are many more, subsequent to the agreement, that we will have to consider as well. I want to hear from all victims. I want to hear from people who may not have been involved in a tragedy such as Omagh but whose victimhood may have resulted from their being in prison or being attacked, or as a result of a range of other experiences. I want to hear from all those people, and we will then reflect on what, if any, is the best timeframe for the payments.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): The Secretary of State will know that there have been many detailed discussions about the legacy proposals, including discussions about dates. He will also know, from his time in his current role and also from briefing about events that preceded it, that—as far as I can recollect—all the political parties have been flexible about taking a compassionate approach. I do not think that this should be a controversial issue; I think that we should show compassion.

Julian Smith: I appreciate my hon. Friend's intervention. That is exactly the approach that the Government will take. We cannot be hard and fast. We must be inclusive. We must ensure that the payment scheme, for which many Members have campaigned on behalf of constituents throughout Northern Ireland, applies to all victims. We talked about the period of the troubles during the consultation, but I was also careful to ensure that we would not be restricted to that and that we would work with Opposition parties to bring about a better definition if we need to define a period that is acceptable to us all.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): While we are on the subject of compassion, may I ask the Secretary of State to clarify the position in respect of the Historical

[Tony Lloyd]

Institutional Abuse (Northern Ireland) Bill? There is a rumour that the Government do not plan to introduce it in the House of Commons in the immediate future. That may not be true, but it would be a retrograde step, and I should be grateful if the Secretary of State commented on the Bill's progress.

Julian Smith: The hon. Gentleman is posing questions about business management that I was qualified to answer a few months ago, but I am now in the hands of the business managers. I will say that today's debate in the other place was extremely moving. The Labour party, the Democratic Unionist party and the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) have been hugely supportive of the Bill. We need to accelerate it and drive it forward, and I will continue to make strong representations, to my successor and to the Leader of the House.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Will the Secretary of State concede, and agree with us, that if the Government were to win the day tomorrow on an early general election, what he has said just now will not come to pass?

Julian Smith: Well, it is true that if there is a general election there is usually a wash-up period, but in all scenarios I will be making the case that we need to get the HIA Bill through. I am concerned that there are many very vulnerable victims who have been waiting a long time—many of them are over 70 and in ill health—so we need to get on with this. I will be working hard, and if other Members are able to assist me in making representations, I will appreciate it.

Nigel Dodds: I am sure we will be able to come to the Secretary of State's assistance in that matter. On this extremely important issue, which is a high priority for everyone in the House, is he making representations to the Prime Minister and others about the need to take powers in Northern Ireland more generally, because we are getting a report on a series of issues which during the passage of this Bill were picked out among a whole lot of other issues that were left untouched—the health service, education, investment, jobs, housing, the environment? All of those issues continue to sit in abeyance in the hands of civil servants. The Secretary of State has not so far mentioned the dreaded B-word: how long is he going to continue to wait before the Government actually take powers to deal with all these issues in the run-up to Brexit?

Julian Smith: My right hon. Friend has raised the issue of Westminster's powers consistently and has strongly represented these views. I believe that the best way to deliver for Northern Ireland is through the Assembly, and I am worried about the consequences that would flow, even though my opposite number has been very generous in offering to help, if needed, on this issue. This is not a good place for us to be; we have to focus on Stormont, and we have to focus on the Executive.

On the issue of legacy more broadly, my ministerial colleague my right hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd) will be beginning meetings with a range of partners, including victims and victims' groups and members of the armed forces, to make quick and substantive progress on this issue.

We are clear that for colleagues across the House, Northern Ireland political parties and, most importantly, the people of Northern Ireland, we must move forward on this issue with broad consensus but also with renewed pace.

Alongside the substantive updates on Executive formation and the abortion law review, reports were published on the transparency of political donations, higher education and a Derry university, presumption of non-prosecution and troubles prosecution guidance. The section of the report on the transparency of political donations states that the regime in place for political donations and loans is specific to Northern Ireland. We recognise that the issue of retrospection is a sensitive one. While the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 allows for the publication of the historical record of donations and loans from 1 January 2014, we must remain cognisant of the fact that retrospective transparency must be weighed against possible risk to donors.

As we have previously made clear, the only Northern Ireland party that has written to the Government in favour of retrospection is the Alliance party. The Government have said that we will consult the Northern Ireland parties in due course about any future change to the nation's legislation. For now, however, our focus remains on securing agreement to restore devolved Government for the people of Northern Ireland.

Lady Hermon: I am exceedingly grateful to the Secretary of State for taking a second intervention. Since the Prime Minister seems absolutely hellbent on having an early general election, will the Secretary of State take a few moments to explain how helpful, or not, an early general election would be to his efforts—his genuine efforts—to see the institutions of the Assembly and Executive functioning again in Northern Ireland? How helpful would an early general election be to those efforts?

Julian Smith: I think it is best that I swerve that question. There are some extremely important issues in Northern Ireland that require immediate attention and I want to focus on them with colleagues over the coming days and weeks. Higher education is a devolved matter and any requirement to increase student numbers will require a decision from a restored Executive.

Lady Hermon: I asked the Secretary of State a straight question, and I really do expect a straight answer from this very honourable Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He is not allowed to swerve the question; he has to answer it directly. He is accountable to the people of Northern Ireland; he is the Secretary of State. We need to know how unhelpful an early general election would be to his efforts to restore the institutions in Northern Ireland.

Julian Smith: I want to focus on the things that need to be worked through. Those things are immediate. Those things require time now, and they cannot be delayed. Therefore, my focus is on trying to work through a whole set of issues over the coming days and weeks.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It is clear that a general election this side of Christmas is going to lead to an extension of the timetable beyond the end of January for any chance of Stormont to be back up and running.

In the Secretary of State's mind, at what point will stumps have to be drawn, when energies have been expended and best endeavours have been deployed but success has not been forthcoming? We cannot leave the good folk of Northern Ireland without political direction and new initiatives on health, education and welfare, as the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) said. Where are we going to be on that?

Julian Smith: My hon. Friend makes the important point that the extension of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act 2018 comes to an end in the second week of January, so time is of the essence. We need to make the most of this time, and all I can say is that I will do whatever I can over the coming days and weeks to ensure that we get the Executive up and running and that we focus on that as our priority.

Simon Hoare: I understand that, and no one in the House will doubt my right hon. Friend's sincerity in relation to that task or the good faith with which he approaches it. However, in the heat and battle of a general election campaign, there is no scope for those discussions to continue and, dare I say it, this could slightly prejudge the outcome. Were there to be a hung Parliament, or if the Labour party were to be in office, the whole thing would change again. Let us be frank: this early general election is not helpful to the timely restoration of Stormont.

Julian Smith: I think I should move on with my speech, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Similarly, the decision on Ulster University's proposal for a medical school on its Magee campus is a devolved issue, and the merits of the business case will have to be weighed up against all others that aim to address the overriding need for more medical school places. On 17 October, I met a range of stakeholders in Derry/Londonderry, and I am personally committed to seeing what I can do to assist with this ambitious project, which has secured political consensus across the local area. This Government remain open to testing the eligibility of contributing inclusive future funds towards the capital costs of the medical school.

In addition to the matters highlighted in the report, I would like to draw the House's attention to other matters on which the Government have a duty to legislate—namely, the creation of a scheme for victims' payments and new laws to introduce same-sex marriage and opposite-sex civil partnerships. As we discussed earlier, on 22 October the UK Government launched a public consultation on the legal framework for a troubles-related incident victims' payments scheme, the consultation on which will run for five weeks. The UK Government would welcome comments from anyone with an interest or view, to inform the shape of legislation to be introduced by the end of January 2020. We must acknowledge and recognise the unacceptable suffering of those seriously injured in the troubles through no fault of their own, as part of wider efforts to support Northern Ireland in building its future by doing more to address its past.

The scheme is intended to provide acknowledgment to those who are living with serious disablement as a result of injury—both physical and psychological—in a troubles-related incident and to provide a measure of

additional financial support. We are consulting on proposals for how such a scheme could be delivered. It is a core element of the Stormont House agreement's proposals to help address the legacy of the troubles, and it is vital that we make progress across this and related matters. As I said earlier, we are not prejudging any element of the scheme; we are consulting to achieve broad consensus.

Following 21 October, a further duty in relation to providing for same-sex marriage and opposite-sex civil partnerships in Northern Ireland has also come into effect. The Government will ensure that the necessary regulations are in place by 13 January 2020, so that civil marriage between couples of the same sex and civil partnerships for opposite-sex couples can take place in Northern Ireland. From that date, we expect that couples will be able to give notice of their intent to form a civil same-sex marriage or opposite-sex civil partnership to the General Register Office for Northern Ireland. Given the usual 28-day notice period, the first marriages should be able to take place in the week of Valentine's day.

Following concerns raised by the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) about the timing of a consultation on conversions from civil partnerships to same-sex marriage and marriage to opposite-sex civil partnerships, we are exploring whether we can consult shortly with a view to delivering the regulations as closely as possible to the previously mentioned regulatory timetable. Regulations to enable religious same-sex marriage ceremonies and to provide appropriate religious protections will also follow shortly, allowing a period of consultation so that the regulations can be tailored appropriately to the particular needs and circumstances of Northern Ireland.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you and the House for your patience with this speech. I hope that I have made clear my undiminished commitment to see Stormont back up and running again. Northern Ireland needs its own locally elected representatives making decisions on local issues and making Northern Ireland's voice heard across the United Kingdom.

11.2 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): There is a large degree of agreement with much of what the Secretary of State has said, as he has already intimated. He was busy over the summer meeting individual party leaders, and it would be helpful to know when he expects all parties to come together for a plenary to take forward Executive formation, because there has not been one since last July. He may be able to come back to us on that.

On medical places provision, I also visited the campus at Derry/Londonderry. Developing medical training places locally is hugely important to help with the situation in Northern Ireland. It would be helpful for the House to understand where the real hold up is and to start working on an assessment to progress matters. There is a clear need and a political agreement on the ground to try to make that happen.

In the short time available, I will concentrate my comments on abortion law reform. The report contains a heading, "Provision of termination of pregnancy services after the interim period", which I expected to outline how the new service would look after March, but it actually talks about—we hear this consistently

[Karin Smyth]

from the Government—a medically based legal framework. I would like the Secretary of State to be able to explain exactly what that medically based legal framework is and why it is required.

This is already a highly regulated area of health service practice. In addition to the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945, regulations apply in a number of areas. First, consent must be given by a woman or else a termination would be criminal—all medical procedures rely on the principle of consent. Secondly, England and Wales have the Care Quality Commission, and Northern Ireland has the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, which registers and inspects hospitals, GPs and independent providers. It has the power to suspend or cancel registrations, prosecute, set out special measures and undertake inspections of facilities.

Thirdly, clinicians are governed by their own professional standards. They have to ensure that they have fitness to practise, they have a duty of care, there are clear complaints and litigation processes, and both the General Medical Council and Nursing and Midwifery Council service standards must be adhered to.

Finally, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence is responsible for developing clinically appropriate treatment regimes for all areas of medical care and controls on the sale and supply of medicine.

I am not a lawyer, but before entering this place I spent most of my professional career over the last 25 years in the NHS, planning, commissioning and monitoring healthcare services. I accept that there are issues to be clarified in the new regime, particularly around conscientious objection and ensuring that women, including doctors and nurses, who seek an abortion service are perhaps offered services away from home for the purposes of anonymity, which might be an issue, particularly in rural areas. I accept that, but the Secretary of State needs to be clear about what exactly he considers to be the legal gaps and to consider how, in the absence of an Executive, women in Northern Ireland can be assured that a high-quality medical service is being planned, how it will be delivered and how it will be monitored.

New healthcare services are introduced all the time across the UK. Indeed, in my professional experience, doctors are always complaining that managers stop them developing new services. The basic process for planning and introducing a new service is fairly straightforward. It has patients and the public at its core. There needs to be an assessment of need in the given population, a projection of the numbers requiring the service, with the case mix and the requirements for tiers of specialism. There needs to be an understanding of what the referral process is, and the planners need to look at the workforce and facilities requirements.

In England, we learned the lesson a long time ago that women should not be seen within a general obstetrics and gynaecology service, and the service for terminations is largely carried out by specialist providers. We need to know whether the Department of Health in Northern Ireland is undertaking that needs assessment. What is the estimation of numbers? What are the expected workforce and facilities requirements? How and where are women to access the service? What is the development of a referral process for women requiring either a medical or a surgical intervention?

Additionally, health is one of the six original core areas of north-south co-operation on the island of Ireland, as part of strand two of the Good Friday/Belfast agreement. Following the mapping exercise that recently took place as part of the Brexit process, a report was finally published in June, after some time of asking. We learn from that document that the exercise recognised that

“the size, population and geography of the island of Ireland mean that economies of scale for certain specialised services only exist at an all-island level or, for certain regions, on the basis of North-South cooperation. This means that, in a number of fields, in the absence of North-South cooperation, patients and health services would be directly affected. North-South cooperation and EU frameworks also support the continuity of care and of supply of health products, such as medicines and medical devices.”

This is an important area, so have the Government or health officials in Northern Ireland started talks with their Irish counterparts and counterparts in Britain about how women access highly specialised services?

In the last two years, as a member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly's committee D, chaired by Lord Dubs, I have participated in evidence-taking on abortion services across the jurisdictions of Britain and Ireland. We have taken evidence in Liverpool, London, Belfast and Dublin. I commend our report, which we have just produced, to the House. We considered a number of cross-jurisdictional issues, including the impact of changes to the law in Ireland, the cost of travel, the impact on women with low economic resources, and the treatment of foetal remains and the particularly traumatic and unpredictable process that women currently have to go through. There is a lack of specialised skills across all jurisdictions, particularly for women beyond 18 weeks, and an issue with the online availability of abortion pills.

These issues are testing health services across Britain and Ireland. We can learn lessons from each other, and we need co-operation. There is a need for designated centres across Britain and Ireland. We need an assurance that the Government are progressing and giving clear guidance to officials in the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Health on the work required to deliver this service.

In conclusion, it is not clear to us what additional legal requirements are needed or for what purpose. Will the Secretary of State say, either tonight on the record or by committing to bringing this forward in the next report, what legal gaps the Government think need to be filled? Will he confirm that the Northern Ireland Office and Department of Health are now planning the introduction of this new service along the lines I have outlined: by undertaking a needs assessment, an estimation of the demand and case mix, and through the provision of staff, facilities and a clear referral process for women to meet their health needs? Will he outline what discussions his officials will be having with their counterparts across Britain and in Ireland about access and referral pathways to specialised services? Will he commit to bringing back to this House, in this report, or by a ministerial statement, a clear account of how the devolved Department of Health is developing this service in a way that allows some public scrutiny for the women of Northern Ireland?

11.10 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald),

to whom I am grateful for stepping into the breach to cover me the last time this was discussed, called for compromise from all parties across Northern Ireland and an end to the “vacuum” at the “heart” of Northern Ireland politics. Two weeks on, we are still no closer to that vacuum being replaced with the fresh air that a restoration of the Assembly would provide, not just to the people of Northern Ireland, but to all the people of these isles, who have missed the views of a democratically elected body in the Brexit debate that should have had its voice heard. I mean no disrespect to Democratic Unionist party Members here tonight, but they represent only one strand of opinion on Northern Ireland’s position in Europe.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): So do you in Scotland—

Gavin Newlands: Indeed. There are other views crossing communities in Northern Ireland. A new poll, published in *The Sunday Times* this weekend, found that 72% of people in Northern Ireland would now vote to remain in the European Union, which is significantly up from the 56% who originally voted to remain. I see the same figures on the doorstep in Scotland. As in Scotland, it is clear that as this Brexit debacle has gone on people have reinforced their view that the benefits of the European Union far outweigh the fantasy Brexit offered by the Tory party. I hope that the restoration of the Assembly will once again give a voice to all the disparate shades of opinion that have thus far been without that voice and, even at this late stage, give a platform for the complexity of opinion on Brexit to be given a voice through Stormont.

Nigel Dodds: The hon. Gentleman talks about people having a voice, but of course seven elected Members of Parliament do not take their seats. It is not that anyone is stopping them or refusing them, so in his remarks perhaps he could reflect that point. Nobody is preventing anyone from having their say; they choose not to come.

Gavin Newlands: I hear what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, but it has to be said that those Members are elected on that basis and it is not for us to second-guess the voters in Northern Ireland on that basis, regardless of our views on abstentionism itself.

Moving on—

Nigel Dodds: Quickly—

Gavin Newlands: Not at all.

I urge the Secretary of State to think carefully before implementing direct rule, and I welcome what he said earlier on that subject. To reintroduce even an element of direct rule would mean fast-tracking legislation through Parliament, which cannot be a sensible path to take when talking about institutions that took years of hard negotiation and compromise to set up. I hope that the Secretary of State is in constant contact with his counterparts in the Irish Government to ensure that both Governments, as joint signatories to the international treaties that underpin devolution in Northern Ireland, are focused on restoration.

Although Stormont has no voice when it comes to Brexit, Brexit is unfortunately helping to ensure that Stormont continues to have no voice, and it is without question endangering the stability that devolution is meant to underpin and be underpinned by. The Assistant

Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland is warning that a no-deal Brexit could open up opportunities for terrorist groups; and the Chief Constable himself states that loyalist paramilitary groups may seek to react to the instability caused by a Brexit deal that is seen to threaten the Union and, moreover, that his officers will not police any of the border crossings after Brexit. That is exactly what people have been warning of since the referendum campaign itself. They were ignored and dismissed at the time, yet here we are. I truly worry that, given the current power vacuum, those who seek to further their so-called cause and wreck lives and progress see Brexit as a jackpot. That cannot be allowed. Rather than playing reckless games in Downing Street, the Prime Minister should wake up to the reality of the damage that his Brexit extremism is causing. It is vital that the fragile peace in Northern Ireland is secured and maintained. It should never have been risked by this Tory Government in the first place.

A glance through today’s *Belfast Telegraph* shows just some of the issues that are being squeezed out: bedroom tax mitigation to expire next March; the impact of substance abuse on victims and their families; victims of historical abuse; people trafficking—all huge and substantial issues for any society to face, but with no debate, no solutions, no legislative action possible in response to any of them. That cannot be right or fair on the people of Northern Ireland.

11.15 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for bringing forward the Northern Ireland Executive legislation and information for us tonight. I want to speak about the issue of abortion; there will be no surprise among people here that I am doing so.

In the past two weeks, the point has been made on a number of occasions that from 22 October there has been no legislation in Northern Ireland requiring that abortions must take place either in NHS hospitals or private clinics. The shadow Minister referred to that as well. Expert legal opinion from David Lock QC, the former Labour MP and leading lawyer in the field of NHS and health legislation, has pointed out that the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 regulates only certain types of premises, so does not ban any procedure from taking place outside such premises. David Lock QC points out that that means that if a doctor—or, indeed, someone without any formal qualifications—wanted to become an independent provider of abortions outside of a clinic, they would not be subject to any form of statutory prohibition or regulation at all.

In short, that means that back-street abortions were made legal in Northern Ireland on 22 October, with all the attendant health risks to women. I believe that that is extraordinary—indeed, it is unbelievable. Never before has the law been changed in any part of the United Kingdom with the effect of making back-street abortions legal.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): My hon. Friend will recall that I made a number of these points a fortnight ago. During the passage of the report two weeks ago, the Under-Secretary of State undertook, on the Secretary of State’s behalf, to write to us and outline

[Gavin Robinson]

exactly what laws were in place to preclude some of the dangers that we highlighted, to respond to us in detail before the change in the law that occurred last Monday. Regrettably, that has not happened. Does my hon. Friend agree that having that information with clarity would be most useful in this debate?

Jim Shannon: I thank my hon. Friend and colleague for raising that. He is absolutely right. The request was made and the Under-Secretary of State said that he would respond, but unfortunately that has not yet happened. That would have been immensely helpful for this debate tonight.

Even in England prior to 1967, back-street abortions were always illegal. Rather than acknowledging the point, however, the Northern Ireland Office has sought rather disingenuously to point to the Northern Ireland guidance as if it offered protection to pregnant women comparable to that of the law. The guidance, however, has no legal weight unless it is referring directly to statute, and for the most part it is merely saying what the NHS, which is under Government control, will do and making suggestions about what everyone else should do.

The suggestion that there is an appropriate substitute for the law is clearly not true and completely inappropriate, given the important matter at hand: women's safety. While the Northern Ireland Office can encourage people to act in a particular way through guidance, it cannot require people to act.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way because he has raised this issue before. Let me try to be helpful to the Secretary of State by referring to the guidance that he has issued about this very point. It is simply not the case that there are no regulations. In particular, abortion pills are a prescription-only medicine, the sale and supply of which are unlawful without a prescription, and that is not affected by any of the changes that came into law last week.

The suggestion that somehow there is no regulation of access to abortion medication is misplaced. I understand that the hon. Gentleman has that concern, but if he reads the regulations and looks at the existing medical regulations about abortifacients, he will find that regulation is in place. I hope that the Secretary of State, who probably has not got round to writing the letter to the hon. Gentleman, will find that a helpful intervention.

Jim Shannon: I am very capable of reading the information. The information that I have is contrary to what the hon. Lady has just said.

Emma Little Pengelly: For the purpose of clarification, reference was made to the case in the courts recently. The case included the procurement of abortion pills. It was dropped because of the change in the law around decriminalisation. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is wrong to say that access to these pills is not affected by the change? It clearly is impacted by the change.

Jim Shannon: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, and for the clarification. In his introduction, the Minister referred to the abortion pills as well.

If encouragement were sufficient, then we may as well do away with legislation and simply replace it with guidance, but we would not do that because it would not be responsible, especially when dealing with matters as important as the safety of women. The truth is that the Northern Ireland Office has failed the women of Northern Ireland. Quite apart from the wider concerns about respecting devolution and the fact that the Assembly voted against any change in the law as recently as February 2016—and that was a decision passed by the Assembly—the Northern Ireland Office did not need to support an amendment in another place removing abortion law regarding pregnancies up until the point just prior to when the baby is capable of being born alive, five months before making provision for a new law to take its place. This, I believe, was grossly irresponsible and completely unnecessary. Clearly, there must be no question of rushing the new legislation. It is right to take five months to consult on it and develop it. I welcome the fact that the Minister has referred to that and to the consultation with the Church groups. That is critical, and I appreciate his mentioning it.

In the intervening period, however, rather than pretending that guidance provides the same protection as the law, the Government should now urgently reintroduce sections 58 and 59 until the new law is ready to take over. The opinion of the people of Northern Ireland in relation to the law on abortion is clear. The majority of people from all sections, of all genders and of all ages are against this liberalisation and change in Northern Ireland, and this House does not respect that and does not take that into consideration.

I want to quickly speak about historical institutional abuse in Northern Ireland and survivor groups. This morning, I met some of the people from one of those groups—the HIA survival group, which set up a trust, the Survivors (North West). Some of them made representations at the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. I met them today in my office. I wish to comment on one issue alone within the historical institutional abuse case and it is to do with the length of time in an institution. What has been agreed, which would be contrary to the opinion of the Rosetta Trust and Survivors (North West), is that there should not be a fixed payment for each year that an individual spent in an institution. Redress awards are to be assessed on an individual basis, taking account of the incidents, the duration and the severity of abuse.

Some of the people I spoke to this morning were in Rubane House in my constituency, where physical and sexual abuse took place. They were very traumatised by what happened to them. They welcome the fact that there will be a one-off payment of £10,000. That is good news, but they are concerned about the redress award system. They feel that there should be a payment for every one of those years retrospectively, but that does not seem to be included in this process. I ask the Secretary of State to look at that again.

The reason I say that is that those people who came to see me today are greatly traumatised by what has happened. They are severely traumatised, and suffer from memories and nightmares of the abuse that took place against them physically and sexually. When it comes to what they feel is appropriate and should happen, it is not about the money; it is about the recognition of years of abuse. The compensation should be retrospective

for every year the victims were abused. If those people had the opportunity for legal redress, the cost for each individual would be between £35,000 and £40,000. The point is that making retrospective compensation payments would probably be a cheaper option, but it would address the victims' issues.

I will conclude now because others wish to speak. The two issues that I have discussed today are really important: first, the clear impression and opinion of people across Northern Ireland is that the changes liberalising abortion are wrong and should not be imposed on Northern Ireland; and secondly, that compensation for survivors of HIA, including those in the Survivors (North West) group, should be retrospective with a payment for every year they were abused.

11.25 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I rise, as the Secretary of State might expect, to ask him another series of questions about the changes in the law regarding abortion in Northern Ireland, which he knows I feel very strongly about. This Act compelled the Secretary of State to act—from start to finish. A week ago, 50% of what the Act asked the Secretary of State to do came into law, which was to repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. It has been mentioned already that there was a court case outstanding, and it is worth starting there and talking about the difference made by that 50% of the Act coming into law.

The case involved the mother of a then 15-year-old girl, who was in an abusive relationship. The mother bought her daughter abortion pills online to help her, but when she took her to the doctor was reported to the police under the legal duty to report. It is about removing that legal duty to report; it is not that people who continue to supply abortion pills and are not medically qualified will evade prosecution. It is worth reading into the record the words of that mother, who went into court the day after the legislation came into effect and saw the case against her, which had been hanging over her for so long, abandoned. She said:

"For the first time in six years I can go back to being the mother I was, without the weight of this hanging over me...every day...I am so thankful that the change in the law will allow other women and girls to deal with matters like this privately in their own family circle."

She said that she could finally move on with her life.

We can debate all the technicalities of these issues, but fundamentally last week something of a magnitude beyond any of our individual comprehensions changed for so many people in Northern Ireland when that Bill became law—in that 50% repeal of the Offences Against the Person Act. And, yes, I think this place should welcome that, not least because the case of the mother I just spoke about shows the human impact of that piece of legislation from the 1800s hanging over the lives of women in Northern Ireland.

I am here this evening to ask the Secretary of State about his duty to finish the other 50% of this legislation, and to ask him what happens now. I share the concern that we need to clarify the regulations. I understand that there is scepticism from some about the existing regulations, and I pay tribute to the shadow Minister, who did a fantastic job of setting out all the existing regulations—and therefore the confidence that many people should have that this is not some free-for-all in Northern Ireland

that has happened in the last week—but there is a case for clarifying what the regulations are. That case is being made not least by the doctors who have been writing to the Secretary of State asking for that clarification because, as of last Tuesday, they can prescribe abortion pills.

I think we would all recognise that had this place passed the 1967 legislation for abortion access in England and Wales by saying, "Well, we're going to say that you can continue to have a back-street abortion, but you won't be prosecuted if you go to A&E", none of us would have accepted that as a reasonable position. And yet, at this point in time—because it is not clear how doctors in Northern Ireland can prescribe abortion pills to women in Northern Ireland who wish to use them—we are risking saying to women, "Continue buying them online and not being clear about which providers are safe, but at least now you won't be prosecuted", as the mother I described had to deal with for many years.

I would really welcome clarification from the Secretary of State about what he is doing with regard to the doctors who are writing to him asking him where they get the prescriptions from and how they make sure they can give safe advice. To be honest, asking women to travel is not a solution. In the past week, the only message we have been able to give to women in Northern Ireland who now wish to access their right to a safe, legal and local abortion is that they have to travel. If they have family commitments, if they are in abusive relationships or if they do not have the relevant travel documentation, that is not a solution for them.

Emma Little Pengelly: The hon. Lady said that the only advice to some would be to order these pills online. It is very important to outline that the medical advice is absolutely clear that it can be dangerous to take these types of pills without medical supervision. The case that she referred to was a case of abortion pills being procured by a mother for her child where there were complications resulting in her having to present. So, yes, I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady: there needs to be guidance in relation to this but we must also be responsible and say very clearly that we should not recommend the route of buying these types of pills online because people do not know what they are going to get.

Stella Creasy: I completely agree. What I am saying, therefore, is that the Secretary of State now has a responsibility to the women and girls in Northern Ireland who wish to be able to access this right to make sure that there is clarity about where they can get abortion pills prescribed by a medical professional. These changes were never about removing the medical component of abortion, but simply about recognising that it should be a medical rather than a criminal matter.

The Secretary of State will know from the letters that I have been writing to his Department that I am concerned that there has not been clarity for women and girls in Northern Ireland about their rights and how to access those rights in the past week. There needs to be more public information about how to access an abortion, alongside the work to make sure that they can access a safe abortion. He will know of the long-standing concerns that many of us have about the concept of public consultation. While he talks about both sides of the debate, he himself has been clear that what is up for debate is

[Stella Creasy]

not whether abortion is available in Northern Ireland but how it happens. Many of us consider that to be a purely medical question. Indeed, the legislation required the Secretary of State to do this in line with the CEDAW—convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women—principles.

A week ago, the Secretary of State's junior Minister—I am sorry, but I am not quite sure of his role—said that the consultation would be published on the following day. We are now a week on. We do not have any of the details of that consultation—what the Government believe they should consult on that meant that any consultation would be in line with the CEDAW principles and would not undermine what this House decided, which is that women in Northern Ireland should be able to access an abortion equally. The Secretary of State talks about consulting the widest range of stakeholders, but he will understand the concern that many of us have about bringing non-medical professionals into the provision of medical services, and, indeed, as the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) has highlighted, the importance of having proper medical engagement.

Let us be honest about this: there is no way a member of a Church community would have the same medical standing as, say, doctors or the royal colleges with regard to the specifics of how a medical procedure is provided. It is absolutely imperative that we have the details of what the Secretary of State thinks he is going to consult on and how he squares that with the CEDAW requirements, so that we can be confident that he is not opening a hornets' nest when it comes to providing the other 50% of this legislation.

It is very important that we put to bed any suggestion that anything has changed in the time limits through what happened last week. The 1945 Act, which the shadow Minister mentioned, is still in place. That is very clear about not changing the viability provisions. People talk about abortions at five months, but that is not what is being talked about in Northern Ireland at all. If anything, modern medicine changes the concept of what viability is to perhaps something that people would consider to be even lower. But there is an issue when it comes to fatal foetal abnormalities and the Bourne judgment. Again, the CEDAW judgment called our attention to how that is interpreted in Northern Ireland, with the concern about how the concepts of the preservation of the life of the mother and of long-term damage were being interpreted. It is vital that the Government address this so that we can be sure that women in Northern Ireland are not being treated differently with regard to preservation of life from women in England and Wales.

We know that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence clinical guidelines apply, but can the Secretary of State confirm that those will be used to deal with these sorts of issues? While the vast majority of abortions happen before 10 weeks, there are some very sad cases that involve late-term abortions, often for very good medical and health reasons. It is vital, in separating out these two issues and ensuring that people in Northern Ireland have confidence about what this legislation has done and the regulations that the Government will bring in, that those issues are addressed. We know that whether people can access a safe, legal

abortion has no impact on the rate of abortion, but we also know that keeping people safe starts with ensuring that they are not criminalised for wanting to make a basic human right choice—to have control over their own body.

I urge the Secretary of State to address those issues. In this interim period, many women in Northern Ireland will need our help and support; I have been contacted by women who are not clear about how to access these services. They have seen that their human rights are finally being upheld, and now they need the Secretary of State to finish the job—which he alone can do, because the legislation was clear that it ultimately rests with him to protect their human rights—that the House asked him to do in July and that came to fruition last Monday.

11.35 pm

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I was encouraged to see that the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) takes such an interest in Northern Ireland matters, but then I realised that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) have an Adjournment debate this evening, which is perhaps why he is here.

I do not want to rehearse arguments from a fortnight ago. The recurring nature of these reports means that important issues for Northern Ireland get aired quite often in this House, and there is no need for me to repeat my speech of two weeks ago, but I want to re-emphasise one point to the Secretary of State. Having sought and received an assurance that we would get written confirmation of the questions asked, I think it is discourteous that we have not had substantive replies to those questions and that they were not available for us to share more publicly with those who take an interest in the legislative change around termination and want to be satisfied with the legislative framework in Northern Ireland. Given that the law changed last Monday, the very least we would have expected was a response between the debate and then. I leave that point with the Secretary of State. I do not expect him to have full answers this evening, though he may surprise me; if he does, they would be most welcome.

The second issue that I raised a fortnight ago was the phraseology used in the report around progress on dealing with legacy prosecutions and what the Government are doing in that regard. Today's report does not say it, but two weeks ago the report said that there had been no further progress on that issue. I highlighted the fact that the Prime Minister had given a commitment to legislate on those matters in response to questions during debate on the Humble Address. That, to my mind, is substantive change. That is an important aspect that should have featured in these reports, but yet again it does not.

I am grateful that the Secretary of State is here tonight, since he was unable to be with us a fortnight ago. He has, in fairness to him, been engaged thoughtfully and continually in issues in Northern Ireland, but I wish to raise with him my disappointment yet again at the content of this report. He knows full well that, when the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Bill was passing through the House in July, myriad amendments were tabled at various stages, and all of them sought to ensure that reports would be brought forward. Section 3(18)

of the Act says that, by 21 October, prior to the publication of this report, the Secretary of State must bring forward a report on the progress of libel reform. Section 3(19) says that, by 21 October, the Secretary of State must bring forward a report on the progress made on implementing the Protect Life 2 strategy in Northern Ireland—a strategy that aims to equip our social services and health sector to tackle suicide, by providing the infrastructure, scaffolding and support for individuals who find themselves in the depths of despair—yet that does not feature in the report we are debating tonight, contrary to the provisions of the legislation.

We were to receive a report on the hardship unit that was recommended as part of the renewable heat initiative. That is in the legislation and it was due for 21 October, yet it is not here. What is the point of putting down amendments and amending the legislation to require reports if they are not before us and they are not available to us? Subsection (20) states that a report is to be published by 21 October, to be laid before us so that we can discuss it, on the demands for elective care in Northern Ireland and the impact for children on waiting lists. Where is it? It is not here.

I apologise in advance if I have fundamentally misunderstood the phraseology in the Act, but to my mind it is quite clear: reports are to be brought forward by the Secretary of State by 21 October on this range of issues—suicide prevention, libel reform, hardship and the RHI, elective care demand and so on—yet they do not feature. We can come back every fortnight and have the same debate about terminations, as important as that is. My right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds), our leader, highlighted that there are many Northern Ireland issues that do not get attention in this place, but here we have a legislative requirement to bring forward reports and there is nothing—nothing. I think it is a dereliction of duty.

The Secretary of State has heard from the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) about the consultation on a victims' pension. I do not think anyone who has a heart could fail to have been moved this evening by Claire Monteith, a victim—she lost her brother and her mother was severely injured in the Omagh bomb—who quite rightly makes the point that her grief, which is associated with an atrocity that came four months after the Belfast agreement was signed, should not preclude her or her family from those provisions. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the comments that he made. He is not going to prejudge the consultation—the consultation is framed as it is—but I think he knows, and would personally and privately accept, that when the consultation responses are considered, this is something on which there will be movement.

I have a couple of questions for the Secretary of State, which perhaps unfairly arise out of the emergency business statement we had earlier this evening. The Leader of the House said that 9 December cannot be fixed as the election date because there is a need to bring forward a Northern Ireland budget Bill. We do not have much time. I am not aware of the engagement that would ordinarily be necessary in advance of bringing forward a Northern Ireland budget Bill, but the House could be rising at the end of this week. We could be

dissolved next week, yet there is an indication from the Leader of the House that a budget Bill will need to be passed.

I ask the Secretary of State this: he is not a business manager any more, but does he know when the budget Bill will be introduced? Can he give us an assurance that a budget Bill for Northern Ireland passed this week or in the early part of next week will contain the provisions that he knows are required on co-ownership housing? He knows there is a legislative fix sitting ready and waiting to go on the Office for National Statistics definitions of who can avail themselves of financial transactions capital. Co-Ownership housing in Northern Ireland has been categorised as a private organisation. In every other part of the United Kingdom, there has been a legislative fix with ONS guidelines to say that people can still avail themselves of FTC. This fix should have been done a year ago and it should have done by a Northern Ireland Assembly, yet it has not been done. The outworking of that is that affordable housing and support for people who want to get on the property ladder do not exist—they will go. So can he commit that he will include provisions that will amend the situation in relation to co-ownership housing?

The Act that we are discussing tonight says that the Secretary of State is mandated to bring forward proposals to deal with welfare mitigation. That was agreed by the Northern Ireland Assembly three years ago to remove the worst vestiges of welfare reform in Northern Ireland, recognising that we do not have a housing stock that would allow for the bedroom tax—we simply do not have one and two-bedroom properties for those in larger homes to move into. We have an impending welfare crisis in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State is mandated by the Act to bring forward a report on 6 December, but he and his two junior Ministers voted today for an election. When are we going to have clarity around welfare mitigation? The Secretary of State needs to know that 34,000 households in Northern Ireland will be directly impacted by a failure to extend mitigation. We are talking about £12.50 a week or £50 a month. Some 1,500 people in Northern Ireland will lose their protective cap for benefits. Those families are going to lose £47 per week on average, and up to £100 per week, if there is not a fix for welfare reform. The additional resource for advice services will go as well. Given that the Secretary of State was keen to vote for an election and knows he is under a duty to bring forward a clear plan as to how we will extend welfare mitigation in Northern Ireland, will he include that as part of his budget Bill?

Finally—there is one more speaker to come, and we want to give the Secretary of State plenty of time to respond—the Secretary of State mentioned last Monday that he had extended the provisions under the EFEF Act. However, he knows he cannot do that singularly. He knows he is under a legislative requirement to seek a positive affirmative resolution for that within 28 days. If this House dissolves and he has not sought that positive affirmative resolution from this House to extend the provisions of the Act, they will fall during an election campaign. Will the Secretary of State therefore indicate when he intends to seek that positive affirmative resolution from the House so that he can extend those powers? Will he do so as part of the Northern Ireland budget Bill?

11.47 pm

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): May I first add my support for the many issues that my colleagues have discussed today? In particular, I want to focus in my short remarks on a number of policy issues that should be being dealt with by the Northern Ireland Executive but that, sadly, are not.

Of course, there are many important issues in the overall reports, and we have heard some detailed discussion of them. In previous debates, I have gone into some of the detail of those issues, but I want to focus tonight on paragraph 3(1), which is on Executive formation, and to spend a little time outlining the impact of the lack of that Executive formation on my constituency, but also across Northern Ireland.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds), my party leader here at Westminster, articulated earlier the many issues that are suffering due to the lack of a Northern Ireland Assembly and because the Northern Ireland Government have not been re-formed. The update in the report is very short because, since we last considered these reports, there is still no Northern Ireland Executive.

I was elected to represent the wonderful constituency of Belfast South just in the 2017 election, and it has been an incredible privilege to do so. In many ways, Belfast South is a thriving constituency. We have some of the best schools in Northern Ireland. We have some of the highest employment rates in not just Northern Ireland but across the United Kingdom. We have some of the lowest unemployment rates. At the last count, we had over 19,000 registered businesses. We have an incredibly diverse constituency, with many wonderful institutions, including the Lyric, many arts institutions, the Ulster Museum, Queen's University and Stranmillis College, to name just a few. Relative to many other constituencies, mine is doing very well, and I am incredibly proud to represent it.

Like all constituencies, however, we still have challenges. The constituents I represent still have very real needs across a whole range of public services from health, education and infrastructure to worrying about bills and worrying about their businesses. I want to touch briefly on some of those issues, because they are the type of everyday issues that are not being articulated in Northern Ireland because of the lack of a Northern Ireland Assembly. They are not being articulated in this place either, because of the nature of the debates. Debates on those issues tend not to include or extend to devolved issues, but they are the issues that are impacting on a day-to-day basis. I know that and my hon. Friends know that, because we listen to our constituents and we know the serious concerns they have. We know the serious detrimental impact those issues are having on their lives. I know that the Secretary of State and his team have been out and about as well, talking to constituents right across Northern Ireland.

I want to touch first on education. Education in Northern Ireland is under huge pressure. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee took some evidence from a number of schools and headteachers. I went out and talked to schools—nursery schools, primary schools and post-primary schools—across my constituency. They are doing an incredible job at a very difficult time.

We know that their budgets are under huge pressure. That is why the Democratic Unionist party, in the confidence and supply arrangement, secured additional money for education. We wanted to make sure that those additional funds went into much needed public services, not for one part of the community but for people right across the community. We knew that schools would be under pressure. We knew there were further projected cuts for schools, and we wanted to do everything we could to help every child in Northern Ireland succeed. It is my party that stood on that platform. No matter where a child comes from, or what their background or financial circumstances are, the DUP wants every child in Northern Ireland to succeed. We recognise that succeeding in education is the gateway to a much better life for people, their families and their grandchildren.

The other area under huge pressure in Northern Ireland on education is special educational needs. There have been a number of debates in this place about autism services and mental health needs, yet for Northern Ireland we have been starved of that debate because of the inability to get the Northern Ireland Executive back up and going. In Northern Ireland, we have some of the highest levels of mental health needs and that is also the case within schools. I speak to parents day in, day out. They are under huge pressure to try to get much needed help and support for their children. They know that their children need everything from getting a diagnosis to getting a statement to trying to get educational support for that child. The Education Authority needs more resources, both financial and in terms of professionals. Parents need more support in their fight to get what their child needs and schools need more resources to provide that support. These are the types of issues that are not being talked about in Northern Ireland. The Democratic Unionist party is committed to a fundamental review of special educational needs to ensure proper resources go into special educational needs for every child across all communities in Northern Ireland.

Jim Shannon: Some 60% of the pupils who go to Clifton Special School, in the constituency of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), come from my constituency of Strangford. The issue is not just about resources for parents and pupils, but upgrading such schools so they can cope with the new workload. Disabled children have very complex needs, both educational and health. That is the predicament facing schools such as Clifton House in Bangor.

Emma Little Pengelly: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. In my own constituency, we have a number of fantastic schools on the frontline, including Fleming Fulton, Glenveagh and Harberton. They are three fantastic schools in my constituency which do a huge amount of work. Other schools are also dealing with complex needs. I have reached out and spoken to them, and I understand the pressures they are under.

Moving on to health, in one respect we have been fortunate in Northern Ireland in that before Sinn Féin collapsed the Assembly, the Bengoa report, which talked about transformation, was agreed to, so we have a policy framework. However, let me be absolutely clear: these types of issues and pressures are not being articulated because there is no forum for this in Northern Ireland. Health-related matters do not fall to councils. There is

no Northern Ireland Executive and this is a fully devolved matter, so it is rarely spoken about in detail in this forum, but we need health transformation in Northern Ireland.

We recognise that the current system is not fit for purpose. The Democratic Unionist party is absolutely committed to that transformation in a way that protects frontline services. We want to, and will, stand up for healthcare workers to ensure that they get proper remuneration for their hard work. Nurses, doctors, cleaners and the other staff in hospitals, including the administrative staff and consultants, are all working under huge pressure, and I pay tribute to them and the incredible work that they do in a system that is no longer fit for purpose, puts huge pressure on them and prevents them from getting the remuneration that they really deserve and that people really want to give.

We recognise that as the transformation is undertaken, we also need the additional resources to sort out things such as waiting lists. All Democratic Unionist party Members know how many constituents come in to see us who are sitting on waiting lists that are growing and growing, week by week, month by month. We want to get that investment in parallel with the much needed transformation, so that the money does not just go on transformation when people on the frontline are suffering. We need to reduce GP waiting times and get more GPs into the practices to help them to support our constituents.

I want to touch briefly on the business community. Businesses are rightly concerned about the proposal in relation to Brexit, but I do not want to talk about Brexit in any great detail today, because there will be plenty of other opportunities—and there have been opportunities—to do that. However, many of the issues for the business community in Northern Ireland are the same as those that businesses face across the United Kingdom. I have absolutely fantastic commercial areas in my constituency—everything from the Lisburn Road to Stranmillis Road, to Ormeau Road, to Finaghy Road, and there are many others across my constituency. They are fantastic areas with many small businesses where the business owners and staff are working incredibly hard under difficult circumstances. Our business rates are too high. Our businesses are struggling and they very much need this reform. I welcome the fact that there is a consultation out, but the Democratic Unionist party wants to do something fundamental to support the very many small businesses that are trying to make our economy work and make Northern Ireland thrive.

Our high streets are suffering. There was an announcement on the high streets fund across England and Wales, but we do not have that in Northern Ireland. I wrote to the head of the civil service asking him to use that money because Northern Ireland got a Barnett consequential. It got money from that announcement. Is it going to our high streets? No, but the Democratic Unionist party would absolutely prioritise supporting our high streets and those businesses and trying to make the very hearts of our communities, towns, villages and cities work.

I briefly want to mention the environment. I will not go into a huge amount of detail, but many people in Northern Ireland are really interested in this issue. I am not sure whether the Secretary of State is aware of this, but Northern Ireland has one of the lowest levels of woodland cover of any region in the United Kingdom.

We have on average 6% or 7% woodland cover. The average across the United Kingdom is 13%, and across the European Union, it is 38%, so Northern Ireland has the lowest percentage of woodland cover by far across the British Isles, the Republic of Ireland and the European Union.

I will conclude with a plea, because I genuinely feel that this needs to be addressed. I have put a proposal on the table: to mark the 100 years of Northern Ireland, I am proposing the creation of a project to increase significantly the amount of woodland cover. One way that we could do this is by planting a tree for every person alive across Northern Ireland and the border counties—approximately 2 million trees. That would bring our woodland cover up from about 7% to about 12% or 13%, which would be the UK average. That project could happen and has happened elsewhere. There are other big initiatives across the United Kingdom, and I ask the Secretary of State to give serious consideration to supporting that proposal.

11.59 pm

Julian Smith: I will not detain the House for long, given the late hour. The hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) made a series of important points. I will read the report she referred to and would like to discuss further with her the important issue of ensuring that the service provision, pathways and operation of this reform are done in the correct and best manner. I look forward to having further discussions about this.

The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) raised several issues, including security. Northern Ireland's threat level remains at severe, but both the PSNI and the security services continue to play an important role and work extremely hard to protect all citizens in Northern Ireland. He and the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) also raised the issue of welfare, and I am looking at that. It is a devolved matter, but I will obviously be looking at it carefully.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) raised a number of issues about the change to abortion law. Obviously, the repeal of criminal offences relates specifically to the procuring of abortion. It does not repeal other relevant criminal laws that exist to protect individuals. Medical procedures are carefully regulated and have to be carried out in regulated premises with appropriate care and oversight. I know how strongly he feels about this, and I would like to continue discussing it with him and others in the House over the coming months of consultation.

The hon. Gentleman's second point was about the HIA and specifically the Rosetta group of victims of child sex abuse. I spoke to that group this evening, and they reiterated the point and said they had met him this morning. I hope to be able to provide confirmation that we will be dealing with the issues he raised as we bring in the Bill.

The hon. Member for Belfast East spoke of a missing letter. I can assure him that that letter was signed today. It has not been received by his office, but I will ensure that it is on its way. I am confident that it is. I apologise for the speed of that letter.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), who has worked extremely hard on this policy, is right to raise the fact that we have now moved into the

[Julian Smith]

shaping phase for the regulations. We are launching the consultation and she is right that we are a few days later than we had hoped, but we will be producing that over the next few days. We are reflecting on the advice from royal colleges and many others, and I would appreciate the opportunity, once we have launched the consultation, of discussing with her how we address the issues she raised about provision and ensuring access to services.

The hon. Member for Belfast East raised the issue of additional reports. Those are in the House of Commons Library. I would be happy to accompany him so that we can read those reports shortly. He also raised the issue of the budget Bill. I have been fighting for more time for that Bill. We need to get that done. It provides the funding and vital services for Northern Ireland. Whatever the next few days hold, we have to get that Bill through. In all circumstances, election or otherwise, we will have to push through the affirmative statutory instrument attached to this extension.

Gavin Robinson: The Secretary of State will have to push that through in very quick order. Can he confirm that when he brings forward a budget Bill it will include that legislative fix he knows so well—that of co-ownership—and will he give us some further details about what he plans to do on welfare mitigation?

Julian Smith: I will be updating the House in respect of the first point. Welfare is a devolved matter, but I realise that it is important to Northern Ireland, and over the coming days and weeks I will be working with, and talking to, the Northern Ireland civil service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) raised a range of issues, including education and the Bengoa reforms. If we put more money into the health service, we will have to drive those reforms forward. She also talked about business. I met members

of the Orange Order on Saturday, and met representatives of other business organisations today. I will do whatever I can to ensure that Northern Ireland—as well as Yorkshire!—continues to be the best place in Britain in which to do business. Northern Ireland is now covered with city deals. We must drive those through as well as looking at town deals, which were also raised. As for woodlands, I am encouraged by that proposal, and look forward to working with my DUP colleague. I hope that there will not be too many trees in the House over the coming days, but we hope to add more to Northern Ireland in due course.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Report pursuant to section 3(5) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, which was laid before this House on Wednesday 23 October.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Over the Counter Derivatives, Central Counterparties and Trade Repositories (Amendment, etc., and Transitional Provision) (EU Exit) (No. 2) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 24 July 2019, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Government of Wales Act 2006 (Amendment) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 11 July 2019, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

Southern Water

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Rebecca Harris.)

12.6 am

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Ind): It is a great privilege to have been allocated this debate. I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the Minister, who has been particularly hard-working today. She has spent many hours at the Dispatch Box, and even after midnight she is continuing to attend to her duties.

The subject that I want to bring to the attention of the House and, in particular, to that of the Minister is simple and straightforward, but it is proving to be a case study of a failure that is causing great anxiety to many of my constituents. That simple and straightforward proposition is: if new development is to take place, it must always be accompanied by the new infrastructure necessary to make the development work. In some respects, that is so obvious that it is impossible to imagine that development could take place without it. It would be unthinkable, for example, to build an estate that did not have access to the electricity network. As many colleagues will know, however, in many cases development adds to the demands placed on existing infrastructure without improving it. Examples of that happen all the time. Demands are placed on general practices, school places and the overall road network, but it is on sewerage and drainage services that I want to concentrate tonight.

Not only is it possible to get away with building new homes without investing in that very necessary infrastructure, but, even more unfairly, the consequences fall not solely or even mostly on the developers or the occupants of new properties, but on the rest of the community. If a GP's surgery runs out of appointments, the local school is full, the roads are gridlocked, or—as in this case—the sewers are overflowing, existing residents are principally affected.

I want to concentrate on water because it illustrates a wider problem, because it is a pressing local issue for many of my constituents, and because many of us have lost patience with the role of Southern Water, the principal provider in my constituency.

As this is a short debate, I want to use the example of the town of Paddock Wood, but it applies almost identically to other parts of my constituency, with particular concerns in the parishes of Hawkhurst and Capel and the towns of Tunbridge Wells and Southborough and many villages as well.

The capacity of the sewerage and draining network that serves Paddock Wood is inadequate for the current population of a little over 3,250 households.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I did some research on this beforehand, and it is not just about the issue of sewerage and drainage disposal, but about access to safe drinking water, which I understand may be a problem in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency. Does he agree that it is important that people are able to access safe drinking water? In Northern Ireland, the onus is on Northern Ireland Water to provide a safe and accessible supply that can be accessed at any time.

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman is an assiduous defender of his constituents' interests. The fact that he is here after midnight, even on a debate on Tunbridge Wells, to fight the good fight for his constituents is a credit to him. I am giving an example of drainage and sewerage services because it is of particular importance for the reason I will give.

The town of Paddock Wood is situated in a low-lying area quite close to the River Medway that frequently floods. When it does so, the overload of the current network has unacceptable, unhealthy and frankly disgusting consequences for residents.

One of my constituents, who lives on an estate near the centre of the town, described how for 10 years her front garden has been regularly flooded with water containing sewage, toilet paper and other waste, coming up from a manhole cover in the middle of the road outside her property. A resident in a different part of town described how he and his neighbours have submitted complaints time and again about sewage and toilet paper being washed out into their road.

Paddock Wood Town Council and the local borough and county councillors, to whom I pay tribute for their tenacity over the years, have highlighted the problem, demanding that it is addressed and warning of the obvious need for investment in greater capacity.

Southern Water has admitted that the infrastructure needs upgrading before any additional demands on it can be contemplated. In 2015 Southern Water told me in a letter:

"There is current inadequate capacity for any future developments."

This followed a capacity check carried out by the company in 2014, which established the need for:

"General upgrades to sections of the Southern Water public sewer network"

and

"a requirement to increase the capacity of the Station Road wastewater pumping station by approximately 8%."

Indeed the company's then chief executive wrote to me, saying:

"It will be our recommendation that the pumping station be upsized before any further properties are built in this area."

Paddock Wood is now subject to plans for at least an additional 1,000 homes across three major developments, on top of the 3,250 homes already there. Initially, Southern Water's advice to planners was consistent with its previous statements that the local network was at capacity. On two of the sites—300 dwellings at Church Farm and 375 at Mascalls Court Farm—the borough council informed me that

"additional off site sewers or improvements to existing sewers will be required and these details have to be agreed with Southern Water."

At Church Farm, Southern said:

"We advised the developer that they need to install a parallel storage sewer to cater for additional flows...We will install the sewer under section 98 regulations, which will be funded in part by developer contributions."

However, as housing development has proceeded in Paddock Wood the promised infrastructure investment has not appeared. Indeed the current chief executive of the company wrote to me in 2017 to say:

"I can confirm that we are not currently in receipt of a valid section 98 application for any of the proposed sites in Paddock Wood."

[Greg Clark]

The company said:

"We have a legal obligation to connect new developments to the sewerage system and are not in a position to formally object to plans for development."

Moreover, Southern has written to the council to say that new sites can commence development without the necessary improvements that it had identified as being needed.

Plans to upgrade the sewerage network in Paddock Wood, despite repeated discussions with Paddock Wood Town Council, have come to nothing. Residents of Paddock Wood now see development happening that they were assured would take place only when the sewerage system had been upgraded to deal with the current overuse and problems and to remove the worsening of that situation, let alone to cope with the planned development.

I met representatives of Southern Water, members of Paddock Wood Town Council, and officers and members of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Kent County Council on 7 September. All those local representatives were dismayed to discover that the previous plans were not even going to be proceeded with, and that the company had in effect gone back to the drawing board to consider what could be done about the capacity in Paddock Wood.

In the meantime, new homes are being built and connected to a sewerage system that is already so inadequate that it results in sewage flowing through the streets and the flooding of existing properties. Enough is enough. The people of Paddock Wood are not nimbys opposing all development; quite the opposite. In fact the town has, without fuss, accommodated more new development compared with its size than most other towns in the south-east of England. It is perfectly reasonable to demand that, in doing so, residents should not be taken for granted or taken for a ride.

I have focused on the town of Paddock Wood this evening, given that this is a short debate, but a sense of distrust and, in my view, justified scepticism also applies to Hawkhurst, Hawkenbury, Capel, Tunbridge Wells, Southborough and many other communities in my constituency. My constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), wanted me to make mention of the fact that many of his communities are also affected by pretty much identical problems. My constituents are not surprised that the company was this year fined the record sum of £126 million for failures including a lack of necessary investment. The saga of Paddock Wood leads local residents to endorse the verdict of the chief executive of the water regulator, Ofwat, who has stated:

"The company is being run with scant regard for its responsibilities to society and to the environment."

I would therefore like to ask the Minister three things. First, will she intervene to insist that Southern Water present comprehensive infrastructure plans without further delay to the community of Paddock Wood and others in my constituency where development is being considered, and that it implement those plans? Secondly, will she strengthen the powers of local councils to require water companies to make an assessment of the infrastructure needs, and not to approve new development until it is certain that the infrastructure will be provided before or

at the same time as the development? Thirdly, will she accept that if we as a nation are to support development, whether it is in the town or the countryside, commercial or residential, the rules should be established and acted upon, and that there is always I before E: infrastructure before expansion?

If we do these things, we can look forward to a future in which new development is seen not as something that is bound to make existing residents' lives worse, but as something that offers the prospect of improvements to the quality of life for everyone in the locality. My constituents want that assurance. They want action, and they want to see it now.

12.18 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): It is late, but I think we are all still very focused on this issue, which is a tricky one. To be talking about sewage at this time of night is really focusing the mind. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) on securing this debate concerning Southern Water and the issues he is facing in his constituency. He is a strong spokesman for his local area, and rightly so. I just want to touch on this whole issue because we are talking about water and a water company, and water is so important in our lives. It plays an important role in our 25-year environment plan and there is a whole section on water in the Environment Bill, which had its successful Second Reading in this Chamber earlier tonight. Some of the things in the Bill will touch on issues raised by my right hon. Friend.

The Government recognise the need to secure long-term water supplies due to climate change and our growing population, so we expect the water industry to take more action in several areas, such as reducing demand for water alongside investing to increase water supplies. The industry also needs to take action on sewerage infrastructure. We recently consulted on a range of measures to reduce personal water usage, including a call for evidence. The need for investment in infrastructure is well set out in the draft national policy statement for water resources infrastructure. I am concerned, however, about the quality of the water environment, and there is more to be done. In the case of some water companies, a great deal more needs to be done.

Last week, the Environment Agency launched a consultation on how we protect and improve the water environment. The "Challenges and Choices" consultation explores how we can work together to manage our waters and deliver significant improvements to water bodies in England in the face of increasing pressures, one of which is housing and the growing population. Given such challenges, the Government want a water sector that delivers more for the customer and the environment. The Government and regulators are challenging the sector to improve its environmental performance, put customers at the heart of the business, and restore trust in the sector. I believe that my right hon. Friend actually used the word "trust" in his powerful speech.

Companies are responding to the challenge and have put forward proposals in their business plans committing to improve performance and offer bill reductions to customers, but there is much more to be done. For example, too much water simply leaks from the system,

and significant investment is needed to improve the resilience of our water supplies and to improve service and environmental standards. In July, as my right hon. Friend might remember, the previous Environment Secretary called a meeting with all the water company chief executives to hold them to account over their performance towards customers and the environment. It was quite a groundbreaking moment that received a lot of coverage because he was quite ferocious with the companies.

Several companies, including Southern Water, had recently been assessed by the Environment Agency as demonstrating unacceptable levels of environmental performance. Companies were also challenged over customer service and leakage performance. As a relatively new Environment Minister, I am now working with regulators to put pressure on water companies to do more to increase resilience, enhance the environment and provide customers with value for money.

Water, as we all know, is a really precious commodity, and it needs to be treated as such. I want to be clear that Government and regulators are committed to taking action and holding water companies to account for their poor performance. Earlier this month, Ofwat issued a penalty against Southern Water of £126 million due to serious failures in the operation of sewage treatment works and for deliberately misreporting performance information. This was the largest enforcement action ever taken by Ofwat and resulted in a £3 million financial penalty and £123 million in rebates to be paid out to customers over the next five years.

I am pleased that Southern Water has made commitments to be more open and transparent about its performance with respect to the environment, and there have been changes in management personnel at the company. Additionally, Southern Water has now committed to reduce pollution incidents by 41% by 2025, along with reducing supply interruptions by 51%. The Environment Agency has set out ambitious measures in the water industry national environment programme, which will result in £4.4 billion of investment by water companies in the natural environment between 2020 and 2025, and £547 million of that investment relates to Southern Water. I am optimistic that that will help to tackle some of the biggest challenges facing the water environment, from the spread of invasive species to flow affected by chemicals and nutrient pollution. It is imperative that we clean up our water and, as Environment Minister, I want to see improvements.

To help to prevent sewage flooding incidents such as those that my right hon. Friend mentioned in his constituency, water and sewerage companies have a number of duties in relation to drainage, wastewater and sewerage, including a duty to effectually drain within their areas of operation. Drainage and wastewater infrastructure must be better prepared for extreme rainfall events to reduce the risk of overloaded sewers flooding homes or overflowing into rivers and the sea, which is simply unacceptable—my right hon. Friend referred to some incidents where that happened. I am committed to ensuring that water companies are making those preparations. That is why the Environment Bill contains a measure to place drainage and wastewater planning on a statutory footing, because whereas the water that comes out of our taps has previously been dealt with on a statutory footing, interestingly, sewage has not and

has instead been dealt with through a voluntary arrangement. I am optimistic that that will be a strong feature of the Environment Bill, which we have talked about tonight.

That measure will ensure that sewerage companies fully assess their wastewater network capacity and develop collaborative solutions with local authorities and other bodies responsible for parts of the drainage system. That will be in addition to the statutory plans that companies already publish on managing long-term water supplies. South East Water, the water supplier for Tunbridge Wells, recently agreed and published its plan. I expect Southern Water to work collaboratively with South East Water to ensure that their plans align. Again, the Environment Bill contains measures on getting water companies to work together much more collaboratively, so that their plans overlap, whether they share the same boundaries or whether, as in this instance, one has the water coming out of the tap and the other deals with what goes down the loo. There will be a duty to work together much more closely on those issues.

The Government have also published a surface water management action plan, which sets out the steps we are taking with the Environment Agency and others to manage the risk of surface water flooding. The plan sets out 22 actions to improve our understanding of the risks of flooding and strengthen delivery. Key actions include making sure that infrastructure is resilient—something that I think my right hon. Friend was getting at—joining up planning for surface water management and building local authority capacity. One of the actions in the plan is to make drainage and wastewater management plans, and that is now in the Environment Bill. Ofwat has recommended that water companies should already have started their action plans, so Southern Water should be starting to formulate its plan. In addition, the autumn Budget allocated £13 million to tackle risks from floods and climate change at the national level. Local authorities have the opportunity to bid for some of that funding to address local needs.

My right hon. Friend also talked about new housing developments and the pressure that they can put on drainage systems. I fully understand—because he painted such a clear, if ghastly picture—what he said about the situation in Paddock Wood and the new housing there and in surrounding areas. I have a great deal of sympathy with those who have had to experience these sewage events. As a slight aside, Southern Water does not have a good record of responding to complaints either—indeed, it has a very poor record—and I imagine that a lot of those affected will have made complaints.

The national planning policy framework was revised in July 2018 and stated that sustainable drainage systems—SuDS, which I am a fan of—should be given priority in new developments in flood risk areas. The NPPF strengthened existing policy to make clear the expectation that SuDS are to be provided in all new major developments, unless demonstrated to be inappropriate. Local flood authorities must also be consulted on surface water drainage considerations in planning applications for all major new developments. This really ought to go some way to address issues raised by my right hon. Friend. Water companies should be consulted on these planning applications, and the plans should be rejected where it is thought that the infrastructure really is not suitable. Water companies will charge new developments for

[Rebecca Pow]

connection to the sewerage systems, so they have that right to charge where they think we need more connections, and they should use this money to pay for any upgrades.

The economic regulator Ofwat is currently in the final stages of its price review process with the water companies. Ofwat has pushed Southern Water to improve its performance, make efficiency savings and reduce bills. I support Ofwat in its work with Southern Water to help it to bring its business plan up to standard. Without a doubt, evidence highlights that the performance of Southern Water has left a great deal to be desired. If improvements are not forthcoming, I shall be requesting a meeting with Southern Water. I believe my right hon. Friend asked whether I would step in and take some serious action, and I shall be doing that and asking some serious questions.

Greg Clark: I am grateful for the commitment that my hon. Friend has given to take action. Will she agree to meet me, and perhaps some of the residents in my

constituency, to discuss the response to her meeting with Southern Water, so that we can make an assessment of whether things are heading in the right direction?

Rebecca Pow: Of course I will meet my right hon. Friend. We want water companies that are working effectively and efficiently, and we need to understand the pressures they are under and how to deliver for all new houses. We are committed to building new houses as a Government. We need new houses, but they need to function properly, with the right infrastructure, so of course I will meet him.

In conclusion, we want to see a water industry that puts customers at the heart of the business, contributes to communities, and protects and enhances our precious natural environment. I will continue to push the sector and hold water companies, such as Southern Water in this case, to account if necessary.

Question put and agreed to.

12.33 am

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 28 October 2019

[STEWART HOSIE *in the Chair*]

Restoring Nature and Climate Change

4.30 pm

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

That this House has considered e-petition 254607 relating to restoring nature and climate change.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and an honour to introduce the petition on behalf of the Petitions Committee. It is timely because of the climate crisis we face, but also because it is a hot topic in Ambridge at the moment, for those who listen to “The Archers”. That is always a useful barometer for a certain part of public opinion.

The petition, which calls for natural climate solutions, such as rewilding, to be enacted to tackle the climate emergency, has been signed by around 110,000 people, including over 650 from my Cambridge constituency. It makes a series of important points and reads:

“Restore nature on a massive scale to help stop climate breakdown.

To avoid a climate emergency we need to act fast.

Rewilding and other natural climate solutions can draw millions of tonnes of CO₂ out of the air through restoring and protecting our living systems. We call on the UK Government to make a bold financial and political commitment to nature’s recovery.

We need to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C to avoid the catastrophic effects of climate breakdown. To do this we need both to reduce carbon emissions and to remove carbon from the atmosphere. By drawing down carbon, nature’s recovery can help us reach net carbon zero.

We have a chance for the UK to become a world leader in natural climate solutions. Those who manage our land and sea play a pivotal role and should be supported to come together to deliver carbon reductions.”

I doubt many—or even any—of us here would disagree with much in that statement. It is a topic that chimes with the public mood over the last year. From the school climate strikes, the Extinction Rebellion protests and many more related campaigns, it is clear that stopping climate breakdown is at the top of the agenda for many people.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this wonderful debate with his magic power. More people in Huddersfield than in Ambridge signed the petition. Does he agree that we need more action from this Government and from the Opposition parties? Climate change is now. We must not put noughts on. We need the northern forest, millions of trees planted and so much more. Does he agree that this is an emergency and we have got to act now?

Daniel Zeichner: Strangely enough, I agree, as my hon. Friend will find as I go through my speech.

We should start with some definitions. I make an introductory caveat; I am not someone who believes that humankind is the cause of all problems, although we cause many. I have always been slightly puzzled by the term “unspoiled” that some people apply to areas

untouched by human intervention. There are certainly many—far too many—places that have been spoiled, polluted and harmed, but there are also examples of glorious and wonderful buildings and interventions, where people have achieved works of great beauty.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): In that recognition of where humans can enhance our environment, will the hon. Gentleman join me in paying tribute to the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the wildlife trusts around the country that do so much to support our environment with innovative and practical solutions?

Daniel Zeichner: I suspect that many Members around the Chamber will have worked with their local wildlife trusts and seen the excellent work they do. Just a few weeks ago I was with the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire releasing Nora the hedgehog into the wild, although Nora’s building was not one of the works of art I was about to reference in my great city of Cambridge.

Cambridge is full of fine examples of magnificent buildings and we are proud of them. They are often the work of previous generations, sometimes created in political and economic circumstances that we would not now accept. We can all point to examples across cultures and countries of magnificent interventions. My point is that we are not for or against nature, but with better scientific understanding of our impact on the wider environment, we now have the responsibility to act in a way that does no more harm and, where harm has been caused, take the opportunity to work with natural processes to secure improvement. That is my starting point.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): Kent Wildlife Trust, along with others, has a strategy of greening urban areas. Will the hon. Gentleman welcome its initiatives and others, such as that at Luton Junior School, in my constituency, which plans to build a green, living wall to help absorb pollution and improve the future health of the children at the school?

Daniel Zeichner: The hon. Lady is correct; I suspect we will be hearing more examples of good work done by other wildlife trusts.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): I will say a word about the role of water and wetlands. The hon. Gentleman will know the example of Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire and about the work that is being done to improve the wetlands towards Anglesey Abbey. We could do with more work like that around the country. In Hertfordshire, our chalk streams are suffering from over-abstraction. Do we not need a policy for water?

Daniel Zeichner: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right. I am about to embark on a tour of wetlands; Wicken Fen will be one of them. This summer we have seen some particular problems with a number of streams drying up, so we need a plan for water.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware of the 2018 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the 2019 report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services that

[*Bambos Charalambous*]

show that nature and climate crisis are inextricably linked? The IPBES report says that 1 million species globally are at risk of extinction. Does he agree that nature-based solutions are a fundamental way of stopping climate change and preventing the extinction of species?

Daniel Zeichner: My hon. Friend is right; I will come to some of those points later.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The hon. Gentleman is being generous with his time. It is great that we are all paying tribute to our local wildlife trusts; I will put in a word for the wonderful Sussex Wildlife Trust. Does he agree that we need urgent action? Ministers could make a decision right now to ban the burning of blanket bog, ending the release of huge amounts of emissions that could otherwise be captured by peat. When we consider that globally peatlands can store more carbon than rain forests, we need to be doing much more and not burning them.

Sir Oliver Heald: Only if they are wet; they have to be wet.

Daniel Zeichner: The hon. Lady is right, as is the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who spoke from a sedentary position. Later in my speech, I will make that point.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is exceedingly generous in taking interventions in this important debate. I pay tribute to the Walthamstow Wetlands—I hope they will be on his tour—and to my local authority, which has planted 5,000 trees in the last year alone in Waltham Forest.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) is right when she says that we need to look at what Government can do. Many of us are interested in ideas about carbon pricing and how we can further incentivise rewilding as part of tackling climate change. Frankly, it is not enough to leave it to local communities and local authorities, which do individually brilliant things; in this time of climate emergency, we should ask national Government to incentivise rewilding. Does my hon. Friend have a view on that?

Daniel Zeichner: I had a wonderful day out in Walthamstow with my partner earlier this year, when we came to see some of the wonderful things that have been done there. On the point of urgency, my hon. Friend is right. The conclusion to my speech will lay down the challenge to the Minister about the degree of urgency we face, which I am sure he will respond to.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that any rewilding scheme is far more likely to be successful if it is pursued and taken along with the consent of the local community and local landowners?

Daniel Zeichner: The right hon. Gentleman is right; again, I will make that point in my speech. When we work together with local communities we can achieve much more.

The petition specifically talks about rewilding and natural climate solutions, and I want to draw on a number of examples and points that experts on those subjects have raised with me. The organisation Rewilding Britain describes the issue as being about people reconnecting with nature, wildlife returning and habitats expanding, while communities flourish with new opportunities. That starts from the principle that natural processes drive outcomes, and that rewilding is to go where nature takes it, with long-term benefits for future generations. I will give some examples, beginning close to home.

There are some wonderful long-term projects such as the National Trust's visionary project to restore wetlands around Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire, which has been mentioned. That project has been ably promoted over many years by Tony Juniper, who now chairs Natural England. He is a highly regarded environmentalist. I will mention in passing that he was my Green party opponent in the 2010 general election in Cambridge. We spent a long evening at the count together after he had run a brilliant, vigorous and exciting campaign, which, sadly for him, secured only a few thousand votes, marginally behind me. I came in a disappointing third. I remind colleagues gently that election outcomes are not always exactly as anticipated. Tony has recently written extensively about the social and economic benefits of a nature-centric green new deal, which would unlock benefits such as public health improvements, both physical and mental. It is a programme that I strongly approve of.

However, it is not just land policy that attracts the attention of rewilders. We need to look to the oceans as well.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman has touched on something that is important in our approach to the debate. When we talk about rewilding and climate change, we often talk about the challenges. Would not it sometimes be better to talk about the opportunities, for jobs, the economy and the social fabric?

Daniel Zeichner: I am slightly alarmed at the unanimity that is breaking out in the Chamber today. The hon. Gentleman is right and many of us have noticed that in the last period the green economy has survived times of recession much more effectively than the rest of the economy.

To return to the subject of the oceans, the securing of no-fish zones in oceans can allow marine habitats to recover from the effects of bottom trawling and scallop dredging. An example is the no-take zone in Lamlash bay in Scotland. That is beautifully outlined by Rewilding Britain on its website. The issues are not always straightforward. In my area, the *Cambridge Independent* reported last week that Cambridgeshire County Council's goal of reaching net zero carbon emissions is going to be more challenging than originally thought, as peatland emissions will be included in Government calculations from next year. Cambridge University Science and Policy Exchange, which strongly advocates nature-based solutions, identified—as the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) pointed out—that peatland is a significant contributor to CO₂ emissions in Cambridgeshire. Adam Barnett of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds tells me that that is a crucial issue. Consequently, the

RSPB and other organisations rightly want to ban the burning of peat bogs, which releases carbon and is extremely damaging to the atmosphere. I hope that we shall get a response on that from the Minister. I know that questions have been put to Ministers about it before.

I have mentioned just some of the complex range of issues that there are to consider. The staff serving the Petitions Committee were kind enough to set up an engagement event on the topic in Cambridge last week, and we had an extremely well-informed roundtable with experts in my constituency. I record my thanks to the Clerks to the Committee for their work on it. Our discussion took place at the premises of the Cambridge Conservation Initiative in the iconic David Attenborough building, a conservation campus that is home to organisations that promote the natural world, such as the RSPB, Flora & Fauna International and BirdLife International. There, I was privileged to meet Dr Mike Rands, the executive director of the Cambridge Conservation Initiative, and Dr Andy Clements, the director of the British Trust for Ornithology, who shared with me their insights on natural restoration. Dr Clements hammered home the point that data and monitoring of natural activity are crucial. We must know the state of affairs to be able to improve it.

Mr Sheerman: My hon. Friend has the great advantage that I have, of having a superb university in his constituency. Are universities, in partnership, doing enough in terms of leadership? I find that many universities do research and do not share with their local communities and groups, or even local government. Could more be done? Of course, many universities, such as Cambridge, are large landowners.

Daniel Zeichner: As ever, my hon. Friend makes an important point. The University of Cambridge provides global leadership, but I occasionally point out to it that the link with the local community could be improved. Universities need to be close to their communities.

Sir Oliver Heald: On that point, Professor Sir David King, the former master of Emmanuel College and emeritus professor at Cambridge, who has been the Government's chief scientific adviser on this, has been a strong advocate of carbon sinks.

Daniel Zeichner: Indeed, Sir David is of course one of my constituents and I happily canvassed him recently. Cambridge is a wonderful place in which to canvass, I assure the House.

Mr Sheerman: It is very flat.

Daniel Zeichner: Cambridgeshire is not as flat as all that, if you cycle around. However, in answer to the intervention of the right hon. and learned Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald)—yes; some important leadership, and extraordinary plans and ideas, are coming from such places as the University of Cambridge, about the dramatic interventions we might make to tackle climate change.

To return to the topic of data, there are many ways in which we can assess what is happening in the world. I was reminded, during the discussion we were having, of the work of immensely important organisations such as

the Bumblebee Conservation Trust; its chief executive, the inspiring Gill Perkins, has pointed that out to me before. Its annual “BeeWalk” involves volunteer “BeeWalkers” walking the same fixed route once a month between March and October, counting the bumblebees seen and identifying them by species and caste where possible. That is important, and I suspect we are also all familiar with the hugely popular and important annual RSPB “Big Garden Birdwatch”. Those are just some of the ways in which we can monitor and assess what is going on. As hon. Members have suggested, such public engagement is vital. By encouraging each other to monitor the world around us, we shall, I am convinced, become better informed in our efforts to protect it.

During our discussion in Cambridge, the importance of data and evidence was further highlighted by Hazel Thornton of the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre. She told me that out of 337 common interventions that it had assessed, only about a third were evidence based. That is a striking statistic. I suspect that all too often we do things that we think are helpful because they are what we have always done, without really knowing whether they have the desired outcomes, or—worse—whether there is a risk of unintended consequences.

Hazel Thornton advocated Government support for open-access data and decision-making tools, which should include consideration of costs and local values. She also called for Government funding for a long-term evidence monitoring system. I have considerable sympathy because, important as voluntary efforts are, they need to be complementary to rigorous scientific recording.

Dr Clements highlighted the need to tackle the carbon crisis and biodiversity crisis together. He pointed out that in some ways the carbon crisis is simpler to communicate to the wider public. We can probably all remember the need to limit temperature rises to below 2°C, but the biodiversity crisis, which is just as crucial, is perhaps harder to explain in simple memorable terms that capture public attention.

Almost as we speak here, discussions in the main Chamber will have an impact on the ways forward. The Environment Bill and our wider future relationship with our European partners will both have a significant impact on the issues that we are debating. A point that has been much stressed in the many recent debates is that, were we to leave the European Union, that should not lead to the potential regression of existing environmental standards. Dr Clements emphasised that to me and, as Members would probably expect, there is near-universal agreement among those who are expert in the field. The combined power and influence of 28 states acting together should not be lost. It is a global climate crisis and we must tackle it collaboratively.

Sue Wells, of the Cambridge Conservation Forum, focused on the need to take oceans into account when making policy. She explained that marine issues could get left behind in comparison with terrestrial projects. Another issue that was highlighted locally was fenland projects. Roger Mitchell, of Fens for the Future, talked about the need for nature-based solutions to the carbon emissions of the fens, which we have already discussed.

All this suggests a wider picture. When developing our land for our needs—housing, transport, infrastructure—we must maintain a focus on natural capital and on nature-based solutions to carbon emissions. Whether in

[Daniel Zeichner]

planning flood diversions and defences with natural solutions, or in projects such as East West Rail, which affects my constituency, and the natural capital work there, we must focus on the environment alongside any development plans.

There are good examples of where past developments can be improved. Recently, I visited Anglian Water's sewage treatment plant in Ingoldisthorpe, Norfolk, with the East of England all-party parliamentary group. We were all impressed with the work that had been done to create beautiful wetlands and increase local and regional biodiversity. The restored wetland removes the need for carbon-intensive, expensive nutrient-stripping techniques, while improving water quality; it is a great project led by the Norfolk Rivers Trust.

We must keep our focus on the environment when delivering investment for the future, and we must think long term. Sarah Smith of the Wicken Fen rewilding project told me the project has a 100-year plan to extend the nature reserve by 10 miles, as I mentioned earlier.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, as that allows me to put on record my tribute to the Cheshire Wildlife Trust, which runs the Eastwood nature reserve in Stalybridge. On the things that he has just mentioned, which I think we all agree with, does he agree that housing is perhaps the area that needs the biggest change? I see far too many generic, developer-led developments that have no relationship to the natural world around them. If we are serious about not just putting investment in, but changing how we do things, housing must be planned in a much better way with respect to the local environment. If we are serious about doing things such as garden villages, that could be the way, but I do not think the present approach will achieve the outcome he is quite ably describing.

Daniel Zeichner: My hon. Friend's intervention takes us off into a different debate in some ways, but I absolutely agree with him. It is much to be regretted that the very high environmental standards for new build that were in place in 2010 are no longer there, but I am sure they can be restored—if not before Christmas, soon afterwards, perhaps.

I spoke before about long-term planning. While Wicken Fen may be looking 100 years ahead, I am not sure Parliament can look forward 100 hours at the moment, but we do need to commit to long-term natural restoration.

Tracey Crouch: Can we put on the record the importance and value of roadside nature reserves, which are often forgotten in the dynamic environment we live in? Many of our wildlife trusts work alongside their local authorities to keep our roadside nature reserves wild and keep those species living in that protected environment, but there is no statutory requirement for local authorities to invest in them. It is important that we remember the value of roadside nature reserves in the context of this debate.

Daniel Zeichner: The hon. Lady must be a mind reader, because that is my very next point. She makes an important point, because, as I was going to say, beyond those big long-term projects, there are quite simple

things that can be done locally or individually. That was drawn to my attention by Olivia Norfolk, of Anglia Ruskin University, who said that simple solutions in urban environments to encourage nature restoration, such as not mowing road verges, can be important. However, she also argued that, while we can all act ourselves, we need urgent systemic changes to the way we run the country, and we cannot continue to export our costs overseas.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): The hon. Gentleman's exchange with my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) reminds me that when I served as Roads Minister in the 1980s, we planted over 1 million trees a year—they were not actually trees when they were planted, but many of them have grown into trees. Those nature reserves are very important, particularly if they can provide continuous habitat and corridors for animals to get around; it is not just about the foxes getting into town on the railways, but about providing a variety of planting that we do not often get in some managed forests.

Daniel Zeichner: I am grateful for that intervention. It must be a wonderful thing to be able to see that the trees that were planted then have now come to fruition. That is also an important point.

If we are to consider all these points alongside a future generations initiative, we need to make not only individual and cultural changes, but systemic, Government-led ones. Tom Maddox, of Natural Capital Hub and Flora & Fauna International, told me of the need to adopt a holistic approach, and in 2021—

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

Daniel Zeichner: I will just finish the sentence. In 2021, the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration starts—a huge opportunity. Let us beat the curve and adopt those radical and far-reaching changes now.

Caroline Lucas: I apologise for interrupting. I thought there was a semi-colon there, but perhaps there was not. I know the hon. Gentleman is concerned about an outbreak of unanimity, so in case that should happen, can I put it to him that natural climate solutions must be supported, but only in addition to, not instead of, rapid emission reductions in every part of the economy? Does he share my concern that Heathrow airport, for example, is pushing a set of ideas about peatland restoration as part of its so-called carbon-neutral growth plans, but not changing business as usual? We must not use natural climate solutions as a way to avoid real carbon reduction.

Daniel Zeichner: I am grateful to the hon. Lady; I am sure there is no danger of complete unanimity breaking out when she is in the room. She is right that, when it comes to the issue of Heathrow, there is certainly not likely to be unanimity. That is an important point, because sometimes—I am not saying this about that particular project—it is pretty clear that there is some greenwashing going on, and we must always be mindful of that.

I turn to the Government and ask for a couple of commitments—first, clear leadership and a commitment to implementing nature restoration measures, rather

than simply leaving them to the market, where simplistic short-term economic arguments too often win out. Yes, restoration can make absolute economic sense on a macro level, but individual actors need encouragement, education and direction on why they should change their behaviour. Targets and monitoring are vital there.

Secondly, as I suspect is often the way, I want to press for more ambition from the Government. The 25-year environment plan includes measures that would improve our natural environment, yes, but many would say that we should go much further. The commitment to restore 500,000 hectares, for example, is half what a single company has pledged in Indonesia. We should look at what others have pledged in the Bonn Challenge. The commitment to raise forest cover in England from 10% to 12% takes us from sixth lowest in Europe to eighth lowest, still behind Scotland and Wales. Most European countries have over one third of their land covered in forest. Belgium has a similar population density to us, but over twice the forest, so we can do more, and we can challenge ourselves further.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am glad to hear the hon. Gentleman pay tribute to the efforts of the Scottish Government, but does he agree that the efforts of organisations such as Network Rail hold them back? It is trying to cut down swathes of trees along the railway lines through my constituency, removing a nature corridor that is important to local people.

Daniel Zeichner: The hon. Lady is absolutely right and points to exactly the kind of trade-off that I was referring to. As a member of the Select Committee on Transport, I should be at this very moment questioning Mr Williams on this issue. She is right to draw attention to the many trees that are being destroyed.

Let me conclude with a voice from a future generation, because last week I received a letter from Maggie, a 10-year-old girl from a primary school in my constituency, and I would like to quote one or two of the things she said:

“Sir David Attenborough said that ‘nature recovery’ laws must be created to ensure ‘habitats are expanded and reconnected’. Please ask the Government to pass a law to protect our wildlife!”

She went on:

“Secondly, our wildlife is endangered by the plastic in the sea and us cutting down their homes. We also need to stop littering around our environment, fields and especially on the beach! To sum up, I need you to tell the government that they need to act now and my question for the government is: do you want to keep ruining animals’ lives, or do you want to save the animals and our world from climate change?”

I must say that in my political life I have rarely invoked Maggie, but today I hope the Minister will rise to the challenge of 21st-century Maggie and act to protect her, and our, future.

4.58 pm

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Thank you for calling me first on this side of the Chamber, Mr Hosie. I declare an interest, in that I am a member of the Conservative Environment Network, and before that I was a member of the Tory Green Initiative in the 1980s. My commitment to the environment is sincere.

I congratulate the constituents of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) on their ingenuity in using a petition, which is a very unusual way of bringing

their concerns to a Chamber of the House, formed, as it is, of general Members. I hope that those constituents will feel satisfied with the response they receive today from my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), who has done so much in the field of the environment, long before he was promoted to be a Minister.

I congratulate the Government on what they have done so far, particularly on setting carbon limits, dealing with deforestation and their work on plastics. Last year, I was in India, in Bangalore, and I was astonished by the amount of plastics there. This autumn, I was in Delhi, and I saw very little plastic. I asked my host why, and he said that they had taken action in India, and that had made a decisive difference.

The issue of carbon emissions goes beyond the countryside, and it has to be faced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and others. During the Queen’s Speech debate, I drew it to the Health Secretary’s attention that the NHS’s carbon footprint in England is around 27 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents, and suggested to him that all new hospitals and health facilities in this country should take carbon footprint into account. The carbon footprint is high and it takes into account health service buildings, but we also have to look at the carbon footprint of healthcare services and medicines; the carbon footprint is measured without taking into consideration the pharmaceutical products provided as medicines.

I refer colleagues to an article published last year by Agence France-Presse, which said that large numbers of pharmaceuticals had been found at levels dangerous for wildlife and the environment. It said:

“River systems around world are coursing with over-the-counter and prescription drug waste,”

which is extremely harmful. If this trend persists, the amount of pharmaceutical effluence leaching into waterways could increase by two thirds before 2050, according to scientists speaking at the European Geosciences Union conference in Vienna in April 2018. Francesco Bregoli, a researcher at the IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, said:

“A large part of the freshwater ecosystems is potentially endangered by the high concentration of pharmaceuticals”.

He said that a large number of drugs—analgesics, antibiotics, anti-platelet agents, hormones, psychiatric drugs and antihistamines—have been found at levels dangerous for wildlife. As part of a study, he focused on one drug, diclofenac, which both the European Union and the US Environmental Protection Agency have identified as an environmental threat; its veterinary use in India has driven a subspecies of vulture on the Indian subcontinent to the brink of extinction.

For scale, healthcare in the world’s largest economies, including China and India, accounts for 4% of global emissions, while carbon dioxide emissions from healthcare in the world’s largest economies account for about 5% of their national carbon footprints, according to a recent study. Scientists at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany have said that climate change and medicines are inextricably linked, with rising global temperatures associated with everything from the spread of infectious diseases to the impact of dangerous weather events. They say that this is the major threat to human health of the 21st century.

Mr Sheerman: I am listening attentively to the hon. Gentleman. A cross-party group of us are very interested in the quality of water in our rivers and streams. Indeed, in Huddersfield, I chair Greenstreams, which looks at the issue locally. Will he look with us at the quality of the Thames, and how its high levels of pollution were turned around right on our doorstep? Of course, building the new Palace of Westminster will have a vast impact on that river.

David Tredinnick: I certainly would. Representing Bosworth, a hosiery and knitwear constituency in the midlands, I have spent much of the last 30 years in the House—not quite as long as the hon. Gentleman, I think, from memory—looking at the problem of phosphorescent dyes, which are very popular in the clothing industry, getting into sewage works and water streams. Of course I would be happy to become involved in that.

I turn to the importance of the UK's having a sustainable healthcare policy. At the moment, one third of the world's population already has, in part, a sustainable healthcare system. The two most populous countries in the world are, colleagues will recall, China and India; China has a population of 1.4 billion and India has a population of 1.3 billion. I say to my right hon. Friend the Minister that the challenge for us in this country is to develop—or to take forward from their small base—zero-carbon medicines and healthcare. We cannot ignore this subject.

China has 65,000 hospitals that use zero-carbon treatments in the shape of acupuncture. They also use traditional Chinese herbal medicine, which has a carbon footprint close to zero. I have to say to my right hon. Friend that India is light years ahead. Not only does it have a family health Ministry; it has the Ministry of AYUSH—the Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy, which is a sustainable health Ministry that is very much supported by Prime Minister Modi, who has just been elected for another five years. The Ministry has seen its budget increase four times in the last six years.

I say to my right hon. Friend that it is a mystery to me why the authorities in this country—the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, NHS England and, to a certain extent, the Department of Health and Social Care—do not look far afield beyond our country and take note of what is happening in other parts of the world. NICE decided to query the effectiveness of acupuncture, a zero-carbon treatment, for lower back pain. In January, I asked its chief executive, Sir Andrew Dillon, whether he had looked at evidence from China. He said no, on cost grounds; admittedly, NICE's budget has been reduced. However, that is a mistake; we should look further afield.

Today, the head of NHS England, Simon Stevens, made a blanket attack on homeopaths over the issue of vaccinations. I personally support the *Daily Mail* campaign for vaccinations, which is a good campaign. What I think is mistaken is to attack a movement. Again, we need to look abroad, at what happens in India, bearing in mind that homeopathy—I will not dwell on it for long—is a zero-carbon treatment. Some would say that there is nothing there in homeopathy, but in Delhi there are 6,000 homeopathy clinics and 15,000 registered practitioners; 80% are doctors with five years' training. I went to a clinic in Calcutta that is treating 2,000 patients a day in the off-season, with 100 doctors on duty each day. I really think that we should look at this.

I will finish on homeopathy on this point. In the whole of India, there are 300,000 homeopathic practitioners, a quarter of a million of whom are doctors with five years' training. How can it be that at a time of environmental crisis and the shocking carbon footprint of the health service, we are not taking this, the second largest medical system in the world, seriously? I have to say that I think the head of our health service, Simon Stevens, has been very badly advised, and I say the same to Andrew Dillon. I think they have been badly advised. They should get out there and see what is happening in the rest of the world and bury their prejudices.

I met and would like to thank Shripad Naik, the Minister in charge of AYUSH; Dr Rajesh Kotecha, his Secretary; and Pramod Pathak, the Additional Secretary, for the courtesy extended to me when I visited the Ministry on a week-long tour of facilities in India. I am most grateful to them and I wish them well as they look after their 700,000 practitioners, 700 teaching institutions and 200 postgraduate institutions; manage an annual intake on degree courses of 46,000 students and an annual intake on postgrad courses of 6,000; and look after 28,000 dispensaries and 9,000 Government manufacturing units. They provide six practitioners per 10,000 of population. That is what we should be looking at.

Colleagues wish to speak, and I certainly do not want to monopolise the time this afternoon. I suggest that we have to broaden the scope of our environmental thinking to look at the whole issue of healthcare. I have seen this elsewhere and I do think that we need to think about zero-carbon treatments and zero-carbon medicines. They are out there, used by one third of the world's population. We need to wise up, as my kids say—“Daddy, wise up.” We need to take note that three babies a day are born addicted to opioid drugs. We need to realise that the new antibiotics that we need are not coming online fast enough. We have to go back to the future, if I may quote Alvin Toffler—I think it was him—and look for new solutions in 4,000-year-old medical systems. If we do, we will have a happier, healthier world, with a better carbon footprint.

5.13 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Hosie. The parliamentary authorities are doing their bit to combat global warming by not having the heating on today—I sent for my cardigan, so I will survive.

The hon. Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) made an interesting speech. His was a slightly imaginative interpretation, perhaps, of the subject of the petition, but I say to him that the Environmental Audit Committee, on which I serve, is, as part of its greening government inquiry, looking at the environmental footprint of the NHS estates. Some of those issues are coming up as part of that inquiry. I think that all areas of Government need to look at how they can reduce their carbon footprint.

The petition under discussion today had 405 signatories from Bristol East. Many of my constituents are passionate about this issue. I am very pleased that we are now talking about rewilding as a natural climate solution. It can draw millions of tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere. I agree, though, with what the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) said: we need to look at both sides of the coin. I find when I take part in debates such

as this and particularly when I talk about agriculture and its footprint—we had a debate in this Chamber three weeks ago about deforestation of the Amazon—that there can often be a focus on the positive side, with people saying, “Let’s restore our soil; let’s plant lots of trees,” but not addressing the fact that huge amounts of destruction are going on. There is not much point in planting trees if, with the other hand, we are destroying the Amazon to grow soya for livestock feed or whatever.

Mr Sheerman: Do we actually have to go to the Amazon on this issue? A leading professor at the University of Cambridge, Professor Steve Evans, who is a great friend of mine, believes that soil degradation here at home, and worldwide, is probably the greatest challenge that we face at the moment. I am talking about what we actually grow our plants and trees in.

Kerry McCarthy: Yes, soil is a huge issue. The Environmental Audit Committee did a very good inquiry on it a few years ago, and the all-party parliamentary group on agroecology for sustainable food and farming, which I chair, did a three-part inquiry. One of the amendments that I tried to get into the Agriculture Bill, with the list of public money for public goods, was to say that better soil health ought to be identified as a particular public good. The response of the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), who was responsible for farming, was that it was covered by the broader list and the Government did not want to be too specific, but now that the Agriculture Bill—well, who knows whether the Agriculture Bill is coming back? Who knows whether we will even be here tomorrow, let alone in time for the Agriculture Bill to come back? But I would like to see the point to which I have referred spelled out more specifically and in the Environment Bill, too.

As the petition stated, we need to act fast to avoid a climate emergency. Reducing carbon emissions alone will not be enough to keep the heating of the planet below 1.5°C. We also need to find ways of removing carbon from the atmosphere, and nature is our greatest ally in doing that. Evidence suggests that natural climate solutions could provide more than one third of the greenhouse gas mitigation required globally between now and 2030, yet natural solutions currently receive only 2.5% of the funding spent globally on cutting emissions. The lack of focus on natural solutions is indicative of the wider lack of action on reversing the ecological crisis over the past 40 years.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): On that point and on the earlier point about deforestation, here at home peat bogs play a hugely important role in carbon sequestration. Should not the Government invest more in restoring peat bogs in the UK?

Kerry McCarthy: Yes, that is really important. I think that there should be a ban on the burning of blanket bogs. I will have something to say about grouse moors in a moment. Another issue is peat in horticultural products. There has been quite a campaign to stop that, and I know that quite a lot of gardeners would support that. That is all part and parcel of this.

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services found that 1 million species

“already face extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken”.

It is a very sad fact that the UK is now one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world: it is ranked 189th out of 218, with a 41% species decline since 1970. Many of us are species champions; I am the parliamentary swift species champion. I know that other people are doing very good work on that front, and it is now more on the political agenda, but it is still shocking how much damage has been done in recent decades.

It is clear that nature is struggling against climate change, habitat loss, pollution and intensive farming, but we can turn that around radically by changing the way we manage land. Rewilding is the only solution that offers the opportunity to tackle the climate and ecological emergencies together. The benefits of rewilding our peatlands, heathlands, grasslands, woodlands, saltmarshes, wetlands and coastal waters are diverse. That would lock away carbon, clean air and water, reconnect us with nature, protect communities at risk of flooding, revitalise wildlife, restore our soil and support new economic opportunities.

In preparation for this speech, I read an article in *The Spectator* by the Minister’s brother, Ben Goldsmith, that was titled “The triumphant return of the British beaver”. He was saying that some people say, “Well, beavers are a bit messy, aren’t they?” This is the same sort of thing that we were talking about in relation to grass verges. I have some constituents who say, “Now that the grass in the parks and along the roadsides isn’t cut to within a centimetre of its life, it looks a bit messy with all this stuff growing,” but that is what nature ought to look like. Ben Goldsmith, in response to people saying that beavers make a bit of a mess, said:

“Considering that the majority of our land is stripped, cultivated, tidied and managed by humans, surely we can...allow nature a bit of free rein along our watercourses.”

That underpins this debate. Nature ought to be allowed to do what nature does. It should not be controlled and tidied out of existence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) mentioned peatland. We are lucky to have 13% of the world’s peatland in the UK, but the habitat is suffering: 80% has been damaged by drainage, extraction, burning or overgrazing. As a result, the equivalent of the emissions of 660,000 UK households are released each year. This natural resource can take carbon out of the atmosphere, but because of the way we treat it, it is releasing more emissions. The Government should ban the extraction and burning of peat immediately. Extraction for compost releases almost half a million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, which is the equivalent of 100,000 cars on the road, so why do we always talk about cars, but not how domestic gardening is causing a problem?

Voluntary targets to phase out horticultural peat are not being met and it is over a year and a half since the Government said progress was insufficient. It is now time for action. Rewilding our peatlands is a no-brainer: it sequesters significant amounts of carbon, provides clean water and reduces flooding. Several years ago, I went to flood-hit areas with my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch). Anyone who has been there

[Kerry McCarthy]

can see the impact of the burning of the moors on the catchment area. It makes sense to look after our peatlands and plant trees.

Some critics of the rewilding agenda say that there is a choice between feeding ourselves and nature, and that turning more land over to rewilding, rather than using it for agriculture, will mean that we lose out in food security. However, the least productive marginal land often provides the best options for carbon sequestration, rewilding and other ecosystems services. We already have large areas of land that produce little food, which could be used to store vast amount of carbon. Grouse moor estates cover around 1.3 million hectares of England, Scotland and Wales. Deer stalking estates account for around 1.8 million hectares in Scotland. These estates are commonly located on degraded peatlands, currently managed at high environmental cost, using practices such as burning, for the benefit of a relatively tiny number of shooters. We need to reassess our priorities and take a more strategic approach to the use of that land.

I chair the all-party parliamentary group on agroecology for sustainable food and farming, which does excellent work on this agenda. The Minister was, before his elevation to greater things, one of the vice chairs of the APPG. Rewilding must be accompanied by a wider transition to nature and climate-friendly farming. The Knepp estate is a good example of how that works.

It is well documented that the intensification of farming since the second world war has left less and less space for nature in the UK. To turn that around, the Government ought to commit to a transition to sustainable agroecological farming by 2030. That is supported by the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. The Government must also commit to net zero emissions from agriculture by 2040 and reverting parcels of arable land, particularly the third that is used for animal feed, to permanent grassland, which has high levels of soil, carbon and biodiversity value.

I mentioned that the Agriculture Bill's approach of public money for public goods is a step in the right direction, but it needs to be more ambitious. If £1.9 billion of the £3 billion currently spent on common agricultural policy payments were allocated to supporting native woodland re-establishment, and the restoration and protection of peat bogs, heaths and the species rich grasslands over a total of 6 million hectares, that could mean sequestering 47 million tonnes of CO₂ a year, which is more than one tenth of current UK greenhouse gas emissions.

As I mentioned, we cannot think of natural solutions only on a domestic level. The UK should play its part on the world stage by ensuring that all UK aid is nature-positive. I know that the Minister, in his role as Minister for the Department for International Development, thinks that is important. We need to support more integrated interventions that improve people's lives and enhance the natural environment. We need to stop harmful investments that destroy nature and contribute to climate change, such as the deforestation of the Amazon. We need to look at how our consumption patterns here are harming the environment overseas.

We need to negotiate an ambitious deal with people and nature at the Convention on Biological Diversity next October. We need to look at other countries that are leading by example on rewilding. Ethiopia planted more than 350 million trees in one day in July—God knows how they managed that, but that is what they did—with the aim of planting 4 billion in the next year. We should seek to follow that scale of ambition.

To conclude, the UK has the chance to become a world leader in natural climate solutions, but we need financial commitments from the Government. Markets alone will not solve the climate and ecological crisis. Next week, assuming we will still be here, the Government have the chance to prove their commitment—actually, this refers to the Budget, which is definitely not happening next week. At some point in the near future, hopefully, if there is not an election, the Government have the chance to prove their commitment, by guaranteeing at least £2.9 billion for the new environmental land management scheme in the Budget, as called for by the National Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the wildlife trusts, whenever that happens. It could also reverse the 42% funding fall as a percentage of GDP for biodiversity conservation since 2008.

Finally, taking a different approach to the way land is managed is as important as high-tech solutions to address climate breakdown. I have heard the Minister of State for Climate Change and Industry talk about weird technological advances that would suck carbon out of the air. I do not see why we need to do that when trees and peat bogs can do the job for us.

5.26 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Ind): It is a pleasure to be here this afternoon and to follow the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), who serves on the Environmental Audit Committee. When I first came to this place, I served on that Committee alongside the Minister, and we spent many a jolly afternoon debating a wide range of subjects and conducting various inquiries.

I fear this speech may become a march around my constituency. In the words of the chief executive of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Debbie Tan, we must look to local solutions. The national picture is crucial, but in each of our constituencies we can ensure that there are good and important projects.

I want to focus on trees. A fortnight ago, Extinction Rebellion came to Westminster and provided each of us with a tree. Perhaps it was not wholly sustainable, being in a single-use plastic pot. None the less, I was struck by the image in Portcullis House of Birnam wood coming to Dunsinane, as these walking trees were paraded through the building. The humble oak tree, a fantastic symbol of our countryside, is one of the best carbon reservoirs we could have. I was disappointed that afternoon to get a beech tree rather than an oak, but I proudly took it home and ensured it was planted in my constituency. The oak tree lives and grows for 200 years, which is why it is important that we plant all the time, ensuring there is a replenished stock.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) mentioned the Department of Health and Social Care being an important partner with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when it comes to the environment, but we must also

look to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, because it has a crucial role in ensuring that our natural environment works hand in hand with the built environment, so we can address the challenge of climate change. I am blessed to represent a heavily treed constituency, but there are many instances of historic oak trees being chopped down, despite having tree preservation orders. There is relentless pressure to build more houses in areas where there is a conflict between nature and the built environment. Valley Park Woodlands are hard up against the 3,000 or so houses built in Valley Park.

Given the pressure that exists, there has to be a balance; that is what much of this debate is about. Of course, we have to provide houses, but we have to ensure that they are in the right place and that there is access to the natural environment so that people can enjoy the special areas that need to be preserved, or simply have somewhere to walk the dog. Those things do not always fit together very easily—walking the dog in an SSSI is never a good idea. There are many examples in my constituency of pressures on Ramsar protected sites such as those in the New Forest, as well as places such as Emer Bog in North Baddesley. It is about providing the right facilities.

I spent 10 years as my local authority's cabinet member for leisure. At the end of that time, we were heavily in negotiations with the local landowner to take possession of an area called Fishlake Meadows. The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust now describes the area as a

“glimpse of how the Test Valley would have looked over 2000 years ago...a dynamic, shifting swathe of ponds, lakes, reedbed, willow scrub and fen grassland”,

but 20 years ago it was farmed agricultural land—it was drained, planted and ploughed for food that we clearly did not require. It is a much healthier environment now that it has been given back to nature and is functioning exactly as it should: as a flood prevention area for the town of Romsey and as a place where ospreys, otters and kingfishers can thrive. It is all about ensuring that we have the right resources in place to support the land. Hon. Members have spoken about nature being “tidied up”, but when we took possession of Fishlake Meadows, it was at a tipping point. If it had been left any longer, the balance would have tipped towards those invasive species that are not wholly desirable, and bringing it back to the point it is at today would have been a much harder job.

I wish to pick up on comments made about farming. It is important to reflect that agriculture can have an important role for good. Last Friday, I had a visit on my schedule to Broughton Water Buffalo in my constituency. Who would have thought that Indian water buffalo provided so much good to the Hampshire countryside? They are farmed completely sustainably, fed only on grass and moved on to different pasture every day. The hay that they eat in winter is grown on the farm, where more than 15,000 trees have been planted in the past few years. That is an example of how local farmers can play a fantastic role in ensuring that the environment is at the forefront and climate change is uppermost in their thinking when they decide how to get a return from their land and protect it at the same time. Unfortunately, the weather in Hampshire was too miserable for me to be able to go, but it is certainly high on my list of

priorities. Who knows? We may all have an opportunity in the next few weeks to disappear back to our constituencies and stomp around in our wellies to our heart's content.

My final point is about volunteering. It has been suggested that volunteers might be inclined to “tidy up”, but actually in both Valley Park Woodlands and Fishlake Meadows a fantastic relationship has built up with the local communities and the local university—Southampton University, which I am blessed to have on the very edge of my constituency. In many instances, it is students who have been on the forefront of ensuring that nature is not tidied up, but enhanced and given the opportunity to thrive as we all want it to.

The Minister will know that part of my constituency is on the edge of the New Forest. We have heard a great deal about the reservoir of CO₂ that peat bogs can provide; peat has not been burned in the New Forest for many a long year, but there are still instances where it is dug, quite illegally, so the national park authority has a massive role to play in ensuring that laws are adhered to and peat bogs are restored and maintained. Again, that can provide some conflict. I had better declare an interest as a member of—I am going to get the name wrong—not the New Forest Pony Breeding and Cattle Society, but one of the other horsey societies in the New Forest. There is a real conflict between draining the peat bogs, which riders would love because it would give us wider access to the forest, and the crucial need to ensure for nature's sake that that does not happen and that peat bogs and mires are managed correctly.

Many hon. Members who have spoken in our debate were recognised a fortnight ago with species champion awards. I will make a quick pitch for the species that I champion: the Duke of Burgundy butterfly, which I gather is the pollinator that has recovered most over the past 12 months. I would like to pretend that that is the result of some great breeding programme of mine, but sadly it is not; it is the result of our warm summers and the efforts of landowners to ensure that the habitats for that extremely endangered butterfly are kept as they should be. In yet another example of how farming can work hand in hand with nature, it is coppiced hazel that provides the best environment for that butterfly. It is important that forestry management continues, but it needs to continue in a way that enables species and, crucially, pollinators to thrive.

I have probably said enough. I very much welcome our recognition of the crucial role that nature can play in sucking up CO₂. In the words of the hon. Member for Bristol East, we do not need any great technology to do that; trees can do it for us.

5.35 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Hosie, and to follow the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), who has reminded me of some pleasant holidays in the New Forest. My wife always reminds me that I fell off a bike there—she will be delighted that that is now on the public record.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) on his excellent introduction on behalf of the Petitions Committee. E-petitions have become a feature of this Parliament; they are an excellent way for the public to ensure that we hear their concerns

[Justin Madders]

and to press us to take action. It is fair to say that we have all received many representations on climate change in the past year or two, but today's debate relates to a particular aspect that we have not touched on much. That shows that the climate emergency is moving up the agenda of the public's priorities fast. In my view, we are not going far enough fast enough. How many of us can say that in our own lives we are doing all we can to tackle climate change?

Of course, change should come from the top. The Committee on Climate Change's report in May led the UK to adopt a net zero target by 2050, but it also found that the Government are failing to prepare the country for the inevitable impact of climate change. That failure is putting our communities and infrastructure at risk. The consequences of our actions are with us already: over the past two decades, severe weather events across the country have cost an average of £1.5 billion a year—only this weekend, parts of Cheshire were subject to severe flooding. Those figures will be dwarfed in coming years by the overall cost and effect of climate change, including the cost to our environment and the human cost as swathes of land become uninhabitable all over the globe. If we do not take action now, the effects predicted in this country alone will include a trebling of heat deaths by 2050, far more frequent flooding, and food insecurity, which is a matter of national security. This is an emergency—and, of course, we may well be one of the more fortunate countries in respect of the impact of climate change.

We cannot and should not act alone, but that should not be an excuse for failing to take a lead. Why are we still financing fossil fuel projects overseas? According to Christian Aid, the UK Government are still spending more on fossil fuels than on renewable energy in developing countries. How does that set an example? It is not leadership. What does it say to the likes of China and India, whose CO₂ emissions dwarf our own? Will our desperation to seal trade agreements with those countries—should we ever leave the EU—inhibit our ability to talk candidly with them about their need to change tack, too? I have a particular regard to the United States in that respect.

We know that our homes, our workplaces and other infrastructure need to be prepared for unavoidable climate impacts, yet the Committee's report also tells us that the Government funding to help to support regions, businesses and individuals has ceased.

There has been a failure to start the critical conversations that we need to have with the public about the changes to behaviour that are necessary. In those circumstances, how will we really be able to equip our communities to meet the challenges of reducing carbon emissions and removing carbon from our atmosphere?

We know that natural climate solutions, and carbon capture and storage, can play a very important role in getting us to net zero. Rewilding and other natural climate solutions can be used to draw potentially millions of tonnes of CO₂ out of the air, and to restore and protect our living systems. Indeed, new research estimates that a worldwide planting programme could remove two thirds of all the emissions that have been pumped into the atmosphere by human activities. Of course, to do that we need to really prioritise the environment.

There was a manifesto pledge from the Conservatives during the last election to plant 11 million trees. I do not know whether the Minister can update us on the figures today, but I think we are some way short of that at the moment. Also, tree planting targets have been missed every year since they were set in 2013. Tree planting in England fell short of targets in the last year, with less than 1,500 hectares of the Government's planned 5,000 hectares being planted with trees. Only 13% of the UK's land area is covered by trees, which is well below the figure for other European countries; on average, the figure is about 35% across Europe. So, 13% simply will not be good enough to meet the challenges we face.

We often trade numbers across the main Chamber: the number of operations carried out, the number of homes built or the number of police officers that we have. Perhaps the real sign of change here will be when we begin to trade insults over the number of trees being planted by each Government. That would be a real sign that there was a genuine commitment on both sides of the House to take this issue seriously.

That is why campaigners are calling the Government's progress on this matter "painfully slow" and are calling for a new strategy to enable the Government target to be met. The Woodland Trust has called for much greater Government support and I echo that call. I am pleased that my own party has pledged to be more ambitious. I refer to the pledge made last month by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) that a Labour Government would plant a million trees in hospitals throughout the UK, which is a very innovative and interesting way to look at things. Some departmental leads could be taken on this matter, too.

I was also pleased to put my name to a letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) in support of the Northern Forest. Again, that is an initiative spearheaded by the Woodland Trust that aims to plant 50 million trees in the north of England. It is said that this Northern Forest would generate around £2.5 billion of social, economic and environmental benefits, which would be at least a fivefold return on investment. That sounds like a win-win situation to me and I hope we can all support it.

In addition to these ambitious plans, I am pleased that the Labour party has pledged to ban all harmful pesticides, such as neonicotinoids, which we believe pose a serious risk of harm to honey bees and other pollinators. We should not underestimate the importance of wildflowers to the ecosystem; we know that if we do not get them right, there is a risk to the entire food chain.

In that regard, I congratulate my local authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council, on work that it has been doing in respect of bulb planting and allowing certain sections of the highway verges to grow wild. The aesthetics of that certainly work for me; it is not everyone's cup of tea, but I think it adds a bit of colour and a bit of pollen to the ecosystem, which is something we can all learn from.

One of the chief recommendations of the Thirty by 2030 report, which was launched last week by my hon. Friend the Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey), the shadow Business Secretary, was sourcing 90% of electricity from renewables and low-carbon sources by 2030. This includes greater use of carbon

capture and storage, with a goal of expanding it to become a “significant component” of the energy mix by the late 2020s.

On that front, I was pleased to learn about a carbon capture usage and storage initiative for the north-west that is based in my own constituency. The HyNet proposals would be based on the key industrial cluster around the Mersey estuary, alongside state-of-the-art hydrogen production in the long run. About 5% of the UK’s energy output comes from this area, due to the high concentration of energy-intensive industry there, but its location also brings with it an opportunity, because there is the ability to repurpose the Liverpool Bay oilfield and gasfield infrastructure, to divert around 1 million tonnes of CO₂ per year into those oilfields. That would be the equivalent of taking 600,000 cars off the road. Ultimately, these proposals have the potential to take over 10 million tonnes of CO₂ out of the atmosphere each year, which would make a huge contribution to reducing our emissions.

The plan would also have economic benefits. It has the potential to create around 5,000 jobs between now and 2025. The key is to finalise business models quickly, to bring forward some of the first stages of industrial development, so that we can start to realise the impressive ambitions for this project that a range of local players has come forward to try to realise.

I believe that these plans have a big role to play, not only in carbon capture but in taking us away from CO₂ and getting our economy more involved in hydrogen. I hope that we can discuss with the relevant Ministers—they are probably Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Ministers, rather than the Minister before us today—how we can bring that plan forward as soon as possible.

I believe that this country has an opportunity to become a world leader in climate solutions, but that can be achieved only by strengthening policy to deliver emissions reductions across all levels of Government, including across Departments. Delivery must be regarded as being much more urgently needed, and we can also do our part at other levels of Government.

Let us take the example of planning, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) referred to. Planning is not normally a party political battleground, but I believe that, if used innovatively, it could drive forward this agenda. I have long held the view that we should be doing an awful lot more to require developers to future-proof developments in terms of not only the environment, but climate risk. However, we should not just look at the bricks and mortar of the homes; we should look at how estates are designed.

Planning decisions made decades ago can still affect things now. I say that because on some of the estates built in the 1960s I see how the trees planted as young saplings have grown out of all proportion to the surrounding houses. Such trees are often too unwieldy to be of use, and they can damage surrounding properties with their roots, which have to be cut. Then, the tree has to be cut down. Also, some trees become diseased. So, this is an issue on which, in future, we could probably show a little more forethought.

Let us make sure not only that developments being built now have a minimum number of trees planted in their common areas, but that the trees planted will grow in sympathy with their surroundings. Let us think about

what those trees will look like in 20 or 30 years. Also, there is no good reason for new industrial developments or office blocks not to have trees and plants designed into their layout.

When we consider new developments, let us look at transport too, because that is a key factor. There is evidence that improved bus networks can reduce carbon emissions. A fully loaded double-decker bus can take, on average, 75 cars off the road, based on average vehicle occupancy for both buses and cars; one bus can move 10 times as many people as a car can.

The benefits of a renaissance in bus travel are very clear in reducing CO₂, but I wonder whether the people setting climate policy in London really understand that it is not quite as easy to get around on public transport in the rest of the country. Try getting a bus after 6 pm in my constituency, or on a Sunday, and it soon becomes apparent that if someone’s shift pattern is not 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, they need a car for work. So, we absolutely need to boost local bus services, which will help us to tackle CO₂ emissions.

I am sad to say that previous generations of politicians have failed to appreciate the enormity of what we now face. We are sleepwalking into a climate catastrophe, and unless we begin to face up to the fact that carbon reduction needs to be done now, we will be the last generation to enjoy the benefits of industrialisation and we will impose on the next generation the consequences of our indolence.

This debate is not about some theoretical future prospect; it is about something that is happening now. We see it all around us, and around the world, with increased fires, droughts and cyclones. The warnings from the scientists are crystal-clear: unless we begin to tackle these issues with urgency, we will only see more of these climatic events. We should not hesitate to call this an emergency. People say words can be spoken in here that do not really change anything, and maybe at the moment they have a point, but we must show people that we can do better and that we have a real commitment from the heart of Government to tackle climate change. A substantial British green new deal should be central to that. It would reduce emissions, create employment and show the rest of the world that economic benefit and climate benefit are not mutually exclusive.

We need to recognise that we are here now because there have been several centuries of relentless pursuit of economic growth without thought for the environmental consequences. There have been so many advances made in that time that it would be wrong to suggest that economic growth is a bad thing, but it is no longer tenable to consider economic advancement in isolation. The scale of the challenge we face from climate change should lead us to say that restoring nature is as much an economic imperative as a moral one.

5.50 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) on presenting today’s topical debate and on taking so many interventions with great patience. I want to declare a non-financial interest: I am a member of the Communities Along the Carron Association project in the Falkirk area and the Community Green Initiative. If we are still here next week, I want to invite Members to attend an

[John Mc Nally]

inaugural all-party group on youth climate action on 5 November at 12 noon. I cannot remember exactly where it is. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), who mentioned the importance of peat bogs. Scotland has the largest peat bog in Europe, and we cherish its magnificence and beauty.

“Restore nature on a massive scale to help stop climate breakdown” is a straightforward petition, and the petitioners are to be congratulated on their clarity of purpose and their aims. Who would not agree with such an ambition? A world conversion is taking place across the planet. We are at a pivotal moment in time, and the UK Government must realise the importance of the petition. The presence of MPs attending this debate tonight emphasises the importance of the petition. It calls for the UK Government to financially and politically commit to supporting natural climate solutions that can draw millions of tonnes of CO₂ from the air.

The UK Government support the need to combat deforestation and to promote sustainable forests. All the evidence before us shows that urgency is required to face this climate and biodiversity emergency head-on. All Governments have to ask difficult questions, but the question is very simple: are we to allow a crisis that hits the poorest people and countries the hardest? To continue to do so would surely be a sin, and the answer has to be a resounding no.

Why, therefore, do we undermine international climate finance contributions by UK actions elsewhere? For example, in last week’s debate I mentioned that the UK consumes 3.3 million tonnes of soy per year, taking it from the lungs of the world—the rainforest and Amazon regions—for animal feed. The UK could take steps to stop that practice immediately. Will the Minister tell us exactly what the UK Government are doing to address that unsustainable practice?

I want to move on to what Scotland is doing. The Scottish Government are determined to lead by example by measuring and enhancing our own natural capital. By doing so, we will benefit the ecosystems and people of our own country, and we will do our bit to help the environment and wellbeing of the wider world. Scotland’s biodiversity is at the heart of a thriving, sustainable Scotland. Initiatives worth mentioning are the marine protected areas and the introduction of white-tailed eagles. Beavers are now flourishing in Scotland. Scotland is taking a leading role in reducing carbon emissions and promoting one of the most ambitious climate change strategies of any country in the world.

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. The Environmental and Resource Economics project report for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency concluded that the economic value of ecosystem services can be estimated at between £21.5 billion and £23 billion per year to Scotland. Those are staggering figures. Many of Scotland’s growth sectors, such as tourism and food and drink depend on high quality air, land and water. The Office for National Statistics figures reported the equivalent of 21,500 full-time jobs in Scotland’s low-carbon economy, showing that strong emission reductions are fully compatible with an economically thriving nation.

Scotland has met its target of 11,200 hectares of new tree planting—a significant increase on 2017—and plans to increase the target further in 2024 from 10,000 to 15,000 hectares. The new legislative framework is the toughest, most ambitious in the world, with the new 75% target for 2030 going far beyond what the IPCC special report says is needed globally to prevent warming of more than 1.5°. Our end target of net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045 is five years ahead of the rest of the UK, and is firmly based on what the Committee on Climate Change advised is the limit of what can currently be achieved.

Being mindful of other issues and unafraid to face up to difficult questions, poor air quality remains an issue in numerous towns and cities in Scotland. Effective change is needed now so that all of us can breathe clean air and lead healthy lives in the future. The Scottish Government’s ambition is that Scotland’s air quality should be the best in Europe. As part of the Cleaner Air for Scotland governance group, we have incorporated the British Heart Foundation, which will help to bring a fresh perspective to the issue.

To conclude, we are encouraging a reduction of energy use and promoting better choices to prevent harmful emissions, and protecting what nature has to offer. All of us have to face up to possible risks to the environment now and in the future. Any lowering of environmental standards post-Brexit will not be tolerated in Scotland.

5.57 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for introducing the debate so well. He spoke with passion in his calm-mannered speech, and many of the points he raised set us up nicely for what was a good debate on all sides of the Chamber.

It is quite common for there to be consensus across all parties in Westminster Hall. If only BBC Parliament and the news channels showed more of what goes on here and less of what goes on in the main Chamber, people would see politics at its best. Many of the debates that take place here get into the detail and intricacies. They encourage Ministers to look at the details that matter, not just the soundbites. When we look at rewilding and restoring nature, it is in many cases the detail that matters. It is easy to put big picture phraseologies around how we want to restore and rewild nature—let us insert a very large number of trees and say we will plant this—but it is the detail and delivery that makes a really big difference.

It has been said by colleagues on both sides of the Chamber that climate change is real. In Parliament, businesses, local government and in all our communities, we are confronted by a pressing question: since Parliament has declared a climate emergency, what are you doing differently? If the answer is nothing, as frequently it is, that is not a good enough answer. When it comes to restoring nature, it means not only looking at how we reverse the biodiversity loss in rural areas, but how we reverse it in urban areas as well. It is about what role our brilliant local councils can play, as well as central Government. It is about businesses, voluntary groups, the third sector, and co-operatives and mutuals as well. There are lots of challenges and it is up to each and every one of us to do something.

That is why, when the shadow DEFRA team talks about the climate emergency, my hon. Friends the Members for Workington (Sue Hayman) and for Stroud (Dr Drew) are always keen to mention the phrase that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) used in her remarks: this is a climate and ecological emergency. If we focus solely on carbon, we will miss part of the debate. That is why we need to look at habitat loss, biodiversity loss, the problems with our soil and so much more besides.

The issue matters to all of us, no matter where we live. We know that catastrophe awaits us if we do not act sooner. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) mentioned, we are already seeing the effects now. If we do not drastically cut the amount of carbon we produce, the result will be sea level rises, extreme weather, population movements, and large parts of our planet—our home—becoming inhospitable and unliveable. There will also be greater biodiversity loss, habitat loss and the extinction of countless animal, insect, fish and plant species.

[SIR DAVID AMESS *in the Chair*]

Indeed, while the debate has been going on, according to the latest biodiversity loss figures we will have lost a couple of species around the world. That shows just how pressing the matter is. Many of those species might not be household names. We had good debates on the ivory ban, in which the Minister played a part, regarding the loss of some flagship species—the elephant and the rhino—due to hunting activities. However, as we saw in the debate about the loss of insects led by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), small insects that many of us will not know the names of are just as important to our environment.

That is why it is good that so many Members have spoken about why rewilding is good. My hon. Friends the Members for Bristol East and for Ellesmere Port and Neston, and the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) talked about activities in their constituencies, highlighting best practice. Other Members discussed the big themes. I was very glad that the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) mentioned green walls in schools and roadside planting. Frequently, it is not just about big schemes; small things add up as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) said that we need to have more nature-based solutions, which is at the heart of what we are talking about. Frequently, we get very good language, but not enough action follows. That is why we need to say that rewilding and restoring nature is good, and we should promote it much more. It is a really important part of a nature-led solution to the climate and ecological emergency.

The right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North spoke passionately about the importance of trees, and Opposition Members made contributions about the variety of trees as well. We need not only to plant more trees, but to ensure that the species that we plant do not contribute to a mono-species environment in which it is harder for insects, birdlife and other plants to thrive. We need to have a mixed approach because, in some cases, not ordering a million trees of the same species makes it slightly more expensive. However, ordering different species is what creates a truly unique environment, and

we know from the research that planting multiple species alongside each other sequesters more carbon and provides a home for more animal species than having tree species of the same variety in the same location. When we talk about tree planting, we need to ensure that we are talking about true diversity.

The Government say a lot of good words on tree planting. Indeed, their manifesto commitment to plant so many trees, as my hon. Friend for Ellesmere Port and Neston mentioned, was positive. It is a shame that we have not seen action on it. I know that the Minister will not accept any greenwash in his Department, but unfortunately, we have lately had very bold soundbites and very poor delivery on tree planting. I would be grateful if the Minister set out how he intends to reverse that.

Sequestering carbon in our forests is really important. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East spoke about the importance of, and the opportunity to, sequester so much more in our natural environment, which could come from a potential change in agricultural setting. I look forward to the introduction of the Agriculture Bill and, as the shadow Minister for fisheries, that of the Fisheries Bill. Those two very important Bills have been hamstrung by the Brexit paralysis, but we need them because of the impact on our natural environment and on coastal and rural communities.

Many Members spoke about the importance of rewetting our peat bogs and preventing the burning of our grouse moors. My party launched that policy during the summer, and I spent an entire day at BBC Plymouth talking to different radio shows and TV stations about why moving driven grouse shooting and changing the economy and approach surrounding it could create additional biodiversity in those rural areas.

That approach works not only on driven grouse shooting, but on rewilding other forms of our natural environment. It is important to make the case not just for a rural environment, but for an urban and rural environment. We need to enhance biodiversity in all settings. As the majority of our population live in urban environments, it is important that our activities as individuals can take place in the areas where we live, not just the areas we want to visit or that we might think of when we talk about natural environments.

The right hon. and learned Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), who is unfortunately no longer in the Chamber, very boldly called for a policy for water. Indeed, the Government's policies for water are far too managerial when it comes to our response to climate change. I encourage the new Minister to give his Department a little kick in that area, because there is an opportunity to go much further. The over-extraction of water from our chalk streams, for instance, rightly carries an awful lot of headlines. Severe damage is being done to our chalk streams, and it is not just fantastic figures such as Feargal Sharkey who campaign in those areas. Local groups right across our chalk stream communities are really concerned about what is happening in those precious and unique environments. We need to do so much more about that.

Caroline Nokes: I have in my constituency the finest chalk stream in the world, the River Test. It is not simply abstraction that is one of our big challenges;

[Caroline Nokes]

we have a significant problem with nitrates going into our watercourses, which is causing huge challenges locally.

Luke Pollard: The right hon. Lady is exactly right. Frequently, when it comes to problems of biodiversity loss and habitat loss, the problems are always “and” rather than “or”—as are the solutions. That gives me an opportunity to mention the contribution of the hon. Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick). I feared that he may have stumbled into the incorrect debate for most of his remarks; however, he raised an important point about pharmaceutical effluents seeping into waterways.

The Minister has not yet had an opportunity to sit with me in a Delegated Legislation Committee and hear me talk about water quality, but I am sure those days will come very soon. He will hear of my concern about coked-up eels in the River Thames. Cocaine passed through by human behaviour is resulting in severe consequences for our marine life. “Coked-up eels” is a phrase that sometimes attracts the attention of our friends in the media, but I know that the Minister will be very familiar with the impact of human behaviour on the natural environment.

In my last few remarks, I will mention one part of the petition that has not really been picked up on. The petitioners said:

“Those who manage our land and sea play a pivotal role and should be supported to come together to deliver carbon reductions.” Indeed, before the debate the World Wide Fund for Nature sent round a very helpful briefing paper about the importance of seagrass replanting. The majority of our debates about carbon sequestration tend to focus on tree planting, and for good reason. Trees are part of our natural environment. We drive past them, walk past them, and cycle past them, and we have them in our own gardens and our parks. They are vivid, and indelibly part of the solution. However, seagrasses can sequester 35 times more carbon than equivalent tree planting in the Amazon, for instance.

There is a huge opportunity to expand our seagrass replanting. Indeed, that is what is taking place in Plymouth Sound, the country’s first national marine park, in my constituency. The reintroduction and replanting of seagrass and kelp forests have a hugely important part to play not only in the biodiversity and fantastic marine species in our coastal waters, but in sequestering carbon. We cannot underestimate the importance of the oceans in playing a part in climate change. They have saved our bacon so many times regarding climate change, because of the amount of carbon they absorb. That is leading to ocean acidification and the loss of habitats, as we see around the world.

In sequestering more carbon, we must not focus only on tree planting, as the Government rightly have in their headline policy. I would like the Government to look, through their marine policy—both in terms of the UK’s coastal waters and our waters around our overseas territories further afield, which I know the Minister has an interest in—at how the planting of seagrass, kelp and other marine plant forms can not only contribute to habitat restoration, providing a nursery for many fish and other marine life, but provide an opportunity to sequester so much of the carbon that we have spoken about.

If we do not act quickly, climate change will be irreversible. That is why all the topics that we have spoken about, from actions at ministerial level down to the actions of local groups and wildlife groups, which we have heard so much about today, are so important. We must all do more to tackle climate change. We must all recognise that the climate emergency means that the way we live, work, travel and play all need to change. That is why the direction set by Ministers is so important. Under the previous regime, we had countless consultations from DEFRA, but not enough action. I hope that in this new era, with the Minister in place, there will be an end to the greenwashing and the obsession with press releases. I hope that the era of acting properly, with the swiftness and urgency that we need to address the climate emergency, will truly have begun.

6.10 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Zac Goldsmith): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir David, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) on securing this debate. It is similarly a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), who has given a typically wide-ranging, thoughtful and knowledgeable speech on this hugely important issue. I will attempt to answer his questions; the “coked-up eels” debate is probably one for another day, but I look forward to it, not least learning what the impacts are. I do not doubt that human cocaine use has had a marked impact on the river environment, but it is not an area about which I know a great deal, so I look forward to hearing more in a subsequent debate.

The hon. Member for Cambridge mentioned his constituent Maggie, who I believe is 12 years old. He can tell Maggie that I agree with her, and have done since I was her age; indeed, I have committed most of my life to campaigning and working on these issues. Nature clearly matters. Given that it is the only source of our wealth, our health, and our very lives, one could say that it matters more than anything else that preoccupies us in this ever-madder place in which we work. All the research, including the recent “State of Nature” report that a number of hon. Members have mentioned, paints a very gloomy picture of nature loss in the UK, with 41% of our species having declined since the 1970s. That report does point to some success stories, and it would be wrong to overlook them. Many of those happened as a consequence of Government, conservation groups, farmers and land managers all working together. Nevertheless, those success stories are the exception; we need there to be many, many more.

The situation globally is even worse. Scientists have warned that even a 1.5° rise in temperatures would be absolutely devastating for humanity, ecosystems and the natural world as a whole, but we are not heading towards a 1.5° rise. Currently, without radical intervention, we are heading towards a 3° rise, which—if we believe the majority of scientists—would be almost apocalyptic. Earlier this year, we saw the results of the most comprehensive assessment yet of the state of nature around the world, and again, the news is really bad. It tells us that today, 1 million species are on the brink of extinction. Over my lifetime, since the early 1970s—I was born in 1975—we have lost a staggering 60% of the world’s land animals in just those few years, and continue

to destroy an area of forest the size of 47 football pitches every minute. Someone better at maths than I am would be able to tell hon. Members how many football fields' worth of forest has been destroyed since this debate began. It is utterly shocking.

Our oceans, meanwhile, are under siege; we are told that by 2050, they will contain more plastic than fish, measured by weight. Fisheries that once seemed inexhaustible, such as their abundance, have either collapsed entirely or are on the verge of collapse. A few weeks ago, the Prime Minister referred to tackling climate change and biodiversity loss as

“two sides of the same coin”.

He was right. We cannot protect nature unless we address climate change, and we cannot properly address climate change unless we restore nature. I would add that unless we do those things, we have no hope of tackling base poverty around the world, either.

If that seems alarmist, we need only look at the facts. More than 1 billion people depend on forest for their livelihoods, more than 1 billion depend on fish as their main source of protein, and about 200 million depend on fishing for their livelihoods. All of us, of course, ultimately depend on the free services that are provided by nature, without which we simply could not survive. For the sake of nature, of climate and of people, it is critical that we step up our response, at home and internationally.

The good news, as a number of hon. Members have said, is that nature-based solutions have the potential to provide up to a third of the climate change mitigation that we need globally by 2030. Done properly, those solutions can turn the tide on the extinction crisis we are experiencing and provide sustainable, secure livelihoods for millions of people. Given that protecting and restoring nature provides a cascade of solutions to so many of the world's pressing problems, it is extraordinary that it receives such a tiny proportion of global aid support. Of all the money invested by the world's Governments in tackling climate change, just 2.5% goes to nature-based solutions. Such solutions should not become a substitute for decarbonisation on a massive scale, as was said by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who is no longer in the Chamber. However, those solutions clearly merit a far greater share of resources.

I was therefore thrilled when the Prime Minister announced at last month's UN climate summit that we in the UK intend to double our climate spending to £11.6 billion between 2021 and 2026, and—even more importantly—that much of that uplift will be invested in nature-based solutions and biodiversity protection. We have already announced a £220 million fund to protect the world's biodiversity, including £100 million for a biodiverse landscape fund that will protect a large range of cross-border, ecologically biodiverse and important landscapes. We are also trebling annual funding for the brilliant, long-established, and—as some hon. Members will remember—threatened Darwin initiative. Ten years ago, a number of Members had to step up to protect that initiative, because it faced closure. It is an extraordinary initiative, of which we can all be proud.

We are also committing an additional £30 million to tackling the grimly destructive illegal wildlife trade. We are on track to deliver the \$5 billion of finance for stopping and reversing deforestation that we pledged

alongside Germany and Norway in 2015, and are making big efforts to protect the world's oceans. We have dedicated £23 million to supporting communities to maintain and enhance 20,000 hectares of mangroves in Madagascar, Indonesia, Latin America and the Caribbean. We have directly helped 100,000 people through building resilient jobs and supporting marine life. We are on track to protect more than half of UK and UK overseas territories waters by 2020 through our world-leading Blue Belt programme, and have announced that we intend to expand that programme much further, with an initial £7 million put aside to protect some of the most diverse marine systems on Earth.

At the UN General Assembly, we announced a global ocean alliance of countries committed to a new global target: to protect at least 30% of the world's oceans by 2030. Countries are lining up to sign up to that commitment—I forget the exact number, but it is a relatively new campaign, and over 10 countries have already signed up to it, with a number of other countries flirting with doing so. Hopefully, they will sign up in the next few weeks and months. We are also working with our friends across the Commonwealth to tackle the scourge of plastic pollution in our oceans. As one hon. Member pointed out, 1 million birds and 100,000 mammals lose their life every year from eating, or getting tangled up in, ocean plastic. As part of the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance, we have invested in programmes worth up to £70 million to tackle that issue.

We have also invested in research so that we can better understand the role of the oceans. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport mentioned the value of seagrass, and he was right to do so: we know that seagrass has an extraordinary capacity to absorb carbon, but we do not fully understand the role of the oceans as a whole in relation to climate change. For example, we do not know the full impact on the ocean floor of bottom trawling and dredging, but science is emerging that suggests it plays a gigantic role in releasing emissions. That is something we need to know, so we are investing in that research. In the meantime, we are investing in protecting fragile ecosystems in the oceans. We are working on a number of other big interventions on land and at sea, and I look forward to telling hon. Members who are interested in these issues more about those interventions in subsequent debates.

However, this is not just about aid. As we negotiate new free trade agreements, we must be confident that we are not importing deforestation through environmentally damaging goods, as was noted by the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy). The hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) made the point about our environmental footprint here in the UK; I believe that we rely on an overseas land area more than half the size of the UK just for imported commodities such as palm oil, soya and things that we feed our livestock. Whether we like it or not, despite the fact that most people in this country would be appalled to know it, we are importing deforestation daily. Under our global resource initiative taskforce, we are working to create a plan to end our contribution to global deforestation through our supply chains. It is incredibly complex, but we have to find a way to do it. We have no alternative.

The OECD estimates that the top 50 food-producing nations spend about \$700 billion a year subsidising landowners and farmers. At the moment, they do that

[Zac Goldsmith]

pretty badly, with little regard for sustainability. We have to find a way to encourage as many of those countries as possible to shift the way that they subsidise farming, as we are trying to do here through our environmental land management schemes. We have set up the Just Rural Transition to do that.

2020 will be a gigantic year for nature and the climate. We will do all we can to deliver meaningful commitments at the convention on biological diversity in China and at COP 26, which we will host with Italy in Glasgow. We want to focus international attention on the importance of and opportunities inherent in tackling climate change and biodiversity loss through investing in nature-based solutions.

I will turn my attention back home, which has been the focus of most hon. Members' speeches and where, as I said, biodiversity is undoubtedly suffering. We need to reverse that and we are taking steps to do so. The UK was the first major economy to set a net zero emissions target in law for 2050. The restoration of nature will be a big part of our response to that challenge. We are already committed to planting 11 million trees in England, plus a further million trees in and around our towns and cities. Despite the scepticism of several hon. Members, we are on target to do that. I am fully confident that we will meet that target, but, equally, I will not pretend that it is anywhere near ambitious enough. We will have to do much more.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport rightly laid out the challenge: we need to ramp up our efforts. In the next few months, we will consult on a tree strategy for England. Earlier this year, we announced a new Northumberland forest, which will be delivered through a local partnership. This year, we will launch the woodland carbon guarantee, a new £50-million market-based mechanism to provide long-term payments to land managers in England to plant trees.

I will move on, briefly, to peat, which was raised by almost all hon. Members, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes). Peat, including blanket bogs and peat soils under agriculture, acts as the UK's largest terrestrial carbon store. When peatlands are working and healthy, they sequester carbon, nurture wildlife, act as water regulators and contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation. Some 86% of peatland emissions come from lowland peat in agricultural use. This year, we launched a lowland agricultural peat taskforce that will deliver recommendations for a new, more sustainable future for agriculture on lowland peat in England.

Several hon. Members talked about the problem of burning peatlands. There is no doubt that they are right; the Government share that view. There has been an attempt, through voluntary initiatives, to scale back—to reduce and eventually eliminate—the burning of fragile and important peat ecosystems, but that has not proven 100% successful as had been hoped. We are developing a legislative response to the problem and we will come back to the House in due course with our plans. There is no disagreement with the hon. Members who have spoken today about the need to address the issue, but we have to do that through legislation, because the alternative simply has not worked.

We are funding the restoration of more than 6,000 hectares of degraded peatland, much of it in the uplands, and we are allocating £10 million to 62 sites across England. We will publish a peat strategy for England that sets out a vision to reverse the decline in England's peatlands and peat soils.

Much of what I have described, here and overseas, involves what some people refer to as rewilding, which is effectively integrating natural closed processes into land management. Rewilding is already happening across the UK in lots of projects, many of which deliver huge benefits. The hon. Member for Bristol East mentioned the Knepp estate in West Sussex, where agri-environment funding has helped to create extensive grassland and scrub habitats, with huge benefits for declining bird species such as the nightingale and turtle dove. I have not been to the Knepp estate, but I long to go and I will be going. I am told by those who have been that it is magical.

I am grateful to the hon. Lady for quoting my brother's article in *The Spectator* in which he promotes the value of untidiness in nature. He has also been a huge promoter of the release of beavers back into the countryside, so I would not get away with not mentioning the return of beavers, more than 500 years since they were eradicated by us. It seems to be unambiguously good news; it is an extraordinary thing.

Beavers are the ultimate keystone species. They build small dams along river tributaries and streams, which play a big role in holding back water following rainfall and help to mitigate flooding and drought, while at the same time breathing life back into the landscape in an extraordinary way. Science is only beginning to understand how that simple species has such a magnificent and transformative impact on the natural world. I am in total agreement with my brother on that, and he would have been furious if I had not mentioned the beaver.

In the marine environment, domestically, we are expanding our network of marine protected areas. The recent designation of 41 new marine conservation zones means that we have 355 sites covering 25% of UK waters.

Our new Environment Bill, which has been mentioned by several hon. Members, includes measures that will address the biggest environmental priorities of our age and ensure that the Government are held to account if we fail to meet net zero by 2050. It will place a duty on the Government to set long-term, legally binding targets on biodiversity, air quality, water, and resource and waste efficiency. It will lay the foundation for the nature recovery network that will create or restore half a million hectares of wildlife-rich habitat in England, which will encompass woodlands, peatlands, grasslands and coastal ecosystems.

David Tredinnick: I recommend going to the Knepp estate and talking to the Burrell family who run it. It is a wonderful wildlife centre.

I am listening attentively to the Minister. I apologise that I was not here at the beginning of his speech, because I was in the Chamber listening to the Prime Minister. Earlier, I raised the issue of zero-carbon medicines and treatments and sustainable healthcare. Will he have a word with the Health Secretary and share some of his experience in that field?

Zac Goldsmith: In terms of zero-carbon medicine, I will struggle to give my hon. Friend a comprehensive answer, because I do not know much about that. As one of the biggest landowners in the country, however, there is a huge amount that the NHS could do. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport mentioned the Opposition's plans to require the NHS to plant 1 million trees on NHS land. That would be just a start. As we build new buildings and expand the infrastructure of the NHS, we should do so in as close to a zero-carbon and nature-friendly way as possible.

The food that is supplied to patients in hospitals should be local, sustainable and good quality, as it is in a number of hospital trusts. The Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust wins the prize every year for the most sustainable, popular and healthy food by sourcing local ingredients. There is lots that the NHS can do, but I will have to get back to my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) about zero-carbon medicines. I do not know a great deal about that area, but I will seek to find out more.

The Environment Bill also establishes spatial mapping and planning tools to help to inform nature recovery and, alongside the provisions in the Agriculture Bill, the actions and incentives that are needed to drive change on the ground. It establishes an office for environmental protection, with a statutory duty to hold the Government to account on our progress to improve the natural environment.

The cornerstone of our agricultural policy will be the environmental land management scheme that will replace the common agricultural policy and be a hugely powerful vehicle for delivering real change. Of everything that we have discussed, that could be the transformational policy in relation to our domestic biodiversity—if we get it right. It means that the payment of subsidies to farmers and landowners will become conditional on delivering public goods such as biodiversity, clean water, flood prevention and mitigation, and adaptation to climate change. It is potentially huge and I hope that the whole House will support it.

The Government are investing in restoring nature, at scale, at home and overseas, and we are providing leadership—I have no doubt about that. Given the scale of the problem that many hon. Members have outlined, however, I will not pretend that this or any Government are doing enough to respond to the crisis. I am absolutely determined that, as long as I am a Minister, and as long as I am in this place, we will do a great deal more. In the meantime, I urge hon. Members to support our Environment Bill and work with us through its passage, so that we can further protections for nature. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridge again on his speech and on raising what is, perhaps, the most important issue of all.

6.29 pm

Daniel Zeichner: On behalf of the Petitions Committee, I thank all hon. Members who have contributed. It has been a very good debate; there has been a considerable amount of agreement. I will not single out many—I know that we are possibly close to time in the main Chamber—but I will mention my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) for all the expertise that she has brought to this subject over many years. I was particularly taken with her comments on the messiness of nature, which is an important point.

Finally, I strongly echo the comments from my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) on tackling the climate and ecological emergencies together—they are absolutely interlinked. I was delighted to hear from the Minister a pretty strong pledge on ending peat burning. I will be able to go back to my constituent, Maggie, and tell her that he agrees with her, and I am sure she will hold him to all the promises on which she sought reassurance.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 254607 relating to restoring nature and climate change.

6.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 28 October 2019

TREASURY

Ministerial Equivalence and Exemption Directions in Financial Services for the EU and EEA

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): The Equivalence Determinations for Financial Services and Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment etc) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I. 2019/541), provides powers for HM Treasury, for up to 12 months after exit day, to make equivalence directions and exemption directions for the European Union and EEA member states.

On 11 April 2019, I laid before Parliament HM Treasury directions under those powers to help to ensure that the UK will have a functioning regulatory regime for financial services in all scenarios. Today, I have laid before Parliament two further directions in preparation for the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

The Prospectus Directive and Transparency Directive Equivalence (Variation) Directions 2019 amend a previous direction made on 11 April 2019. The existing equivalence direction determines that EU-adopted International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) are considered equivalent to UK-adopted international accounting standards for the purpose of preparing financial statements for transparency directive regime requirements and for the purpose of preparing a prospectus under the prospectus directive regime. This decision delivered on a commitment made by the Government in November 2018, allowing overseas issuers with securities admitted to trading on a UK regulated market, or overseas issuers making an offer of securities in the UK, to continue to use EU-adopted IFRS when preparing their consolidated financial accounts for future accounting years.

On 21 July 2019, the prospectus regulation came into full application in EU legislation, and the prospectus directive, including the UK domestic legislation implementing the directive, was repealed. HM Treasury has made the Prospectus (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I. 2019/1234) to ensure that there continues to be a coherent and functioning prospectus regime in the event that the UK leaves the EU without an agreement on 31 October 2019. This new equivalence direction therefore amends the existing direction to refer to prospectuses being prepared under the prospectus regulation rather than the directive. This amending direction ensures that the existing equivalence direction continues to be legally operable and does not change its intended effect.

The markets in financial instruments exemption directions 2019 give effect to the decision taken by HM Treasury, the European Union and the EEA European Free Trade Association countries to exempt central banks of certain states, including EEA states, from certain provisions under the markets in financial instruments regulation in the event that the United Kingdom leaves the European Union without an agreement. This direction is necessary because adaptations to the EEA agreement

granting the relevant exemption are not yet operative for all affected EEA central banks. This direction will therefore ensure that those affected EEA central banks can continue to carry on their activities in the UK without disruption at exit.

Copies of the directions are available in the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office and will be published alongside the Equivalence Determinations for Financial Services and Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment etc) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 on Legislation.gov.uk.

[HCWS46]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Telecoms Update

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nicky Morgan): I wish to inform Members that today I made an oral statement to the House concerning the announcement on Friday 25 October that the Government support a Shared Rural Network programme, subject to binding legal agreement.

[HCWS45]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Update

The Secretary of State for International Development (Alok Sharma): The United Kingdom is a development superpower. We are the only country that is simultaneously meeting the NATO target of spending 2% of our gross domestic product on defence and the UN target of spending 0.7% of gross national income on international development. We should be proud of meeting both those targets, maintaining our security while supporting some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world. Our commitment to ending global poverty and delivering the sustainable development goals (SDGs) makes the world safer, healthier and more prosperous for us all.

As we enter a new Session of Parliament, we will maintain our commitment to helping the world's poorest. As we leave the European Union, the UK's development work and use of ODA sit at the heart of our international agenda.

I would like to update the House on some of DFID's key achievements since 2015:

Over 14 million children gained a decent education, of whom almost six million are girls.

More than 32 million people have been supported with humanitarian assistance, including at least 10 million women and girls.

Some 60.3 million women, children under five and adolescent girls have been reached with nutrition-relevant programmes.

Almost 52 million people have been supported to gain access to clean water or improved sanitation.

Some 3.9 million people supported to raise their incomes or maintain/gain a better job or livelihood.

As a result of our work, by 2020, 76 million children will have been immunised, with over one million lives saved.

A number of these achievements were reflected in our 2019 voluntary national review of how the UK is supporting the SDGs at home and abroad. They build on what DFID delivered between 2011 and 2015:

Supported 11.3 million children in primary and lower secondary education, of whom 5.3 million were girls.

Reached 30 million children under five and pregnant women through DFID's nutrition-relevant programmes, of whom 12.1 million were women or girls.

Supported over 64 million people, of whom at least 22.6 million were women, to access clean water, better sanitation or improved hygiene conditions.

Ensured 5.6 million births took place safely in the presence of nurses, midwives or doctors.

Overall 80,100 mothers have been saved during child birth along with 226,000 babies during this period.

Distributed 49.7 million long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets, to people at risk from malaria.

UK international climate finance (ICF) programmes have supported 57 million people to cope with the effects of climate change over the last eight years. ICF programmes have provided 26 million people with improved access to clean energy, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 16 million tonnes—the equivalent of taking three million cars off the road for a year. Through the Global Environment Facility, the UK has also contributed to creating nature protection zones equivalent to the size of Brazil.

At the 74th United Nations General Assembly, we launched a new partnership to help make one billion people safer from disaster by improving early warning systems and the capacity to act on risks. The Prime Minister also announced: the doubling of UK ICF to £11.6 billion over five years from 2021; a biodiversity and forests package to protect and restore the world's forests; and support to the efforts of British and international scientists, innovators and entrepreneurs to create new clean energy technologies through the new £1 billion Ayrton fund.

The UK is a leader on global health, and by 2020 will have helped vaccinate 76 million children, saving 1.4 million lives from vaccine-preventable diseases. I recently announced that the UK will step up efforts to end preventable deaths of mothers, new-born babies and children in the developing world by 2030. The UK committed £400 million between 2013-20 to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, which contributed to the vaccination of approximately 400 million children against polio every year. Polio is a development success story; from being present in 125 countries in 1988 to wild polio cases reported in only two countries in 2019. The UK is contributing £1.4 billion to the replenishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (2020-22) and will host the replenishment of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, next year following a commitment of £1.44 billion between 2016 and 2020.

DFID plays a leading role in tackling the barriers girls and women face in achieving their potential. Since 2015, DFID's nutrition-relevant programmes have reached 60.3 million women, children under five and adolescent girls. In 2018-19 the UK helped to prevent 7.3 million unintended pregnancies, save 8,300 maternal lives, and prevent the traumas of 89,900 still births and 52,900 newborn deaths. In 2018, we announced £50 million—the

largest single investment worldwide to date by any international donor—towards ending female genital mutilation. Last month, I announced a new £600 million programme that will give over 20 million women and girls access to family planning per year over the next five years, saving tens of thousands of lives—a sign of the UK's commitment to women and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights around the world. DFID is a world leader in preventing violence against women and girls. We are pioneering approaches around the world that have shown reductions in violence of around 50%—proving that violence against women and girls is preventable.

Since 2015, DFID has supported 14.3 million children around the world to gain a decent education, of which at least 5.8 million were girls. DFID spearheads the Leave No Girl Behind Campaign, launched at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in 2018. At the G7 summit in August the Prime Minister announced a £90 million package for education in emergencies and protracted crises that will support 600,000 children. Since then, at the United Nations General Assembly, the UK announced a further £515 million to help get over 12 million children—half of them girls—into schools. This will boost future economic growth and improve women's rights in some of the poorest countries in the world.

Our ultimate goal is to support countries, allowing them to help themselves, enabling them to become economically self-sustaining—as a route towards ending global poverty. Governments around the world collectively spend around \$140 billion every year on aid. However, the United Nations estimates that an additional \$2.5 trillion is required annually in developing countries to meet the SDGs. That investment gap needs to be met largely by the private sector. That is why I have set up an International Development Infrastructure Commission to advise on how we can mobilise additional private sector funds. The UK-Africa investment summit next January will showcase the City of London as a world-class financial centre and demonstrate its offer to economies across the developing world. Increased investment will lead to more jobs, better access to basic services and opportunities for businesses.

The UK is leading the way to build sustainable economies. It is my ambition that within 10 years our partner countries will raise 10 times more resource through private sector investment and their own tax revenues than they receive in UK aid. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates the average developing country generates tax revenues of around 14% of GDP. This is way below the 35% average for developed countries. In the last year, DFID announced a new £47 million package to improve tax systems in developing countries. DFID will continue to use the UK's world class expertise to raise the standards of tax systems of developing countries to create a more stable environment for investment. This support does work. For example, for every £1 spent on operating costs an additional £100 is returned in tax revenues in the Tax Inspectors Without Borders programme.

While being a strong supporter of the OECD Development Assistance Committee, the UK is working to update the official development assistance (ODA) rules to ensure they reflect the breadth of UK assistance around the world. Reform is about getting the most out

of the 0.7% commitment for the world's poorest and UK taxpayers. For example, we secured an increase in the percentage of contributions to UN peacekeeping missions in ODA eligible countries that count as aid, from 7% to 15%.

These efforts to build on the reforms to the aid budget that have been delivered since 2010, such as:

Aid spending is now more transparent and accountable. Details of DFID programmes are published on DevTracker, with spend over £500 and information for contracts worth over £10,000 published on gov.uk. In addition, before financial aid is provided, DFID checks the risks of corruption and only provides funding if it is clear that the money will be used for the intended purposes.

An independent body to oversee aid spending. In 2011 we set up an independent body to scrutinise aid spending. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact, which examines ODA spend across Government, assesses how we drive efficiency, value for money and reach those most in need.

Stopped traditional bilateral programmes to those who had the means to self-finance their own way out of extreme poverty. We did a review in 2011 of where the UK's aid money was being spent which led to the ending of bilateral aid programmes in, for example: Angola, Cambodia, China, Gambia, Moldova, Russia, Serbia and Vietnam. Some of these countries may still need a different type of support to mobilise their own resources and prevent reversals.

Ending traditional aid to India. In 2012 we announced we would end traditional aid to India by 2015. Since 2015 our new development partnership with India has focused on the poorest and most marginalised people through offering world leading expertise, skills, and investment to India in areas such as urban development, financial services and energy.

Stopped money going to ineffective aid organisations. The multilateral aid reviews (MDRs) in 2011 and 2016 assessed multilateral agencies that received over £1 million in DFID core funding by testing alignment with UK priorities and their organisational effectiveness. On the basis of the 2011 review, we took the decision to stop providing core

funding to four institutions. We are clear that our multilateral investments must be clearly justified in relation to UK priorities, multilateral performance and value for money, and—like all DFID programmes—are regularly assessed to ensure they deliver results, remain cost-effective and prove good value for money for UK taxpayers. Reform priorities from the 2016 MDR were embedded in multilateral programmes and continue to be monitored as part of the annual review process, which in turn inform future funding decisions.

[HCWS44]

PRIME MINISTER

Early General Election: Date of Poll

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): The Government have tabled a motion proposing that an early general election be held. The motion is in the terms set out in section 2(2) of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011. If agreed to by a super-majority of the House of Commons, an early election will take place in accordance with that Act.

In the event this House approves the motion for an early election, I will recommend that Her Majesty the Queen appoints 12 December as the date of the general election. This would mean Parliament dissolving just after midnight on 6 November.

In line with the Fixed-term Parliaments Act, the date of Parliament's return will be set by Royal Proclamation following Dissolution, and I will recommend to The Queen that the first meeting of the new Parliament takes place before 23 December.

[HCWS43]

Petition

Monday 28 October 2019

OBSERVATIONS

TRANSPORT

Driving Test Centre in Dunfermline

The petition of Residents of Dunfermline and West Fife,

Declares that there is a clear demand for a Driving Test Centre to remain in Dunfermline.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges her Majesty's Government to work with the DVSA to ensure a long-term arrangement is secured to retain the Driving Test Centre in Dunfermline with an adequate level of service provision to meet current and future demand.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Douglas Chapman, *Official Report*, 24 July 2019; Vol. 663, c. 1406.]
[P002504]

Observations from The Minister of State, Department for Transport (George Freeman):

The Government want to keep people safe on Britain's roads by helping everyone through a lifetime of safe driving.

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) is committed to providing driving tests in Dunfermline. It is doing everything it can to keep driving tests in the area.

The driving test centre at Estantia House, Dunfermline, closed on 31 May 2019 because the landlord ended DVSA's tenancy agreement and refused to grant another lease.

DVSA is conducting driving tests from the Vine Conference Centre in Dunfermline. The agency is working with the Conference Centre to provide testing in Dunfermline for the longer term.

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