

**Tuesday
18 May 2021**

**Volume 695
No. 5**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Tuesday 18 May 2021

House of Commons

Tuesday 18 May 2021

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Orders, 4 June and 30 December 2020).

[NB: [V] denotes a Member participating virtually.]

Oral Answers to Questions

JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Sentencing Reform

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reform sentencing. [R] [900140]

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reform sentencing. [900167]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): On 9 March we introduced the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which has been carried forward into the new Session. This legislation will deliver on our manifesto commitments to make punishments tougher for the most serious offenders and to introduce more effective community sentences, and work is also under way on the non-legislative reforms set out in my White Paper last year, which aim to tackle the underlying causes of criminal behaviour and improve the rehabilitation of offenders in the community.

Rob Butler: It is essential that the public have confidence in the sentencing decisions reached in our courts. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that an important element in that confidence can come from judges and magistrates explaining clearly the aims their sentences are designed to achieve, recognising that they are about not just punishment but rehabilitation in order to reduce reoffending and then create far fewer victims of crime in the future?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend speaks from experience about these matters, and he will know that by law the court must explain the effect of a sentence and its reasons for deciding on it in clear, ordinary language. The pre-sentence report pilot that I announced in the sentencing White Paper also aims to increase sentencers' confidence that their determinations will indeed improve outcomes for offenders and reduce reoffending.

Marco Longhi: Sedgley in my Dudley North constituency has recently seen gangs of youths coming together, throwing stones at passing cars and at people's property and generally engaging in behaviour seen as very intimidating towards neighbours, so will my right hon. and learned Friend consider the following three things? First, please can we refrain from describing this type of activity as "low-level antisocial behaviour" because victims of these crimes certainly do not see it as such? Secondly, could we ask the police and the judiciary to look at prosecuting and indeed convicting so that sentencing is meaningful and therefore acts as a deterrent? Thirdly, can we please engage with colleagues across Departments to look at investment in schemes for young people that are tailored for them?

Mr Speaker: Members should ask only one question.

Robert Buckland: I understand, Mr Speaker, but my hon. Friend had to cover a lot there because the question of offending by young people and children raises complex issues. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to talk about the way in which we describe this behaviour, and indeed I made that very point in my maiden speech to the House. We should label that criminality as "criminality", and it will sometimes be in the public interest to prosecute, because we have flexible community orders for children to address their offending behaviour, involving parents and carers in that process, too. But there are alternatives, and it is important to commend restorative action and early interventions to prevent children from getting into the criminal justice process in the first place.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): The Government's 2019 manifesto promised to do "right by victims" and "to fight crime against women and girls",

but I have to say to the Secretary of State that nothing seems further from the truth. Women do not need rhetoric; they need legislation, but he appears more interested in silencing protests than giving a voice to victims of sexual crimes—more interested in defending statues than women and girls. Will the Secretary of State show that he cares by working cross-party to implement Labour's Bill on ending violence against women and girls?

Robert Buckland: That was not a question; it was a soundbite, which bears no reality to what this Government have been doing. We have passed landmark domestic abuse legislation, we work tirelessly in the fight against violence against women and girls, and we continue to do that in our new Bill, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which presents a golden opportunity for Labour to work together with us. But what did they do? They voted against it on Second Reading; they voted the whole thing down. I will not believe Labour until they truly match their rhetoric with their deeds; so far their record has been dismal and weak.

Mr Lammy: In 2019 Philip Leece viciously raped a woman on her way home from a night out; she was 26 and soon to be married. Adding insult to injury, he published the name of his victim online and ridiculed her as being too fat and disgusting to rape. For that, he received a pathetic fine of £120. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman will not commit to implementing Labour's whole Bill on ending violence against women,

will he at least agree to implement Labour's proposals for tougher sentences for those who name and shame victims of sexual offences?

Robert Buckland: The right hon. Gentleman is right to raise that distressing case, and he can rest assured that over the years in which I have dealt with the unlawful and criminal naming of victims in that way I have not hesitated to take action as a Law Officer. Indeed we are already making preparations to see what can be done to improve and strengthen the law in this area, because, make no mistake, the naming of victims of sexual abuse—and other types of offending as well where anonymity is an essential part of the process—is not just wrong, it is criminal and we will do whatever it takes to help stamp it out.

Legal Advice Deserts

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): What steps he is taking to tackle legal advice deserts. [900141]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): Legal advice and legal aid underpin a fair, rules-based society. The Legal Aid Agency keeps market capacity under continual review to ensure provision across England and Wales, and legal advice is always available through the Civil Legal Advice telephone service.

Navendu Mishra [V]: In Greater Manchester, we are lucky that the Greater Manchester Law Centre provides an excellent service for people across the city region, but in my constituency of Stockport there are no community legal aid providers; it joins the 78% of local authorities in England and Wales that do not have that service. Does the Minister agree that these legal aid deserts are denying vital support to millions of people, and will he make representations to the Treasury to ensure that there is the necessary funding for every area to have an acceptable number of legal aid providers?

Alex Chalk: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. Legal aid is essential, which is why I am delighted that when the law centres sought support from the Government, every penny piece requested was provided—including, by the way, to Greater Manchester Law Centre, which received £140,000. We are standing behind excellent legal aid providers, including those who provide it digitally and remotely, because when it comes to legal advice, what matters most is quality, not necessarily geography.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab) [V]: My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Navendu Mishra) is spot on, is he not? The Government must address the vast deserts where no legal aid providers exist. The disabled and vulnerable in most of England and Wales have been denied access to justice due to the Government's inaction. How can the Minister possibly justify a situation where 37 million people in Stockport, Hull and across the rest of England and Wales do not have access to a community care legal aid provider? He talks tough, he promises all sorts; he does nothing. Get on with it!

Alex Chalk: It is always a pleasure to hear from the hon. Gentleman. What a shame that when there was a Labour Government, he did nothing to stand up to the

Labour Prime Minister who decried “fat cat” legal aid lawyers and said that he was going to “derail the gravy train of legal aid”.

Where was the hon. Gentleman then? Nowhere. This is the Government who are getting behind legal aid and getting behind the civil legal aid service, and who, by the way, funded the community justice fund, which provided support for the Disability Law Service that he wants to see, and so do I.

Sexual Assault: Naming of Victims

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): What steps he is taking in response to people naming victims of sexual assault. [900142]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): Complainants in rape and sexual offence cases are protected by automatic reporting restrictions. There is a lifetime ban on reporting any matter likely to identify a victim from the moment the offence is reported. As the Lord Chancellor has outlined, we are giving consideration to what more we could do to provide greater deterrence and punishment when an offence is committed.

Charlotte Nichols [V]: While we still see instances of victims of sexual assault being named publicly, women continue to be silenced from naming their abusers by civil actions from those who are wealthy enough to take them. I wrote to the Prime Minister in March asking him to take action on this, but the Minister's reply of 13 April missed this point entirely. Will he now say what steps he will take to prevent victims from being gagged by wealthy and powerful abusers in civil courts?

Kit Malthouse: Obviously, we want to make sure that there is equity before the law, and no matter how rich or powerful someone is, they have to obey the rules as they are laid down. As the Lord Chancellor has outlined, we are giving consideration to what more we can do in this area to make sure that the anonymity of victims in this kind of case is protected and there is sufficient deterrent and punishment for those who name their own victims, or indeed those who are victims in court, so that it does not occur.

Backlog of Court Cases

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the backlog of court cases. [900143]

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): What plans he has to tackle the backlog of court and tribunal cases. [900149]

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): What plans he has to tackle the backlog of court and tribunal cases. [900159]

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the backlog of court cases. [900169]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Philp): Prior to coronavirus, outstanding case loads in the Crown court were low by historical standards. However, coronavirus has put huge strain on the court

system, in common with so many other public services. The Government have taken decisive action, with 60 Nightingale courtrooms, a quarter of a billion pounds spent on improving the justice system, 290 safe jury trial rooms and 1,600 extra staff. It is thanks to those decisive measures that magistrates court case loads are now 60,000 cases lower than they were at the peak over the summer.

Laura Trott: I thank the Minister for his answer and for his previous engagement on the issue of a Nightingale court in Kent. Will he provide an update on when he thinks the court will be established and up and running?

Chris Philp: My hon. Friend has been a tireless advocate for a Nightingale court in Kent. My colleague Lord Wolfson is working very actively on that question and I strongly hope we will be in a position to make a positive announcement in the very near future.

Seema Malhotra: The employment tribunal backlog stands at a staggering 51,000, which is 45% higher than pre-pandemic levels. The Minister will blame that on covid, but he knows the system was broken before, with cuts made by his Department. Now, as we see multiple employment claims shooting up and some employers using covid as a cover for fire and rehire or cutting people's employment rights, we have a tribunal system that is unable to cope. Labour warned about this and called for a package of urgent measures. When will the Minister finally step up and take responsibility for the backlog of cases?

Chris Philp: In common with so many other areas of the justice system employment tribunals were profoundly affected by coronavirus, but we have taken decisive action. The number of employment tribunal sitting days is being increased dramatically, and the tribunal is benefiting from the 1,600 extra staff hired across Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service and from the enormous investment in technology, which is enabling across the court system, including the tribunal, 20,000 remote hearings a week. Those are the actions we are taking to address the issue the hon. Lady raises.

John Spellar: The Minister is being remarkably complacent, because he must know that much of the backlog was actually caused by massive cuts by the Conservative Government. That was a huge error, impacting not only on very serious criminal cases in the Crown court, but on dealing with the petty crime and antisocial behaviour that is blighting our communities. He also knows that cases are taking years to get to court, with the impact that that has on the availability or willingness of witnesses. When he will he stop putting out this complacent line and get a grip of the problem?

Chris Philp: The right hon. Gentleman talks about the situation prior to coronavirus. The outstanding case load in the Crown court prior to coronavirus was 39,000 cases—low by historical standards and substantially lower than the 47,000 cases left behind by the last Labour Government. Moreover, under this Government, crime, as reported by the crime survey, has dropped by 41%. There is no complacency. A quarter of a billion pounds has been spent, 1,600 extra staff have been hired and 23,000 extra police are being recruited. There is no complacency here.

Dr Evans [V]: I asked the House of Commons Library what was going on in the east midlands pre-pandemic. Interestingly, in *Bosworth* the number of court cases in the backlog has stayed the same. That is partly because there was an 11% rise in Leicester courts, but a 12% fall in Leamington Spa. Clearly, covid has had a massive impact and I pay tribute to the court staff working tirelessly to clear that, but overall there is a mixed picture. What is the Minister's Department trying to do to tease out what is covid and what is pre-existing, and, most importantly, to share good practice to try to deal with all those cases?

Chris Philp: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for his interest, of course, in his constituency and his region. There is a great deal we are doing across the country, including in the east midlands. I mentioned the investment of a quarter of a billion pounds. We are also saying that for Crown court cases there will be no constraint on the number of cases listed. We are encouraging the judiciary the length and breadth of the kingdom, including in the east midlands, to be forward-leaning in listing. We have, of course, already opened the Nightingale court in Nottingham and are planning to open a further Crown court in Loughborough in the late summer, which will accommodate large multi-handers—it will be a supercourt. I hope my hon. Friend will welcome that important step, which will benefit his region.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Even the Minister's own MPs accept that there is a crisis in the court system. There are now a record 57,000 outstanding Crown court cases. Lawyers are concerned that they cannot safely see their clients in cells and facilities in many courts are inadequate for the same purpose. The temporary leases on many of the Nightingale courts will come to an end within weeks. Defendants are spending longer than ever in prison and on remand, and some are wrongly feeling pressured to plead guilty rather than face months and maybe years before their cases will be heard. Will the Minister confirm his plans for the future of Nightingale courts, put a stop to the other planned court closures and tell the House just how long is it going to take to clear this backlog?

Chris Philp: I am rather perplexed to hear the shadow Minister talk about planned court closures. There are not any planned court closures and, in fact, as I have said, we have opened up 60 new Nightingale courtrooms and will be looking to continue those as long as they are needed. I already said, in the last answer, that we are planning to open up a new Nightingale court in a number of places in the country, including in Loughborough. The Lord Chancellor has been clear that the judiciary can list at will in the Crown court to encourage the recovery, which we are supporting with money—I have mentioned the quarter of a billion pounds several times already—remote hearings and extra staff. The pandemic has caused enormous difficulties for the court system, as it has for public services. Jury trials and pandemics do not mix very well. We have taken decisive action. That decisive action is delivering results.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Will the Minister look to fast-track rape cases by providing DNA testing hubs requiring immediate testing of the accused on request, like breath tests, and confirm that positive tests, alongside a dated audio recording from

the victim's mobile phone saying that they do not consent to sex, would be sufficient to enable immediate imprisonment through fast-track Nightingale courts to massively scale up the number of rapists taken off our streets and put behind bars? Will he meet me to discuss this?

Chris Philp: The hon. Gentleman is raising an extremely important point. Some of the questions that he is raising, to do with DNA testing and disclosure, are being addressed in the rape review that is due to report very shortly. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister for Crime and Policing would be delighted to meet and discuss some of these—[*Interruption.*] He is leading this work and he would be delighted to discuss these points; he gave me that undertaking just a moment ago. We are looking to expedite and ease these matters through, for example, the wider use of section 28 pre-recorded evidence, so people can give their evidence more quickly. On prioritising hearing rape cases, the hon. Gentleman is raising a very important point. Listing is a matter for the judiciary, but I know that judges think very carefully about the kind of points that he made when they decide which cases to prioritise.

Supreme Court Reform

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of reforming the Supreme Court. [900144]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): I know that my right hon. Friend has taken a long and keen interest in the Supreme Court. It is entirely legitimate to look, in the wider context of constitutional reform, at the Act that underpinned the creation of that court to see whether it can be improved and updated. I will be open and consultative as that work is carried out, and I will say more at a later date about which aspects of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 I intend to consider.

Sir Edward Leigh: For 600 years, the House of Lords and, latterly, its Appellate Committee did a superb job of being our Supreme Court. Nobody has ever given a proper cost-benefit analysis of what has been gained by abolishing it, apart from spending so much more extra public money. I doubt that the Government, or any Government, have the guts to abolish this wasteful institution, but will the Secretary of State and Lord Chancellor make it clear that we do not have a written constitution? We are not America. The Queen in Parliament—in other words, this House of Commons—is supreme, not the Supreme Court. That is particularly important if the Scottish National party should ever carry out its threat of a unilateral referendum against the wishes of this House of Commons in an Act of Parliament. Will the Secretary of State—

Mr Speaker: Order. Sir Edward, you should know that it is not supposed to be a speech; it is a question. You have been here so long you should know that.

Robert Buckland: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to decry the rationalist approach that was taken by the then Labour Government to our unwritten constitution. He is absolutely right to warn us against a descent into a United States-style constitutional court,

which will do no one, least of all the judiciary, any good. I pay tribute to the members of that august body, but it is right that in the wider context of constitutional reform, we look at all aspects of our constitution to make sure that we get the balance right and to emphasise the point that Parliament is supreme.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP) [V]: The Leader of the House described a Supreme Court ruling on his Government's plans as a "constitutional coup", yet we now see the UK Government using the same court to prevent the Scottish Government from implementing human rights legislation. Is the message to judges from the UK Government that they should just stay out of Downing Street's business, but stand by if needed to prevent the devolved nations from implementing democratically agreed policy? How does the Secretary of State think that that will protect the Union?

Robert Buckland: Tempted as I am to talk about the particular issue that the hon. Lady raises, there is an ongoing Supreme Court reference. That is a normal use of our constitutional devices to make sure that all parts of the kingdom, including the devolved Administrations, legislate in a way that is consistent with the powers that they have. That is what is happening; it is a very good example of a mature democracy in operation.

With regard to the hon. Lady's underlying political point about the Scottish Government's decision to legislate in that way, this country is among the leaders in the world in child safeguarding. No amount of virtue signalling about the incorporation of international conventions that will make no difference to the quality of safeguarding of children in our country will get away from that fact.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con) [V]: Is not one of the key features of our unwritten constitution respect for the independence, integrity and quality of our judiciary? Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that we have no intention of going down the American route with any political interference in the appointment of our judges?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend is absolutely on the nail, as ever. He knows that I have long valued the principle of comity, which is that we as parliamentarians respect the independence and role of the judiciary, and that in their work the judiciary likewise respect the position of Parliament. That is what comity is all about, that is what I believe in, and that is what we will embody in our policies as we develop them.

Crime in Prisons

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce crime in prisons. [900145]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): Reducing crime in prisons is a key priority. We are delivering on our commitment to invest £100 million in bolstering prison security and clamping down on the weapons, drugs and mobile phones that fuel violence and crime behind bars. This investment enhances security at the entry point to prisons, using the latest technology,

and strengthens staff resilience to corruption, as well as targeting organised criminals who exploit prisons as a lucrative market.

Andy Carter: As the Minister says, many of the crimes committed in prison are related to illegal contraband that finds its way inside. Constituents who live close to Thorn Cross Prison in Appleton Thorn in my constituency have told me about their increasing worry about daylight drops in gardens that border the open prison. Could the Minister tell me what steps he is taking and what residents can do to address that real concern, particularly where children are playing in gardens and their parents are concerned for their welfare?

Alex Chalk: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that important point on behalf of his constituents. The Government's £100 million investment to prevent crime in prison has enabled hundreds of security items to be purchased that will assist his constituents, including 176 search dogs, 300 metal detection archways and wands, mobile phone detection technology and 51 X-ray body scanners. We have also developed clear guidance for prisons on managing trespassers within the open estate, including protocols on reporting evidence to the police and addressing the site-specific security risks. I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the matter further if that would be helpful.

Office of the Chief Coroner: Provision of Services

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking with the Office of the Chief Coroner to help ensure timely provision of services by that Office. [900146]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): I am grateful to the Chief Coroner, his predecessor and his staff for their work in supporting coroners during the covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 has had an enormous impact on coroners and their staff; it is therefore to their very great credit that in 2020 the average time from a death being reported to the conclusion of the inquest remained at 27 weeks, as it was in 2019.

Steve McCabe [V]: I thank the Minister for his answer, but my constituents who are served by the Birmingham and Solihull coroner service often express frustration at delays when they are making burial arrangements. It is a particular issue for Muslim and Jewish families, for whom burials should take place as soon as possible after death. What is being done to ensure that coroners' courts engage with local religious group to address these problems and make sure that religious beliefs are respected and honoured?

Alex Chalk: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. Coroners are independent judicial office holders, so they will operate independently. However, I can say that the Government have provided over £4 billion to local authorities to ensure that those coroners who are doing this important work have the resources they need. So far as the Birmingham and Solihull coroner service's timeliness is concerned, the average time from a death being reported to the conclusion of the inquest in that area was 10 weeks, down from 14 weeks, in 2019. I am pleased to say that that is well below the average in England and Wales.

Prison Officers: Years of Experience

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): What recent estimate his Department has made of the cumulative number of years of experience held by currently serving prison officers. [900147]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): As at 31 December 2020, the cumulative length of service by all band 3 to 5 prison officers was more than 243,000 years. From late 2016 to the end of December 2020, the number of prison officers has increased by more than 3,600. Having experienced staff in prisons is vital to ensuring that they remain safe, secure and decent.

Ms Rimmer: I thank the Minister for his answer to my question. We both know that being a prison officer is a difficult job that takes years of experience to perfect, yet a combined 86,000 years of experience has been lost since 2010. Does he accept that this has had a catastrophic effect on safety, and will he commit to giving prison officers the pay rise his experts recommend to tackle the problem?

Alex Chalk: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for rightly paying tribute to our prison officers. Let us just pause to reflect for a moment. At the beginning of this pandemic, Public Health England estimated that, on a reasonable worst-case scenario, more than 2,500 prisoners could die in prison. Because of the excellent work of our prison officers, that figure—although each one is a tragedy—is closer to 119. It was prison officers who delivered that. I am pleased to say that, even in this difficult financial situation, our prison officers received between 2.5% and 7.5% increases last year. We are also investing heavily in the security equipment needed, including PAVA spray, SPEAR—spontaneous protection enabling accelerated response—training, and body-worn video cameras, that make prisons a better and more conducive environment not only for prisoners but for prison staff.

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab) [V]: The Minister must surely recognise that there are consequences to 86,000 years of staff experience being lost since 2010, because what happens when there are not enough experienced staff can be summed up in one word: violence. In 2019, violence was 134% higher than in 2010. Even last year, with prisoners locked up alone, violence was 38% higher. Self-harm has doubled, and assaults on staff have tripled. Experience matters. With further cuts coming, thanks to the Minister's friends in the Treasury, will he recognise this? How is he going to make our prisons safer?

Alex Chalk: I agreed with the first half of that but not the second half. It is absolutely right that we have retention. May I reassure the hon. Lady that there are an additional 3,600 prison officers? In fact, I am sorry to say that what she said about the data on violence is wrong. The violence in terms of assaults on prison officers has gone down by 20%. I hope she will also be reassured to know that the leaving rate is down by nearly 3% as well. We are getting behind our prison officers. We are investing in our prisons. We are providing the security, providing the investment and making sure that their brilliant work can continue long into the future.

Pet Theft: Maximum Sentence

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of increasing the maximum sentence for pet theft. [900148]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): I recognise the deep distress that the theft of a much-loved pet can cause, which is why laws are already in place to deal with offenders who commit such abhorrent crimes, but more can be done. The Environment Secretary, the Home Secretary and I have had discussions to consider further action, and I have set up a taskforce to investigate and tackle this issue from end to end, looking at prevention, reporting, enforcement and prosecution.

Mr Harper: I welcome the setting up of the taskforce, because what is important is not just the sentencing but the deterrent effect, so that we see fewer pets—dogs, particularly—being stolen. The Secretary of State's answer will be very welcome, but can he say what more can be done? I ask him this on behalf of my two rescue labradors, Sophie and Chase, but also on behalf of the newly elected police and crime commissioner in Gloucestershire, the Conservative Chris Nelson, who made stopping pet theft one of his key election priorities.

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I declare an interest, as an owner of a cat. Let us not forget that this applies to a number of much-loved animals, who have, particularly in lockdown, proved an invaluable source of solace and comfort to many millions of people. He is right to talk about the wider issue. Those who minimise pet theft forget that it is often the thin end of a wedge and it might even involve organised crime. We need to take a zero tolerance approach here in order to deal with wider criminality, so we will be looking at the nature of the black market that exists and the rises we have seen with regard to the value of individual animals. All that is very much on the table.

Probate

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): What steps he is taking to reduce the length of time taken to grant probate. [900150]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Philp): We have increased resources to handle calls and inquiries relating to probate applications and, as a result, the average time taken to process such an application is running at between four and six weeks. We have also had a big push towards moving the process online—to be digital—and in March more than 75% of grants were done digitally.

Wera Hobhouse [V]: One of my constituents applied for probate and was mistakenly sent the wrong will. This was discovered only after they chased it and they discovered that the case had been closed, with no word from the probate office. When the correct will was sent, it was lost and once again my constituent was not informed. It took nine months for probate to be granted from when they first applied. The loss of a friend and a relative is already an incredibly difficult time. Can the Minister tell me and my constituent what he is going to do to improve communications in the probate office so that nobody has to go through a similar experience?

Chris Philp: Thankfully, distressing examples such as that are extremely rare. I encourage Members who encounter them to write to us at the Ministry of Justice so that we can make sure they are rapidly resolved. The number of complex cases where there are various queries and difficulties has reduced by two thirds since January—they have gone down from 2,500 to 650. I urge constituents to use the digital system, because for straightforward digital cases we are now issuing probate in one week and, even for stopped cases, where there is a query, it is being done in four weeks. We should all be urging our constituents to use the digital service to make sure this is as fast as possible.

UK Nationals in US Prisons

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on enabling UK nationals imprisoned in the US to serve their sentences in the UK. [900151]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question and letter to the Department on this issue, and we will be providing the response. There is already a mechanism in place to facilitate transfers of sentenced persons to and from the United States. British nationals serving sentences in the US can request to be transferred to a UK prison under the Council of Europe convention on the transfer of sentenced persons.

Sir Desmond Swayne: In the particular circumstance, and given the powerful case I have made in correspondence, can the Minister fix it for my constituent to commence his sentence in the UK?

Alex Chalk: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who has fought doggedly on behalf of his constituent. The prisoner transfer agreement that exists between the US and the UK has been in place for 31 years. It does not allow for the so-called “takeover” of sentences. The only way this individual can be transferred is for his constituent to return to the US, commence his sentence and apply for transfer to a British prison. But I can assure my right hon. Friend that, once that application is agreed by the US, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service will endeavour to process the transfer as quickly as possible.

Emergency Workers: Assaults

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): How many people were prosecuted for assaulting an emergency worker in 2020. [900152]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Philp): In 2019, 11,257 cases were prosecuted for an assault against an emergency worker and in that year 9,066 resulted in conviction and sentencing. As you may know, Mr Speaker, the Government are legislating to double the maximum sentence for an assault on an emergency worker from 12 to 24 months. Just this morning, we had Committee proceedings taking evidence on that and the move was widely welcomed by the police chiefs who gave evidence to our Committee.

Chris Bryant: It sounds as though that was a very well-written piece of legislation in the first place because it seems to be having an effect. However, we do still have large numbers of emergency workers being assaulted and the Sentencing Council still has not produced new guidelines to insist that magistrates must treat simply spitting as a “proper assault”. Especially in the last year, that has become more important than ever before. May I ask the Minister: how many of the people who have been prosecuted have had sentences longer than six months? That is the key to determining whether lengthening maximum sentences to two years will be effective.

Chris Philp: I should start by congratulating the hon. Gentleman on the instrumental role that he played in bringing forward the legislation to which I have just referred. On the question of Sentencing Council guidelines, I understand that the Sentencing Council, which is independent of Government, is in the process of looking at the sentencing guidelines. I hope that it will reflect the very strong feelings on both sides of this House about the seriousness of assaulting an emergency worker and that it will bear that in mind when it publishes those revised guidelines. I am afraid I do not have to hand the number of those being sentenced to more than six months; of course many will be. Where the assault is more serious, it will be prosecuted as grievous bodily harm or GBH with intent, which carry much higher maximum sentences. I am happy to write to the hon. Gentleman with those figures if that will assist him.

Reduction of Reoffending

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce reoffending. [900153]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): We have innovative and ambitious cross-Government action plans to tackle reoffending as part of our uncompromising mission to cut crime. For example, we are introducing GPS tags for serious acquisitive offenders to track their movements for up to 12 months post release and increasing the length of curfews. In January, we announced a £70 million investment, which included enhancing the Department’s approved premises and providing temporary basic accommodation for prison leavers to keep them off the streets and reduce reoffending.

Ben Everitt: I thank the Minister for that answer. It is jobs that I am interested in. We know that having a job can reduce a person’s chance of reoffending by up to 50%, so what steps is his Department taking to support young offenders to get on the job ladder? I will give a local example here. We have an excellent “Ban the Box” campaign, which Milton Keynes College supports, to end that cycle of reoffending and offer a chance to young people to turn their lives around.

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend has identified, with his usual wisdom, one of the three pillars of success post incarceration: a house, a friend and a job. He is quite right and I congratulate Milton Keynes College on its participation in the “Ban the Box” campaign. The Ministry of Justice has also been pleased to support business in the community at the event marking the remarkable milestone, it tells me, of 1 million roles covered

by “Ban the Box” in March this year. We adopted “Ban the Box” in the civil service in 2016 and about 350,000 of those 1 million jobs are now in the civil service. More widely, as part of our approach to revising offender management, we are working very closely with colleagues at the Department for Work and Pensions to make sure that those who leave the secure estate have a fair shake in the job market, which, as he rightly said, will go a long way to cutting reoffending.

Violence against Women and Girls: Support for Victims

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to improve support in the justice system for victims of violence against women and girls. [900154]

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to improve support in the justice system for victims of violence against women and girls. [900158]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): Supporting victims to seek justice is a significant priority for the Government. We are investing in vital victim support services—more than £150 million this year—and a new victims code sets out the level of service that victims can expect to receive from justice agencies, but we must go further. The victims Bill announced in the Queen’s Speech will enshrine victims’ rights in law, hold agencies to account for delivering those rights and set expectations for the standard and availability of victim support.

Dr Huq [V]: The Minister talks about a victims Bill. There has been one in every Queen’s Speech since 2016 and we have not seen any concrete action. So can I ask him to remedy that by starting with a particular concrete action? Can he back the amendment that the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) and I are tabling to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill to address the fact that 50% of women seeking abortion at clinics face intimidation and emotional distress? We want national legislation put in place to provide clarity for women, police and girls rather than relying on councils all the time, which do not have the bandwidth, resources or time to do this issue justice.

Kit Malthouse: I take the hon. Lady’s rebuke about a victims law, but she should be reassured that we are currently scoping the outline of that Bill with an intention to consult for prelegislative scrutiny later this year. We are firmly of the conviction that the victims code, which became effective on 1 April this year, is worthy and should be enshrined in statute and that is what we are aiming for. As to her amendment to the Bill, no doubt it will be considered as part of the legislation going forward.

Debbie Abrahams [V]: At a recent Oldham roundtable on domestic abuse, we heard of the increase in abuse during lockdown and the issues that the victims were facing. In particular, the lack of measures to address wider cultural issues, the fact that poverty is a driver and consequence of abuse, and the lack of availability of appropriately adapted or supported safe accommodation, were all cited as issues with the Government’s new Domestic Abuse Act 2021. What discussions has the

Minister had with his counterparts in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that the Domestic Abuse Act is as effective as we all want it to be? At the moment, it is just a sticking plaster over a gaping wound.

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Lady is quite right that legislation is only half the fight. The implementation of that legislation, and what we actually do physically on the ground for the victims of domestic abuse, are key to ensuring that we reduce the number of victims and increase the number of perpetrators who receive punishment.

When I was Housing Minister, I was pleased to work closely with the supported housing sector, particularly in the area of refuge, to ensure that refuges stayed within the housing benefit regime, rather than moving towards universal credit. One key plank of the argument that we made to Treasury colleagues was that that would enable greater investment by the sector in this area, as it could then be confident on the income stream that will arise from people who are within that kind of accommodation. I have just taken over the brief on victims, so I will shortly be talking with colleagues in MHCLG about what more we can do on supported housing—not just for people in that particular situation, but more widely for those who are seeking either to build a better life post incarceration or to escape victimisation.

Mr Speaker: Let us welcome Anna McMorris to the Dispatch Box.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

The first duty of any Government is to protect and deliver justice, but justice for victims of violence against women and girls is becoming ever more distant. Rape convictions have fallen by more than 50% in the last two years—a record low, according to the Crown Prosecution Service. Worse still, more and more victims are dropping out of the process altogether. The Government are due to release a violence against women and girls strategy, but Labour's is ready to go and includes: a fast-track system; a dedicated Minister for survivors of sexual violence; and a survivors' support package, which would aid victims before, during and after the process. Will the Minister commit to taking these proposals forward now? If not, can he explain to victims why this Government choose further delay and inaction?

Kit Malthouse: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her appointment, but I am afraid that I reject her rebuke as to inaction. With my other hat on at the Home Office, I have been working very hard over the last two years to address some of these issues, in particular, for example, by setting murder as one of the key national priorities; a third of all murders are domestic. In order to prevent murders, the police and others have to reach back into the crime types that result in that catastrophe, not least domestic violence and abuse. There is an enormous amount of work going on.

The hon. Lady should not believe that the fact that we have not yet published our rape review—I hope to publish it shortly—means that work has not been under way. For her and other Members' information, I chair an action group—a taskforce—that brings together the police, the CPS and other partners across Government

to focus on this issue, and to see if we can drive better outcomes for victims and better performance in the courts; there is an enormous amount of work going on. Having said that, this issue is not one on which there should be a political divide. If there are good lessons to be learned from the Opposition or, frankly, from around the world, we would be foolish not to have a look at them.

Topical Questions

[900200] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): In the Gracious Speech last week, the Queen outlined this Government's plans to recover from the covid-19 pandemic and to build back a better country for our future. The justice system has a vital part to play in that—to cut crime, to protect victims, and to guarantee fairness in our society. My ministerial team and I look forward to steering a number of new Bills through Parliament during this Session. As I said earlier, I am pleased that our new pet theft taskforce will now look at how we can better protect people from the awful crime of pet theft and ensure that action is taken against those who perpetrate it and those who organise it.

Kerry McCarthy: Will the Secretary of State advise on what is being done to ensure that prisons reopen for family visits as soon as possible? The guidance on the Government website has not been updated since 29 March. Although I am told that prisons can reopen once they reach stage 3 of the national framework, I certainly know of some that have reached that stage but still are not open, which is very upsetting for the families involved, so will he give us an update?

Robert Buckland: Of course, Her Majesty's Prison Bristol will be near to or in the hon. Lady's constituency. I am glad to tell her that the majority of prisons have now reached stage 3 in accordance with the plan that I published last year. The individual decision making is very much up to governors and regional group directors, but I can assure her that Ministers and senior officials are driving forward progress on reopening, allowing visits, and indeed considering moving to the next stage, stage 2, which would further open up the prison environment—consistent of course with public health guidance and the needs and the safety of prisoners.

[900202] **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): How are the Government using technology in innovative ways to reduce crime?

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): What a brilliant question! I have always regarded myself as an early adopter of technology as one of the first in my family to own a Sinclair pocket calculator—remember those?—so I am now given the opportunity to early adopt in criminal justice as well. There are lots of ways that we can use technology to decrease offending. For example, I referred earlier to the GPS trackers that we are fitting to a group of criminals post release. Some 50% of those released from prison following, for example, conviction for a burglary go on to reoffend. If we know where they are all the time, then they are less likely to offend, but also, if there is a burglary, the police are able to match their location to the data to eliminate them or

make them a person of inquiry. Similarly, Mr Speaker, you will be pleased to know that we are rolling out alcohol abstinence tags, which we fit to the ankles of those who are convicted of a crime where alcohol has driven their criminal behaviour. At the moment, compliance with these tags is well over 95%.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP) [V]: In reply to my earlier question, did the Secretary of State really say that the incorporation of international conventions—we were talking about the UNCRC—will make no difference to the quality of safeguarding of children in our country? I was so taken aback that I have changed my second question. I have to ask: does he actually believe that, and is it just this international convention or are they all as impotent as he appears to think that one is?

Robert Buckland: In a word, yes.

[900205] **Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): As the ban on evictions starts to lift, what preparations has my right hon. and learned Friend made to ensure that the courts can cope with the surge of applications?

Robert Buckland: Volumes of possession actions remain significantly low as a result of measures that we took in response to the pandemic. Indeed, although the ban in England on bailiff-enforced evictions will end on 31 May, the requirement for landlords to give extended notice periods to seek possession orders in all but the most egregious cases has really struck the right balance. We intend to taper down these notice periods to pre-covid levels by October, which will help to manage demand in the courts. I pay tribute to senior judiciary for working at pace to develop a case management approach to possession cases.

[900201] **Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): According to the Government's own research, 60% of people in the north-east have no up-to-date photo ID and 44% say they are unlikely to apply for local authority ID in order to vote. Will the Justice Secretary update the House on the most recent data on investigation and prosecutions for in-person voter fraud, because without evidence of significant abuse, the Government's sledgehammer to crack a nut risks undermining rather than protecting the integrity of our elections by unjustifiably preventing many people from voting?

Robert Buckland: With respect to the hon. Lady, I think that her concerns are wholly misplaced; I would be kind enough to say that. Some of the objection to this is, frankly, synthetic. The last Labour Government introduced it in Northern Ireland in 2003 without any concomitant reduction in turnout. Countries such as France and Canada and other mature democracies have long had this system in place. We will provide free identification for the tiny minority of people who do not have it. Frankly, the people of this country are wondering why on earth this has not been done before and are bewildered by the Opposition's confected objections.

[900207] **Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con) [V]: I met with TSB last week to discuss fraud and was surprised to find out that there has been a big increase in young people being subject to fraud. TSB's internal research

showed that over 50% of these scams and frauds directly involved social media. What does my hon. Friend believe should be done about that, and what conversations are taking place with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to develop ways to clamp down on this in the light of the online harms Bill?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend rightly identifies an expanding area of business, sadly, for the courts and the police. He will be pleased to know that just last week, I held a meeting with the National Economic Crime Centre at the National Crime Agency to talk specifically about this issue. He will understand the complexity of online fraud in particular, whereby the offender may well be overseas, laundering money through a third territory and banking it in a fourth. Nevertheless, we need to do more to increase our capacity and capability to tackle this issue, to which we are all, including me, subject.

[900204] **Tony Lloyd** (Rochdale) (Lab) [V]: Far too many women are sentenced by our courts to short or very short prison sentences. The overwhelming evidence is that non-custodial sentences, with properly resourced and properly structured alternatives to prison, work better in preventing reoffending. What are the Government doing to ensure that we invest in these non-custodial options for the courts to use?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Gentleman speaks with a lot of experience, not just as a Member of this House but as a former police and crime commissioner. He will be reassured to know that the female offender strategy continues. In particular, with regard to the work that we are doing on pre-sentence reports, we will help courts and decision makers come to conclusions based upon community sentence treatment requirements, whether that is support for addiction or for mental health problems, which are a constructive direct alternative to those short terms of imprisonment that he rightly criticises.

[900209] **Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Will my right hon. and learned Friend reassure my constituents of the steps his Department is taking to improve judicial and public confidence in sentencing?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend is right to hold the Government to account on these issues. He will recall that the White Paper I issued last year set out our plans for a framework that will do just that, by targeting the most serious violent and sexual offenders, ensuring that they serve longer proportions of their sentences of imprisonment in custody, therefore reflecting more appropriately the severity of their crimes and protecting the public, and ensuring that we introduce robust and effective community options for those who commit less serious offences.

[900206] **Kate Osamor** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: There are no black, Asian and minority ethnic Supreme Court judges. Can the Secretary of State explain what decisive action the Government are taking to ensure greater representation of people of colour across our judiciary?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. She will be encouraged to know that the Judicial Appointments Commission, senior judiciary and I work together on that very issue, to ensure that the professions are doing

all they can to encourage and support applicants from a black and minority ethnic background. In particular, I pay tribute to CILEX, the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives, for driving forward that important diversity. There is much more work to be done, and progress for all of us is frustratingly slow, but I will continue to put my shoulder to the wheel to ensure that we see sooner rather than later someone of a black and minority ethnic background sitting in the Supreme Court.

[900210] **Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans), the Treasury Committee has been hearing about the explosion in online financial fraud. Could my right hon. and learned Friend explain how the victims Bill will help so many of our constituents who are being preyed upon by these financial fraudsters?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise an issue that affects many people. One issue is the embarrassment and shame of people who fall victim to such fraud that they could have been tricked in the first place. Not only is supporting victims to overcome that stigma very much part of the victims code that we introduced in the past month or so, working with the sector, but as we develop the consultation into our new law, there will be opportunities fully to reflect the pernicious nature of online criminality. By helping to design out fraud, the financial services sector can make its greatest contribution to the reduction of such heinous crime.

[900208] **Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): To return to the questions asked earlier by my hon. Friends the Members for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) and for West Ham (Ms Brown) about the loss of prison officer experience due to experienced prison officers leaving the service, will the Secretary of State confirm whether it was the Chancellor himself who vetoed the fair pay rise for frontline prison officers that was recommended by his own experts?

Robert Buckland: I remind the hon. Gentleman that in the context of those recommendations, prison officers received rises of between 2.5% and 7.5%. It is right to say that in one specific instance the recommendations of the body were not accepted—we are mindful of our overall duties with regard to the public purse—but I assure the hon. Gentleman that in terms of the recruitment, support and promotion of the vital role of prison officers, the Government will not stint in their unwavering support and encouragement.

[900212] **Richard Fuller** (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): Festus Akinbusoye, the inspirational police and crime commissioner for Bedfordshire, has championed the use of addiction recovery programmes for low-risk offenders. Will the Minister tell the House what encouragement he is likely to give to police and crime commissioners to expand the role of such programmes? In particular, what encouragement will he give to Festus for his campaigns?

Kit Malthouse: I join my hon. Friend in celebrating the election of Commissioner Akinbusoye, who is one of the 29 Conservative police and crime commissioners—a full 70% of the available slots were secured by the Conservative party at the elections two weeks ago. My hon. Friend is quite right that police and crime

commissioners have a critical role to play in offender management, given that more than half of crime is committed by reoffenders. At the severe end in particular, we know that, on average, all murderers in the country have committed at least seven previous offences. In my role as Policing Minister, I will work closely with police and crime commissioners to make sure that not only as chairs of their local criminal justice board but more widely they can play an important role in driving down reoffending.

[900211] **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Involvement in the criminal justice system can be especially upsetting for children, so will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the Scottish Government's proposal for a Bairn's Hoose? The idea is that families and children would all be under one roof and looked after in a way that could be beneficial to families who come out of the criminal justice system. Are the UK Government willing to look at the idea as well?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that suggestion and would be interested to know more about the specific approach being taken. I assure him that south of the border the concept of supported accommodation and a supported approach is very much at the heart of what we are seeking to do, particularly with regard to young offenders. The development of the use of smaller units and diversionary work has been very much at the heart of what we have done over the past 10 years. The hon. Gentleman will see that the number of children now incarcerated has fallen from 3,000 to just over 500 or so in the past year. That is a dramatic improvement, but I am certainly interested to know more about the Scottish Government's initiative.

[900216] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Does not the collapse of the Serco fraud trial and the fact that the Serious Fraud Office was prosecuting only mid-level managers rather than the people responsible for defrauding the taxpayer, which they admitted, highlight the need to bring forward a "failure to prevent economic crime" offence at corporate level, and to make it a criminal offence?

Robert Buckland: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his assiduous campaigning on this important issue. He knows that I have always placed heavy emphasis on the need to examine the law carefully in this area, because I accept that there are loopholes. I asked the Law Commission to undertake an in-depth review of economic crime law and, if necessary, to make recommendations on options for reform. It began its work last November and is aiming to publish an options paper later this year. We will work with the Law Commission to implement any next steps.

[900215] **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): The Government's own review warns that any changes to judicial review should be made only after the most careful consideration, so will the Government listen to themselves and will the Secretary of State rethink his plans to limit individuals' powers to challenge Government through the courts?

Robert Buckland: We commissioned an independent review, which was published after public involvement, and we have now conducted a consultation process, again with full involvement from civil society. We will have plenty of opportunities, in this House and in the

other place, to debate and scrutinise any legislation that comes forward. There are ample opportunities for all of us to take part in this important process, and I am sure that the product of those deliberations will indeed be one of quality that enhances the balance between the judiciary, Parliament and the Executive.

Mr Speaker: I will now suspend the House to enable the necessary arrangements to be made for the next item of business.

12.35 pm

Sitting suspended.

Ministerial Code/Register of Ministers' Interests

12.39 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on enforcement of the ministerial code and the publication of the register of Ministers' interests.

The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt): May I start by congratulating the right hon. Lady on her multiple new roles? I apologise for the fact that she has to put up with me for her debut. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is unable to be here, but I know that he is looking forward to working with her.

On 28 April, the Prime Minister appointed the right hon. Lord Geidt, former private secretary to Her Majesty the Queen, to the position of independent adviser on Ministers' interests. In taking up the appointment, he agreed revised terms of reference for the role, which strengthen its independence. One of his core tasks is to oversee the preparation of the list of Ministers' interests. In giving evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee last Thursday, he confirmed that it was his intention to publish the updated list on Ministers' interests by the end of this month.

Angela Rayner: The ministerial code is clear: there must be no misuse of taxpayers' money, nor actual or perceived conflicts of interest, but time and again Ministers act like the rules are for other people—none more so than the Prime Minister himself. Last year, he declared £15,000 from a Tory donor for his sleazy jet trip to a private island. This weekend, we read that the real cost was double that, and paid by someone else entirely.

People might ask, "Why is this important?" It is important because it goes to the very heart of our democracy. Who do our Government answer to: the public, or private interests? We learned only from the media that the Prime Minister has blocked the publication of the independent commissioner's report. Can the Minister tell us why the delay? Does she accept that the rules apply to everyone, even the Prime Minister, and will he accept—

Mr Speaker: Order. This case is with Standards, and really we ought to keep away from it until Standards has been able to deal with it.

Angela Rayner: Okay. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The list of Ministers' interests is also mysteriously delayed, I assume while the Prime Minister tries to remember who paid for his flat, but does the Minister accept that if the Prime Minister can block the independent adviser from investigating he cannot in practice be fully independent, because the code clearly is not preventing actual or perceived conflicts of interests?

When the Home Secretary lobbies on behalf of a former adviser flogging substandard face masks, who lands a £100 million contract without tender and at double the going rate, who cannot perceive that as a conflict of interest? It is something that we know not from the Home Secretary declaring it, but because it was revealed in an admin error. Then there is the Health Secretary, who appears to have ordered an official to recommend a bid that he had not even read from a

former Tory MP, who pocketed another £200 million of taxpayers' cash. Surely the independent adviser must investigate those cases with no prime ministerial veto.

Finally, there is the Prime Minister's own top adviser, Lord Lister. He concealed being paid by a luxury developer owned by yet another Tory donor, which was granted a record-breaking taxpayer-backed loan by the very public body that Lister chaired—money that was meant for affordable homes, but given out at mates' rates for luxury flats and private profit. Will the Government release the loan agreement, along with the correspondence on that decision, and hand it to the independent investigator, and when will they publish their report on officials' second jobs? When Ministers and advisers use the public purse as a personal cashpoint, the public have a right to know.

Mr Speaker: Order. Before we start, the supplementary was meant to be two minutes. I did interrupt, so I allowed some leeway. I will therefore also allow some leeway for the reply. When we mention Members of the other place, it is meant to be on a substantive motion. I know that seems strange, but these are the rules of the House, which I do not make; the House has made them and adopted them. We must stick to the rules. We do not criticise individual Members of the other House except on a substantive motion.

12.44 pm

Penny Mordaunt: The right hon. Lady raises issues about the ministerial code, the arbiter of which is the Prime Minister; the work of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which is a matter for that Committee; and the role of the independent adviser. She also touches on various reviews that are taking place and matters for the House authorities. As you pointed out, Mr Speaker, these are not things it would be appropriate for me to pontificate on, but I will try to answer the general thrust of the accusations the right hon. Lady makes today, and I shall speak frankly, because I know she appreciates that.

The charge the right hon. Lady makes is that the people she names are somehow on the take. That is the charge she is making here today on the Floor of the House: that they have not been focused over the past 16 months on working their socks off to save lives, to get a vaccination programme up and running and to do the things that the public need us to do, but that they have, unbelievably, entered into politics, made sacrifices and overcome the obstacles that she will be aware of to get into this place not to serve in public life but to do a mate—more accurately, a Tory mate—or someone they vaguely know, or met in a lift once, or perhaps do not know at all, a favour. That is the accusation that she is making today. I am afraid that that is why the Labour line of attack is not getting traction, well rehearsed though it is. It is not getting traction with the public because it is not plausible. It is based not on fact but on speculation, innuendo and smear.

Perceived conflicts of interest are not those that the right hon. Lady has made up. The public care about scrutiny—they do. They care about accountability, transparency and standards in public life. What they see through though is the performance she has given today, which is designed to smear decent colleagues and denigrate British business. I would direct the right hon. Lady to the National Audit Office report, which refutes the

accusations she has made about MPs, civil servants, business and members of the public—but I am sure she already knows that. I would suggest to her that an Essex MP is perfectly entitled to forward an offer from the Essex chamber of commerce to help in a pandemic. MPs do it all the time—it is part of our job—but the right hon. Lady already knows this, too, and so does everyone else. The urgent question today has more to do with Labour's internal politics and divisions than the conduct of Members of this House and enterprises that have been working to help the NHS and to save lives.

The right hon. Lady has made particular accusations today about colleagues, and I want to make a final point, Mr Speaker. If you were to take every single MP she has made an allegation about this afternoon, if you were to look at all the political donations they have received since the pandemic started, since January 2020, and if you were to add them all up and then double them—no, quadruple them—you would just about match what the right hon. Lady herself has received in the same time period. She should thank her lucky stars that we do not play the same games that she does.

The right hon. Lady is in a new position shadowing the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who now looks after some of the most pressing issues facing this nation: the Union of the United Kingdom, devolution, the recovery from this crisis, national security, community resilience and the British brand around the world. That is what we are focused on. I hope that, after her debut today, she will be too, and I wish her well.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): The role of the independent adviser is an important one, and I personally was impressed by Lord Geidt's evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee last week. Ostensibly, the delay in the publication of the register of Ministers' interests was due to the vacancy in that important position that arose after the resignation of Sir Alex Allan. What does my right hon. Friend suggest be done should such a vacancy arise again, so that the register is not delayed in the future?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend makes some very good points. He knows, because I have appeared before his Committee regarding this and other matters, that there have been delays to certain things, in part because of what the Government have had to deal with over the past 16 months, but those appointments are in train now. As he also knows from the evidence his Committee took, the register is due to be published very soon. I am sure that things will be on a much more stable footing as, hopefully, we come out of the pandemic.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): Annex B of the ministerial code says it is

"important that when a former Minister takes up a particular appointment or employment, there should be no cause for any suspicion of impropriety."

Given that David Cameron worked as an adviser for Greensill Capital and is reported to have share options worth tens of millions of pounds, do the 57 messages to senior officials that we are aware of regarding Greensill Capital give any cause for suspicion of impropriety? Will that be investigated by the independent adviser? One of those messages to a senior civil servant said the decision

"seems bonkers. Am now calling CX,"—

the Chancellor of the Exchequer—

"Gove, everyone."

Is that acceptable? Does that give cause for concern about impropriety and will that be investigated? When the Minister is on her feet, can she tell us what action, when the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster got the call, did he take on behalf of his old boss?

Penny Mordaunt: As I said in my opening response to the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), these issues are being looked at—there are reviews in train—and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on those until they have reported. However, I think all Members of this House will want things looked at. They will want to ensure that we get to the bottom of these issues, and I hope, too, that we will look at the wider issues around the Gupta Family Group and the role of the SNP in those matters.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): I welcome the appointment of Lord Geidt and also the modest increase in the terms of reference to increase his independence. Do my right hon. Friends accept that it is possible still for us to go a little further to increase the degree of independence of Lord Geidt and his successors, and that it is not too late to add the extra levels of independence that have been suggested by Lord Evans and, among others, me to make sure that the role has extra credibility, without necessarily giving way to some of the extraordinary allegations that seem to prejudice some of the important work being done by independent or cross-party reviews already under way in this important area?

Penny Mordaunt: May I take this opportunity to thank my hon. Friend for the work he has done on these and related matters? It is very helpful when colleagues make positive suggestions. My understanding is that a response has been sent to Lord Evans, but we are keeping all things under review. We clearly want to ensure that we arrive at a situation where we can have the greatest possible transparency and ensure that we retain the trust of the public.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Accepting everything that the Minister says about the probity of her colleagues, does she not think that it would be in their interests for their names and their reputations to be cleared by a system that is wholly independent of the Prime Minister? Complaints against Ministers could be investigated, those investigations would be instigated by someone independent of Government, and thereafter their conclusions would be published. Surely that would be good for her colleagues.

Penny Mordaunt: I think I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that it is in those colleagues' interests that there is credibility and weight to any investigations. The difficulty is that we have this peculiar and unique relationship between Ministers and the Prime Minister—they are not employees; they are in a particular category—and therefore we have a situation where the Prime Minister is the arbiter and is responsible for the ministerial code. What we are doing in all of these processes is trying to arrive at the condition that the right hon. Gentleman describes, but still stay within the boundaries of what is legal and what is correct.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): Thanks to the efforts of this Government at the beginning of the pandemic, at no point did Blackpool Victoria Hospital or other local organisations such as Blackpool Council run out of PPE, despite the obvious global shortages. The public would rightly expect Ministers to do everything within their power to source PPE to keep people safe, so does my right hon. Friend agree with me that the actions taken by this Government were both proportionate and necessary, given the circumstances?

Penny Mordaunt: I do, and as well as thanking Members of this House who forwarded information to try to help address the PPE shortages, I should put on record our thanks for the incredible work of the procurement teams in the Cabinet Office and the Department of Health and Social Care. One criticism the National Audit Office did make was that paperwork was not done on time, but I always remember one of the people who had done an incredible job during that period saying, "I would rather be criticised for late paperwork than a nurse not having gloves." That is what enabled us to get equipment to the frontline during an incredibly difficult time for supply chains all around the world.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am not going to comment on any of the individual issues, as that would be wholly inappropriate; I want to ask the Minister why such a long time has passed since the last register of ministerial interests was published. It is not even now an accurate list of Ministers, because so many Ministers have changed. Would it not make far more sense and be more in the interests of the public if the register were published every month, and if all the details that related to an individual Member of this House were also published in our register, so that a member of the public could simply see everything that is relevant to that individual Member?

Penny Mordaunt: We have seen all sorts of innovations over the last year given what technology now enables, and the hon. Gentleman makes a very sensible suggestion. It is for Lord Geidt to take these matters forward, and I am sure he will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said today.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): Given that the NAO has found "no evidence" that Ministers were involved in any decisions around emergency PPE procurement, does my right hon. Friend agree that throwing unsubstantiated mud like this for party political advantage damages not just the Government but our political processes and is deeply irresponsible?

Penny Mordaunt: I agree with my hon. Friend—and it also damages business. Without the efforts of the private sector, whether it be pharma companies or production lines changing to produce what the country needs, we would have been in a really sorry state. Let us be frank, part of this agenda is to discredit the private sector.

Dame Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab) [V]: If the Prime Minister does not respect the ministerial code how can he be expected to judge the behaviour of other Ministers who may have breached it?

Penny Mordaunt: The Prime Minister does respect the ministerial code and he is the arbiter of it.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab) [V]: MPs make mistakes from time to time and when that is drawn to their attention they apologise and we are severely admonished for them, but it is extraordinary that the new register of ministerial interests has not been published yet, and when Ministers start to double down and reports are not published, people start to wonder what the Government have to hide. Is the Minister saying to us today that no one has breached the ministerial code of conduct and that this is all just a misunderstanding that will be sorted out when various reports are published?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Gentleman's question again betrays what is actually taking place this afternoon. I do not know; I do not have a crystal ball to see into the future. I am in the same position as everyone else, but what I do know is that to make unsubstantiated allegations about people is quite wrong.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Members right across the House received offers of support from businesses right around the country to make a huge contribution during a time of national crisis. Is it not the case that every Member has a responsibility to forward these offers of help and that all these offers were then judged on the same basis independently by the civil service, and to undermine this national effort is actually pretty damaging for the entire country?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend makes a good point. If there is one message I want to get across this afternoon, it is that if we are ever again in the situation that we found ourselves in last year, I would urge British business to step up as it did before. The public do not think the things that the Opposition say. They know that businesses in their communities did an incredible job, and we will stand up for them and thank them for their achievements last year to keep this nation safe.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP) [V]: I do not think anyone is criticising business, but it is quite clear that we need an inquiry into lobbying, procurement, and ministerial and civil service conflicts during the covid crisis. However, experience shows that such inquiries are not effective if requests for information are ignored, so does the Minister agree that what we really need is a judge-led inquiry with the power to order production of evidence and to take evidence on oath, and with the threat of appropriate sanctions for non-compliance and for perjury or equivocation?

Penny Mordaunt: In preparing for this urgent question, I had in my pack a list of the inquiries that are going on into one aspect or another, and it ran to something like one and a half pages. My personal view is that I do not think we need any more reviews. We have the Committee on Standards, we have the House authorities, we have the Boardman review; we have all these pieces of work looking at all the issues that hon. Members have raised this afternoon. What I would like to do is focus on the matters of substance that are facing this country and ensure that we take the trust of the public with us in that respect. I would also say to the hon. and learned Lady that I am afraid that part of the agenda is to question business. That is what is going on this afternoon.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): The National Audit Office found no evidence that Ministers were involved in any decisions around emergency PPE procurement—or in the procurement of ear pods at £250. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the Labour party had spent more time helping us fight the virus rather than banging on about wallpaper and the procurement of PPE, it could have gained back some trust from the British public?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. It is perfectly legitimate for any Member of this House to raise issues around how we hold people to account and how we scrutinise things, but he has characterised how this is being presented, and he will know from his constituents that the public take a dim view of it.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Paragraph 1.3.c of the ministerial code states:

“Ministers who knowingly mislead Parliament will be expected to offer their resignation to the Prime Minister”.

Does that rule still apply, and does it also apply to the Prime Minister?

Penny Mordaunt: Of course it still stands; it is the ministerial code. I am sorry to say that this is another question that does not make any substantial allegations or provide any facts or evidence; it is smear and innuendo, and it is not the way to behave.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): The National Audit Office found no issues with the PPE contracts. The Labour-led Public Accounts Committee, on which I sit, commended the Government's vaccine programme as world-leading. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this attempt from the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) has more to do with her bid for votes from the Labour membership than with any concern about public procurement?

Penny Mordaunt: I do agree with my hon. Friend. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne will reflect on what she has done this afternoon, and if she does have ambitions in the leadership department, I would ask her to reflect on whether what she has done today is the hallmark of a leader.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab) [V]: The ministerial code states that the register of interests must be published twice a year. The latest one is five months late, so it has been 10 or 11 months since the last one was published. At the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee last week, Lord Geidt told us that he was determined that a full list of Ministers' interests would be published

“as quickly as possible...by the end of this month.”

Can the Minister confirm that all Cabinet Ministers have resubmitted their interests and give a more precise date for when the new list will be published, given that the end of the month is during parliamentary recess?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sure that the right hon. Lord Geidt will publish the register before the end of this month. That is what he has said; I am sure that he will wish to do it in a way that is helpful to the House and that he will have heard what the hon. Lady has said.

I do not know which Cabinet Minister has filled out which form; all I can tell the hon. Lady is that as a Minister of the Crown, I have certainly filled out mine, and I am sure that my colleagues have done so as well.

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend and her colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care for their efforts to ensure that the Cumbria local resilience forum and our North Cumbria health trust were kept stocked with PPE at the height of the pandemic, enabling them to keep my constituents in Workington safe. I remember the pressure that Ministers were under at the time and will forever be grateful for the often late-night correspondence dealing with potential issues. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is right that Government Ministers did everything that they could to get their skates on, as they were urged to by the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), and pass on all offers from businesses to help to secure vital PPE at a time of national crisis?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for putting on record the tremendous job that was done in his local patch. He is saying that credit is due to Ministers, but actually credit is due to colleagues across the House. For many months, I took a call every morning at 10 am, sometimes from hundreds of colleagues across the House. People from every single political party put forward offers of help for PPE and all sorts of things that the health service needed. That is part of our job, and people made a huge difference to the effort by doing it.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): I wrote on 25 March to the Cabinet Secretary, Simon Case, about the No. 10 refurbishment. I asked 24 questions on potential breaches of the ministerial code. Two months on, I have still not received an answer. Is this an admin error or do the Government have something to hide? People in Luton North and across the country deserve answers, especially when they are struggling to keep a roof over their head, never mind defending a luxury refurb. Will the Paymaster General please ask her colleague the Cabinet Secretary to respond to those questions?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sure that the Cabinet Secretary will respond to the hon. Lady. He takes his responsibilities very seriously. The problem is that the matter is now the subject of a review—it is a subject for someone else to look at. I think, in all honesty, that there is nothing I or the Prime Minister could say at the Dispatch Box that will satisfy people until someone independent says it. I have to say, again, that this is a sideshow. I very much encourage the hon. Lady to return to the matters of substance, which I am sure are the issues that her constituents care about.

Mr Speaker: I will just say for the record that I expect MPs' letters to be answered. MPs on all sides have a job to do, and they can only be helped by early answers to their correspondence.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con) [V]: Over the past few weeks, I knocked on hundreds and hundreds of doors in my constituency during the local elections, and not a single constituent mentioned the wallpaper of the Prime Minister or his holidays. What they were concerned

[Mr Peter Bone]

about was welcoming the implementation of Brexit, how the Government were handling covid and the success of the vaccination programme. Does the Paymaster General agree that unless the Labour party gets its act together and starts listening to the people and their concerns, it will remain the Opposition party?

Penny Mordaunt: I agree; I had a similar experience on the doorstep during the recent campaign. That is not to say that the public do not care about standards in public life and accountability. They do care about those things; they just recognise this for what it is, which is a load of flannel.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP) [V]: The first part of this urgent question is about enforcement of the ministerial code. I have heard a great deal about reviews and recommendations, codified guidelines and inquiries—maybe too many inquiries or the wrong inquiries. I am not besmirching anybody here and I am not alleging anything, but if somebody in the Cabinet Office has broken the ministerial code, what is there to enforce their taking the right action and resigning from their position?

Penny Mordaunt: Ultimately, that is one of the responsibilities of the Prime Minister. It is because of the unique status of a Minister—that they are not an employee—that that exists. That is the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): My constituents care about scrutiny, transparency and standards in public life. Will the Minister reassure the people of Anglesey that all offers to supply PPE were assessed by independent civil servants using a rigorous eight-stage process to ensure that any contracts awarded delivered not only high-quality supplies, but value for taxpayers' money?

Penny Mordaunt: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. There is, I think, a perception that if a business flagged their offer to a Member of Parliament or a Minister they somehow bypassed the system. They did not. They still went through those eight rigorous checks and the National Audit Office has confirmed that.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab) [V]: I have a high regard for the Minister, but I am afraid I struggle with her explanation on this issue. On 22 February, inadvertently or not, the Prime Minister made a misleading statement to the House regarding PPE contracts. He stated that they were all published. They were not. That is based on a High Court ruling and is irrefutable. His lack of apology and correction of the record is clearly a breach of the ministerial code. That this happens with seeming impunity—

Mr Speaker: Order. A criticism is only on the substantive motion. This cannot be used. It has already been tried earlier. The rules of the House must be obeyed. I know it is not what Members want to hear, but I am in charge of ensuring that the rules are kept to. Unfortunately, we cannot continue with that question.

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): We all know that Government procurement is a long, clunky and expensive process. It was therefore of clear national importance

for the Government to fast-track some procurement decisions, particularly in relation to PPE, to protect people and keep people safe. Does the Minister agree that the recent elections in Teesside, where we gained a new Member of Parliament and a landslide for the Tees Valley Mayor, show that the public support our decisive decision making over the Labour party's political point scoring?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The British public want us to focus on the issues that matter to them. They want us to recover quickly, both economically and in dealing with the backlog of issues we have in education and healthcare. They want us to get on and deliver. What they do not want is this Punch and Judy politics. They are tired of that. They want some delivery. They want some competence. That is why they are electing Conservatives across the country.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab) [V]: The Government face a slew of allegations over contracts for mates, lobbying, conflicts of interest and influence. Does the Minister think now is the time to exempt a new Government agency, the Advanced Research and Invention Agency, with £800 million of public money from existing procurement and freedom of information rules? When faced with sleaze, surely the response is to stop the sleaze, not the scrutiny?

Penny Mordaunt: Sadly, again more smear. It seems that anyone who was awarded a contract for PPE or anything else is a Tory mate, even when they turn out to be a Labour party donor.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I welcome the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) to her place—or to one of her many places, I should say—but I cannot really welcome the tone of her questions. I am surprised that she is continuing with these unsubstantiated allegations. Perhaps in all the excitement of the reshuffle and the announcement of her shadow Cabinet, she has forgotten that the elections have already taken place—or perhaps she has another election on her mind. Is not the truth of the matter that since 2010 this Government have strengthened the ministerial code, strengthened the requirements around the publication of Minister's interests, and introduced the requirement to publish all Government contracts over £25,000? The record of the Governments in the past decade has been to massively increase public scrutiny and transparency.

Penny Mordaunt: That is absolutely correct, and I could add to the list the things that we have also done to increase transparency and accountability at a local government level, which we know was an area that needed to be looked at.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP) [V]: The Minister has been deflecting from the fact that whether she likes it or not, there have been breaches of the ministerial code. Does she believe that simply trying to deny it or attacking anyone who tries to raise the issue is a satisfactory response to her earlier assertion that the public care about transparency and scrutiny?

Penny Mordaunt: I have said several times this afternoon that the public do care about that and they are right to do so. We should be here to answer questions about

those issues. What I am not going to put up with is decent colleagues, decent businesses and members of the public being smeared by innuendo. I think that I have made my views very clear on that, and I hope that Opposition Members, including the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne—and I do wish her well—reflect on that.

Mr Speaker: I will now suspend the House for three minutes to enable the necessary arrangements to be made for the next business.

1.15 pm

Sitting suspended.

10-point Plan: Six Months On

1.19 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kwasi Kwarteng): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement. Last November, the Prime Minister announced a radical and ambitious response to the economic impact of covid-19. This was, of course, the UK's 10-point plan for a green industrial revolution. Its aim is to build back better, to use our recovery to level up the country, to scale up new industries and to support jobs throughout the United Kingdom as we accelerate on our path to net zero by 2050.

Six months on, I am pleased to inform the House that we are already seeing this ambition being delivered on. The 10-point plan is projected to create and support up to 250,000 jobs, and mobilise £12 billion of Government investment and up to three times as much from the private sector by 2030. We are investing in the UK's most important asset—our workforce—to ensure that our people have the right skills to deliver the low-carbon transition and thrive in the high-value jobs this will create. This is the case for the engineers and construction workers who will build the new offshore wind farms and nuclear plants to provide clean power to our homes, to the retrofitters who will make homes more comfortable and efficient. This work of course builds on the strong progress we have already made as a country in decarbonising our economy. Last year, we hit over two months of coal-free electricity generation, which is the longest streak since the industrial revolution. Two weeks ago, we broke a new wind power record, with both onshore and offshore wind turbines generating 48.5% of the electricity in Great Britain. The plan is projected to reduce UK emissions by 180 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent between 2023 and 2032. I am sure Members are aware that that is equal to taking all of today's cars off the road for about two years.

Since the 10-point plan's publication, we have enshrined the UK's sixth carbon budget in law, proposing in that a target that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 78% by 2035 compared with 1990 levels. That is an enormous commitment, but one that we are working extremely hard—flat out, indeed—to achieve. Our Energy White Paper has set out a comprehensive, strategic vision for the transformation of the energy system consistent with delivering net zero emissions by 2050. We have also launched our new, ambitious UK emissions trading scheme, for consultation later this year.

On offshore wind, we have confirmed up to £95 million of Government investment for two new offshore wind ports: Able Marine Energy Park—AMEP—on the south bank of the River Humber, which will receive up to £75 million of government investment; and Teesworks offshore manufacturing centre, on the River Tees, which will receive up to £20 million. Those investments have already been endorsed by business. Since the launch of the 10-point plan, we have seen a 501% increase in British businesses signing up for the UN's Race to Zero initiative. Rolls-Royce is working on the world's largest jet engine, which will cut aviation emissions, as part of its £500 million UltraFan engine project. Jaguar Land Rover has announced plans to be all-electric from 2025, with Ford, Bentley, Volvo and Nissan stating that they will do this from 2030. Just today, GE Renewable

[Kwasi Kwarteng]

Energy has announced that it expects to create up to 470 green jobs to support the delivery and operation of all three phases of the Dogger Bank wind farm, the world's largest offshore wind farm, located off the north-east coast. The impressive growth of the offshore wind sector presents a great example of how delivering net zero will help us level up across the UK. It also demonstrates the confidence that international investors have in our contracts for difference approach and the immense confidence employers have in our people, particularly those in the north-east, where so much of this infrastructure is being deployed.

However, this is not just about energy; each of us has a contribution to make. We are helping businesses and people to go greener every day, by delivering on our commitment to greener business, buildings and transport. In March, we published the UK's industrial decarbonisation strategy, the first strategy of its kind from any major economy in the world. It sets out clearly how industry can meaningfully decarbonise, remaining competitive and reducing emissions, instead of simply offshoring our industries and pushing emissions abroad.

To that end, the industrial energy transformation fund has already allocated nearly £300 million to 39 projects to help industry transition to a low-carbon future. This month we began the process for deciding the first carbon capture cluster locations in our industrial heartlands, which will be operational by the mid-2020s, with another two set to be created by 2030. All of this increased investment totals £1 billion, helping to support 50,000 jobs, potentially, in areas such as the Humber, the north-east and the north-west, and in Scotland and Wales. We are providing £1 billion of funding to phase 1 of the public sector decarbonisation scheme, which will support up to 30,000 jobs. These jobs will be in building services, engineering and design, low-carbon heating, installation of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency measures.

The 10-point plan is our commitment on meeting the fourth and fifth carbon budgets. Further strategies for sectors of the economy will be set out over the next year. This will include publication of our heat and building strategy, ahead of COP26, to set out our long-term approach to reducing emissions from all buildings in this country. It also includes our hydrogen strategy, which is backed by a £240 million net zero hydrogen fund investment, to support—I stress this point—both green hydrogen produced by electrolyzers, and blue hydrogen enabled by carbon capture and storage.

We have also committed a further £20 million to increase the number of on-street charge points for electric vehicles. We will provide £50 million to help people and businesses install these charge points. We will also publish our transport decarbonisation plan as soon as possible, setting out an ambitious pathway to end UK transport's carbon emissions by 2050 at the latest. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is fully engaged and committed to publishing that.

The impact of those commitments can already be seen. As of March 2021, battery electric vehicle sales stand at 7.7% of the market, and plug-in hybrid electric vehicle sales are 6.1%, which is a huge increase of 88% and 152% respectively from only a year ago. Our acceleration towards low-emission vehicles will not only

contribute to cutting our carbon emissions, but strengthen British industry through supporting up to 40,000 jobs by 2020.

All these policies and initiatives are coming together and will be set out in our net zero strategy in the autumn. The strategy will build on the 10-point plan, and it will make the most of new growth and employment opportunities across the UK as we build back better and greener from covid-19.

It will not have escaped hon. Members' notice that we will be hosting COP26 towards the end of the year, and what we are doing now is setting the scene for that historic event. In that context, our ambition and our leadership are absolutely crucial. The 10-point plan demonstrates our commitment not only to the green recovery, but to the kind of leadership that we want to show in this vitally important year. All these actions bring us a step closer to net zero by 2050, meeting this planet's greatest threat with ambition and innovation, which is absolutely necessary if we are to hit our goals. I believe passionately and sincerely that a new era of green jobs through Britain's green industrial revolution has been inaugurated. I commend this statement to the House.

1.28 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. The climate crisis is the single greatest long-term challenge we face. As Secretary of State, I was proud to pass the world-leading Climate Change Act 2008 with cross-party support. In that spirit, although we believe that the UK should be going further and faster, we also recognise that our targets for 2030 and 2035 are ambitious by international standards. But the Secretary of State's central challenge is whether targets are matched by the scale of action required in this decisive decade, and once again, his statement showed that the Government are very good at self-congratulation but perhaps less good at self-awareness. The evidence is that there is a wide gap between rhetoric and reality. Crucial areas are not being dealt with, and the scale of finance is not being delivered, leading us to be off track on our targets.

Let us take a few key issues. The first is buildings, a crucial part of decarbonisation. Last year, the green homes grant—remember that?—was the flagship measure, which the Secretary of State said would

“pave the way for the UK's green homes revolution.”

Now it is the policy that dared not speak its name in the Business Secretary's statement, and no wonder—it has been a complete fiasco, with contractors not paid, installers forced to make lay-offs and homeowners unable to get grants. As importantly, when the scheme failed, more than £1 billion was not reallocated but simply cut from the budget. We desperately need a comprehensive plan for the massive task of retrofitting and changing the way we heat millions of homes, with the finance to back it up. It is a big task. The heat and building strategy was supposed to be published last year but has been delayed and delayed. Can the Secretary of State promise that when it is published, it will finally contain the plan and the finance we need?

Next, let us turn to electric vehicles. Again, we were supposed to see the transport decarbonisation strategy last year. Today, the Secretary of State did not even give

a date for publication, so perhaps he can tell us in his reply when we will see it. We support the 2030 phase-out date, but the Climate Change Committee says—this is really important—that we will need 48% of the cars sold in the UK to be EVs by 2025, in just four years' time. Despite the recent progress that he talked about, we are way off that, at less than 15%. We are not financing gigafactories, on which there is a global race. Our charging infrastructure remains inadequate, and the Government have actually cut the plug-in grant. Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that the Government are not investing enough to make the EV revolution happen in the way that is necessary for our car industry's future and consumers?

On offshore wind, we should be proud of our world leadership on generation, and I welcome today's jobs announcement, but according to RenewableUK, only 29% of capital investment in recent projects has been in the UK. Can the Secretary of State tell us when the Government will finally deliver on their pledge for 60% of the content of our offshore wind to be domestic?

On manufacturing, there was no mention of steel in the statement, which seems a surprising omission, given how crucial it is to our country, our steel communities and the green transition. A clean steel fund of £250 million announced two years ago and only to be delivered in two years' time is, I am afraid, wholly inadequate. The Secretary of State knows it, his Back Benchers know it and our steel industry knows it. Will he acknowledge that, and what is he going to do about it?

On hydrogen, we are investing hundreds of millions, which is welcome, but it is against billions being invested by others. On aerospace, the Jet Zero Council is all very well, but jobs have been lost in aerospace during this crisis, as the Secretary of State knows, and our investment again fails to measure up internationally.

Here is the worry I have about the scale of investment. The Secretary of State talks about investment over the decade of tens of billions, public and private, but everyone from PwC to the CCC says that we need that investment not over a decade but each and every year to get on track for our targets. In that context, the Treasury's crucial net zero review was due in autumn 2020, and now it has been promised for spring 2021. Well, we are in spring 2021. Can he tell us when it will finally see the light of day? It is a crucial piece of work.

All this means that we are way off meeting our fifth and sixth carbon budgets. Green Alliance estimates that policies announced will only lead to 26% of the reductions necessary to get the UK on track for 2030. Can the Secretary of State tell us how far off track he thinks we are for our fifth and sixth carbon budgets?

The climate emergency is a massive challenge for our country—the biggest long-term challenge we face. There is also a massive opportunity for our country, with our amazing scientists, our brilliant workforce and our world-leading businesses. But to make that future happen, we need a Government with the aspiration and commitment that matches the ingenuity and aspiration of the British people. Instead of a piecemeal 10-point plan, we need a comprehensive green new deal with the scale of investment and commitment that meets the moment and the emergency. I am afraid that I do not believe the Government's record measures up to the scale of the challenge we face. We will hold them to account on behalf of the country.

Kwasi Kwarteng: The right hon. Gentleman raised a number of points. The heat and buildings strategy was always due in 2021; I know that because I commissioned it when I was the Energy Minister. I hope it will be published shortly. We also have a hydrogen strategy. He mentioned that our £240 million hydrogen fund was little compared to other countries, but private sector investment has been very successful in the deployment of offshore wind. The reason we have a commanding position—the No. 1 position—in offshore wind deployment is not because of the Government writing cheques; it is because the Government created incentives for the private sector to invest. That will be exactly the way in which we will scale up the hydrogen economy.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned offshore wind and the UK content of the supply chain. We are absolutely focused on that; we potentially have an auction round 4 at the end of this year, and I am committed to increasing—in fact, we have policies to increase—the level of UK content in offshore wind. The GE Renewable Energy announcement in Teesside only a couple of months ago, in which it committed £142 million, is exactly the kind of investment and commitment to the UK supply chain that we want to see.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): Point 4 of the 10-point plan refers to the need for large-scale battery factories for electric vehicles—sometimes called gigafactories. They need to be up and running within five years, so will the Secretary of State update the House as to where we are in securing them? Will he also comment on the state of discussions about the future of Vauxhall at Ellesmere Port, with its ambitions to build electric vehicles there?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am pleased that my right hon. Friend mentions gigafactories and the opportunities that they represent. There are conversations as we speak between people who are making batteries and the car makers; clearly, the dynamic between the auto manufacturers and the people who will be making the batteries is an important one. I hope to make a positive announcement about that soon. In relation to Ellesmere Port, there are very positive discussions with Stellantis. I am very much engaged with this matter, and we are particularly hopeful that we can make some movement in the summer on this too.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I welcome the statement in so far as it goes, but there is need for further clarity. Hydrogen has been mentioned on a couple of occasions. When exactly does the Secretary of State expect the hydrogen strategy to come forward, and how does he expect the business models to operate in practice?

We have concerns not just about hydrogen and the delays in that regard, but in relation to carbon capture and underground storage. The House will be cognisant of the fact that in 2017 the Government pulled the plug on £1 billion-worth of investment in Peterhead. We know that there are plans to have two clusters in place by the mid-2020s. One of those clusters has to be in the north-east of Scotland, linking the north-east of Scotland with Grangemouth, because of course Scotland has contributed more than £350 billion in oil and gas revenues to the UK Treasury. There can be no just or fair transition if the communities that I represent and others in Grangemouth are left behind.

[Stephen Flynn]

My final point is in relation to an issue that appears to have escaped the notice of the Secretary of State in his statement, and that is transmission charges. He will be aware that our renewables project in Scotland must pay to access the grid, whereas the renewables project in the south-east of England gets paid to access the very same grid. I see that the Energy Minister is in her place. That is important because she wrote to me on 12 April and said:

“On the specific question of grid charging arrangements, it is important to note that this is a matter for Ofgem as the independent regulator.”

However, as the Minister knows only too well, Ofgem’s strategy and policy is determined by the UK Government. Indeed, the Government’s own energy White Paper states, on page 86:

“We will set out our vision for energy as a guide to Ofgem, by consulting in 2021 on a Strategy and Policy Statement for the regulator.”

When will that consultation begin and when will this Government stop holding back Scotland’s renewables potential?

Kwasi Kwarteng: The hon. Gentleman raised three issues. The hydrogen strategy should be coming out in the summer. It is a twin-track strategy, as I described it as Energy Minister. We are committed to the production of both green, electrolyser-produced hydrogen and blue hydrogen, which comes from carbon capture.

That leads me to the hon. Gentleman’s second point. He will know that there are a number of attractive sites for carbon capture here in the UK. We have set out our road map for two clusters by 2025 and two more by 2030, and we are in the process of deciding how to proceed on that. He can rest assured that Acorn is a very attractive project; it is something that I have looked at, and I am sure we will have some more information on that.

On offshore transmission charges, the hon. Gentleman knows that this has been an issue for a long time. I committed to looking at it as Energy Minister, and we will have a consultation on that. He must also appreciate that the Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth, my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), is absolutely right: this is ultimately a matter for Ofgem, which, as he knows, is an independent regulator.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and I too particularly look forward to the publication of the transport decarbonisation plan. In west Cornwall, we are working up a plan to bring the towns of St Ives, Penzance and Hayle together in a low-carbon transport plan, bringing together the railway, the roads and multi-use off-road tracks. Will the Secretary of State look at how he can help us to achieve that? Also, if it so happens that he is down in my neck of the woods in a month’s time for the summit, maybe he could meet us to hear about our ambitious plans to provide low-carbon transport for all people living in west Cornwall.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am pleased to say to my hon. Friend that I would be happy to meet him in Cornwall at any time of his choosing, provided, of course, that it

fits in with my diary commitments. I am fully aware of the transport decarbonisation plan being absolutely crucial to his constituents—

Edward Miliband: When?

Kwasi Kwarteng: The right hon. Gentleman asks when. Unfortunately, wide though BEIS’s purview and authority are, my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary will have a more accurate perspective on when that strategy will be published.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): The Secretary of State knows that how we heat our homes and insulate our buildings is an urgent issue that will affect every house across the entire country. He told the Select Committee a few weeks ago that the heat and building strategy would arrive at the end of Q2. Unless I have misunderstood, that is not before COP26; it is around now. Can he update the House as to why it has been delayed once again?

Kwasi Kwarteng: When I was Energy Minister, I wanted it to appear in the first quarter and I think I made public commitments to that. The hon. Gentleman will understand that many of the issues have been discussed across Government, and I am very confident that the heat and building strategy will be published soon. I cannot, however, give him a firm cast-iron date on this.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): I welcome the focus on electric vehicles in the 10-point plan and the £1.3 billion investment in accelerating the roll-out of the grid infrastructure. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need a comprehensive network of ultra-rapid charging points in order to accelerate the uptake of electric vehicles and to get rid of a lot of the range anxiety?

Kwasi Kwarteng: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When MPs talk to their constituents, we hear them talk about range anxiety, and it is critical that we have the right charging infrastructure to drive forward the EV roll-out. We have committed public funds to this, but I am very happy to discuss it with her, as it is obviously critically important. I feel that we are in a good place, but I would be very interested to hear her ideas.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): The 10-point plan announced 50,000 new jobs in energy efficiency, which may or may not have been in addition to the 80,000 new jobs that were due to be created by the green homes grant announced last summer in the Government’s plan for jobs. My repeated written questions to the Department to clarify whether those 50,000 jobs are in addition to the 80,000 have not yet elicited a clear answer, so could the Secretary of State tell me how many jobs in energy efficiency have been created so far, and what plans are in place to create more, now that the green homes grant has been scrapped with no plan to replace it?

Kwasi Kwarteng: The 50,000 jobs related to the green homes grant. The hon. Lady will know that there were three elements to the green homes grant. One related to the decarbonisation of public sector buildings. That was £1 billion deployed through Salix. That has gone

extremely well. Of the remaining £2 billion, £500 million was to be disbursed by local authorities for council housing, social housing and people who are vulnerable. That programme is going very well. What has been rejigged has been the half that related to owner-occupied buildings. It was a short-term stimulus plan that was due to run out in March this year, and we are looking at a replacement scheme.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I welcome the ambitious plans that my right hon. Friend has set out to clean up our energy system and support green British jobs as we work to end the UK's contribution to climate change by 2050. However, can he confirm that he will prioritise keeping bills affordable, particularly for lower-income households in Stoke-on-Trent, as we transition towards net zero?

Kwasi Kwarteng: My hon. Friend will know that this is a critical point. There is always a balance between trying to decarbonise and making sure that energy bills are low to protect people. That is why we have a warm homes discount, which has worked very effectively. We have deployed money, and committed to that in the manifesto, with a home upgrade grant of about £2.5 billion. We are always looking at schemes not only to decarbonise, but to keep the costs low for those who are most vulnerable.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): One could be forgiven for thinking that COP26 is approaching and the Government need to make some headline announcements. What is missing in the Secretary of State's statement today is a clear set of metrics against which this House, this country and the world can measure the Government. Will he take on board the thoughtful recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee, which said that he should report properly to this House with clear targets and metrics which we can hold him to? I know that he is a man of intelligence, and a man who is committed to this; if he is that committed, will he open up that scrutiny so that we can really hold the Government properly to account?

Kwasi Kwarteng: Let me declare an interest: I served under the hon. Lady's chairmanship on the Public Accounts Committee and I am very grateful for the time that I spent on the Committee. Of course, I will treat the Committee with the respect and courtesy that are due it. I look forward, as do my officials, to being asked about any of the Government's programmes in respect of the net zero agenda.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I welcome the commitment in the 10-point plan to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050, but we have very few electric vehicle charging points in Southend and many parking restrictions. We would very much like to see them on new builds and in people's driveways. With petrol and diesel cars being banned by 2030, will my right hon. Friend please help us to get more of these charging points in Southend before we become a city?

Kwasi Kwarteng: That begs the question, when will Southend become a city? Leaving that to one side, of course I will help my hon. Friend achieve those goals. The electric charging point roll-out is perhaps the most

important metric—the most important thing to do—in order to achieve our goals with respect to electric vehicles.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Following on from the question of the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), there were some positive comments from the chief executive of Stellantis yesterday to the effect that things were moving in the right direction but we were not quite there yet. May I take this opportunity to remind the Secretary of State that Cheshire West and Chester Council and the local enterprise partnership have been working very closely with the civil servants over the past few months to make sure that the right deal is in place. They stand ready to do anything else they can to get this thing over the line, which is what we all want to see.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am conscious of the work that the hon. Gentleman has done, as he put it, to get this over the line. I was gratified to see Mr Tavares' comments yesterday and I think that we are in a reasonable place. We obviously need to work very hard together to get it over the line, but the situation in Ellesmere Port is moving in a positive direction.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I thank and welcome everything that the Secretary of State has said today. May I join the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) in extolling the virtues and benefits of the Acorn project in the north-east of Scotland—of course headquartered in Banchory in my constituency—as being essential to our drive towards net zero? Does my right hon. Friend not agree that, if his Department were to choose this project, it, along with the energy transition deal, would demonstrate again to the people in the north-east of Scotland the value of remaining a part of our United Kingdom?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am delighted to see this degree of cross-party fraternity on that. All I would say is that the Acorn project has a lot to recommend it.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance) [V]: The Government talk of a green industrial revolution, but surely they should be working through the concept of a green new deal bringing together attacking climate change and addressing social justice and job creation. On job creation specifically, how do the Government come to the figure of a quarter of a million new jobs by 2030, as many non-governmental organisations and think-tanks believe that the Government could be creating closer to 1 million jobs over the decade with the right policies of investment, with areas such as Northern Ireland achieving 50,000 more new jobs?

Kwasi Kwarteng: Of course, the number of jobs depends on the definitions that you use. The 250,000 number specifically relates to the measures in the 10-point plan. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will know, as he has been in the House for a while now, that as Energy Minister I always used to say that we have about 400,000 so-called green-collar jobs today and our target was for 2 million by 2030. That is a much wider range of jobs than those specifically created by the 10-point plan, and that is where there is a discrepancy in the numbers.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): There is a lot of older housing stock in my constituency and I therefore fully support the Government's aims to make our homes warmer and greener. I appreciate that there are issues with the green homes grant scheme, but will the Secretary of State commit to boosting investment in energy efficiency measures in our homes, because that will not only be good for the planet and good for residents in helping to reduce bills, but create tens of thousands of quality green jobs?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I fully appreciate my hon. Friend's points. He and I stood on a manifesto in 2019 that expressly committed us to spending £9.2 billion over 10 years on exactly the kinds of measures that he mentioned. That is something that I am very focused on.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab) [V]: Thousands of my constituents work in the nuclear sector, which only this week has seen students from Warrington University Technical College beginning prestigious degree apprenticeships at Sellafield in Warrington—proof that the sector is a vital partner in the skills and levelling-up agendas, meeting our decarbonisation goals and creating high-quality green jobs. The Government have rightly concluded that we need much more nuclear power in the mix to reach net zero. However, under their watch, three large-scale nuclear projects have been abandoned due to the lack of a financing mechanism, which the Government claim to have been working on for four years. Why is nuclear financing more complicated than nuclear science?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I do not think it is. The hon. Lady will remember that the third of the Prime Minister's 10 points was expressly committed to nuclear power. I was very pleased, as Energy Minister, to visit the nuclear college at Hinkley Point. I am sorry that I did not manage to go to Sellafield. We are completely committed to this, and we will bring forward in this Parliament legislation that will further commit us to creating more nuclear power in this country.

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): The 10-point plan recognises the immense value of local jobs in offshore wind production—something that my constituents are anticipating as Barrow and Furness is the home of the second-largest wind farm in the world. However, wind is not the only crucial renewable energy source in Cumbria: nuclear is hugely important and, as the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) said, we are reliant on it. With that in mind, will my right hon. Friend update the House on the financing policy that sits behind this to enable these jobs to be created?

Kwasi Kwarteng: My hon. Friend will realise that sensitive discussions are being held all the time, but I refer him back to my answer to the previous question. The third point of the Prime Minister's 10-point plan was all about nuclear power. It said explicitly that we are committed to having a decision on a plant before the end of the Parliament. We are in conversations with operators and developers—very fruitful conversations, I might add—to bring that about, and we have an ongoing commitment to increasing, not decreasing, capacity in nuclear power.

Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab) [V]: Does the Secretary of State agree that wide-scale housing insulation is key to bringing down household emissions? If so, can he explain what possible rationale he had for axing the green homes grant scheme? Will he take this opportunity to publicly apologise to the businesses affected by the shambolic delivery of the green homes grant schemes, including those businesses that his Department failed to pay for the work that was carried out under the scheme in good faith, some of whom were reportedly forced to make staff redundant?

Kwasi Kwarteng: The accusation that BEIS somehow did not pay people who worked on the scheme is a very serious one and I need to investigate it. I do not think that was the case but, as I said, I will investigate.

As I have mentioned, the green homes grant was composed of three elements. One was the decarbonisation of public sector buildings through Salix, the public finance body, and another relied on local authorities to distribute funds to enhance social housing and decarbonise those buildings. Both those elements were successful. The other element related to owner-occupiers. It was a short-term scheme that was always designed to end at the end of March, which it did, and we are looking to develop a replacement.

Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con) [V]: Falmouth boasts the deepest natural harbour in western Europe and it is well placed to play a leading role in the UK's ambition to deploy a gigawatt of FLOW—floating offshore wind—capacity by 2030. FLOW deployment in the Celtic sea alone could create more than 3,000 jobs. Local universities and the private sector have come together to accelerate deployment with a Strength in Places fund application. Will the Secretary of State visit the port of Falmouth with me—perhaps while he is in Cornwall next month—to see the exciting plans for ensuring that Cornwall is at the heart of this emerging sector?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am not sure which is coming first—St Ives or Falmouth—but I am sure that arrangements can be made for such a visit.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. Will he please outline how the intended £12 billion of Government investment—with potentially three times as much from the private sector—to create and support 250,000 green jobs will be distributed throughout the United Kingdom? In particular, what will happen in Northern Ireland, which currently seems to be increasingly outside of the UK plan but has the potential to play a tremendous role—for example, at Harland & Wolff in Belfast and, indeed, other booming sites of industry throughout Northern Ireland—in achieving our industrial revolution?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has brought that question up. He will know that I speak regularly to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), about investment in Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to net zero. The hon. Gentleman will know about the offshore wind opportunities in Northern Ireland, I am particularly excited about the

opportunities for hydrogen, and he will also know about the operation of Wrightbus and its efforts to bring hydrogen into the transportation system. There are exciting opportunities for Northern Ireland in relation to the net zero 10-point plan and I would be happy to discuss them with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I listened carefully to what the Secretary of State said about the paper he is going to produce this year on heating buildings and about point 2 of the plan, on the hydrogen strategy. Will he make sure that the plan properly recognises that significant numbers of homes, including in my constituency of Forest of Dean, are not on the gas grid, and that we need solutions that work for the people who live in them so that they can have what they want, which is greener heating for their homes that is affordable and deliverable on the necessary timescale?

Kwasi Kwarteng: My right hon. Friend will know that in the United Kingdom we have an extremely diverse range of buildings and dwellings, which means that a one-size-fits-all policy just does not work for energy in the UK. There are lots of ways in which we can decarbonise buildings, which is exactly what will be spelled out in the heat and building strategy and—to a lesser degree, but more focused on hydrogen—in the hydrogen strategy. I would be happy to discuss with my right hon. Friend what we are doing to ensure that his constituents who are off the grid can get cheap, affordable green energy.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for responding to the 20 questions. I wish him well for his extensive tour of Cornwall.

2 pm

Sitting suspended.

Debate on the Address

[5TH DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 17 May).

Question again proposed,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Affordable and Safe Housing for All

[Relevant Documents: Seventh Report of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, Session 2019-21, Cladding remediation—follow-up, HC 1249; Fifth Report of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, Session 2019-21, Pre-legislative scrutiny of the Building Safety Bill, HC 466; Second Report of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, Session 2019-21, Cladding: progress of remediation, HC 172, and the Government Response, CP 281; Twelfth Report of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, Session 2017-19, Leasehold Reform, HC 1468, and the Government Response, CP 99; and Oral evidence taken before the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee on 9 November, and 23 November and 7 December 2020, on the future of the planning system in England, HC 858.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I inform the House that I have selected amendment (h) in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

2.4 pm

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move an amendment, at the end of the Question to add:

“but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech fails to prevent the potentially ruinous costs of remediation works to make buildings safe being passed on to leaseholders and tenants; and call on the Government to set a deadline of June 2022 to make all homes safe.”

I am pleased to open the debate for the Opposition today. I look forward to shadowing the Secretary of State on housing. Although he and I may have different outlooks, I hope we can make positive progress together on the key issues, particularly the cladding scandal. I want to put on the record my thanks to and admiration for my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), who will shine even brighter in her new role as shadow Leader of the House.

If this year has taught us anything, it is the importance of home. The stay at home order put that sharply into focus. For those of us in stable, warm, comfortable homes, with room to work and live, lockdown has been difficult in many ways, but we have not battled daily. For those renters sharing a home, for those living in damp and overcrowded housing or in unsafe, unsellable blocks covered in flammable cladding, or for those without a home, living in temporary accommodation or on the streets, and for those in insecure work or those missing out on support schemes with mounting rent arrears, “Stay at home,” has felt like a prison sentence.

[Lucy Powell]

Ministers have taken some welcome action, such as the moratorium on evictions, but alongside housing charities I am deeply concerned that the rolling back of those protections will now lead to a wave of homelessness. The Secretary of State promised that no one would lose their home because of coronavirus. He must now come forward with a comprehensive plan that achieves that. The pandemic has massively exposed the deep inequalities in our society. If now is not the time to bring the country together with a shared mission of decent, affordable homes for all, like the mission arising out of the second world war, when is?

Housing is a fundamental human right. Everything else—getting the kids to school, going to work, health and mental health, and holding down a job—flows from having security in your home. Yet far from the “Housing First” mission being at the heart of our response to build back better, the Government’s approach has all the hallmarks of the past eleven years of failure and their belief that the market knows best, and if they cut perceived red tape and pump prime the market even more, that will work. Well, it will not, and we have the last eleven years of that failed approach to prove it. Rough sleeping—doubled. House prices—up 50%. Home ownership down, new social house building down 80%, and 230,000 fewer council houses. Now, more people are living in expensive, poor-quality private rented housing, subsidised by a soaring housing benefit bill.

This Queen’s Speech doubles down on the Government’s failed ideology. It lays bare whose side they are on. Developers will have watched in glee—the planning Bill is a developer’s charter, with everything they could have wanted to maximise their profits off the back of communities and first-time buyers. We want more affordable home ownership in all parts of the country, but this approach will not deliver it. The issue is not whether developers are getting planning permission; they are. It is that they are not then building. Meanwhile, this Queen’s Speech says nothing on homelessness; nothing for renters living in overpriced, poor-quality homes, thousands of whom are on the brink of eviction; nothing on the social housing Bill promised after Grenfell; nothing for those stuck on council waiting lists because right-to-buy properties are not being replaced; and nothing to address the climate emergency after the Government’s flagship Green Homes grant was dropped. Those gaping holes speak volumes: millionaire developer donor mates dealt a winning hand; renters, leaseholders, first-time buyers and local communities dealt a busted flush. Far from a national mission to put homes for all first, we have more of the same.

Nothing illustrates that better than the building safety crisis—a crisis that now goes way beyond Grenfell-style cladding and has broken the market in flats across the country. Without serious intervention, the nightmare will continue for leaseholders and tenants for years to come. The fire in east London two weeks ago should have been a wake-up call—if the Secretary of State needed another—to tell him that his hands-off approach just is not working. Thankfully there were no fatalities, but it could have been much worse. The block was covered in the exact same cladding that caused the Grenfell disaster. What is more, residents tell me that the balconies contributed to the fire spreading, the waking watch failed to reach everyone and there was no plan for the evacuation of vulnerable residents.

Residents have been pleading with the Government to fix their block for years. New Providence Wharf was mentioned in the House of Commons at least 10 times before this fire. Even after receiving millions from the building safety fund and being put on the “name and shame” list, the developer had not even started removing the cladding by the time the fire took place. Leaving it largely to the private sector has not worked. It was never going to. We have asked, begged and pushed the Government to step in. Now must be the time to act. That is why with our amendment Labour is today asking every Member of this House to vote to enshrine a cast-iron deadline to make all homes safe.

June 2022 will be five years since the Grenfell disaster. Nobody should pass that milestone living in an unsafe block. I believe the Secretary of State when he says that he wants to do the right thing, but we need much more urgency. We need leadership. We need sustained and concerted action from the Government to underpin the process and restore confidence. I want to work with him to get this right, and quickly. The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee has set out strong proposals. The Labour Front Bench has too. Let us work together across this House and sort it out.

I welcome the additional money put into the building safety fund, but the fund still has lots of problems with its scope, deadlines, application process and transparency. As ITV’s survey of leaseholders out today showed, the issue goes way beyond cladding and way beyond the current criteria. Most of the identified problems are not even covered by the fund, which is exclusively for certain types of cladding. Balconies, firebreaks, insulation and blocks under 18 metres are not covered, even if applications could be made by the very short deadline. We also need to get rid of the ludicrous “first come, first served” approach.

The building safety crisis goes well beyond funding. Without sorting out the underlying issues, just throwing money at the problem will not resolve it. The whole system, from mortgage lending to regulation, governance and risk assessment, is broken. Take the Green Quarter, which is just outside my constituency. Leaseholders and the developers were too early for the fund, so have footed the bill to remove dangerous cladding themselves. Works have now been completed, and they recently had a new risk assessment, but instead of getting the A rating that they expected for mortgages and insurers, it came back as B2, meaning that they are still trapped with further bills to pay having done all the right things.

That is why we need a national taskforce to develop a holistic approach to building safety and risk assessment, putting confidence back into the system with all the players around the table and proper regulation and guidance, driven by the Government. As has happened in Australia, the Government must also carry out a full audit of dangerous buildings, prioritise them according to risk and make it absolutely clear who pays and, crucially, who does not. Government Ministers, including the Secretary of State, have promised leaseholders that they will not be forced to pay. Yet despite the cross-party pressure, including from the hon. Members for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland) and for Southampton, Itchen (Royston Smith), amendments to the Fire Safety Act 2021 to enshrine that in law were rejected by the Government.

In its current form, the draft Building Safety Bill would shift responsibility for all costs on to innocent leaseholders. I will take the Secretary of State at his

word, and I expect that clauses 88 and 89 will not be included when the Bill is finally published. If he wants to give that reassurance to leaseholders watching, I will happily give way to him. If he does not want to do that, MPs will have a chance tonight to vote on our amendment to do just that. The Government say that this is a Queen's Speech for home ownership, yet that rings very hollow for those homeowners living in tower blocks across our towns and cities.

This Queen's Speech is a clear sign of a Government running out of steam, with low or no ambition for this country. Where we needed big, bold action and a mission of housing first, we have tinkering around the edges and a piecemeal approach that does not rise to the challenge. The Government could have given more people security of ownership, not overheated the market. They could have implemented a planning regime that creates places and builds communities, not a developers' charter. They could have driven forward their long-delayed reforms of the private rented sector, abolishing section 21 and giving people security of tenure—a commitment that Labour reaffirms today. On the 100th anniversary of Becontree, the first and largest council estate in the UK, they could have invested in a new generation of council housing for the 21st century. They could have made homes fit for the future, with net zero standards and large-scale retrofitting creating tens of thousands of jobs. They could have kept the spirit of Everyone In and committed to ending homelessness. They could have reformed wholesale our feudal leasehold system, whereby millions of families face extortionate fees, poor service and poor contract terms, with little or no recourse. While the Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Bill is welcome, it has to be the first step of wider reform and that cannot come soon enough. They could have done all this and more, but tellingly, they chose not to.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. The hon. Lady talked a number of times about home ownership but then implied that the Government are doing nothing about it but are reducing levels of home ownership. However, does she accept that home ownership peaked in 2003 and has declined since? It is now being reversed, including through some of the policies that the Government have brought forward, such as First Homes, which gives first-time buyers on lower incomes a 30% discount on market price. Will she welcome that kind of intervention?

Lucy Powell: I do not accept the premise of the hon. Gentleman's intervention. Home ownership, especially for younger people, is now falling as well, so he should check his figures on that. This Queen's Speech will do nothing for home ownership. It is a developers' charter when it comes to planning; that is not what is wrong with our planning system at all. For those who cannot afford to buy their own homes, there is absolutely nothing in this Queen's Speech.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I welcome my hon. Friend to her Front-Bench position and I am very pleased to see her there. Just to come back to the First Homes arrangement, there is no argument about encouraging young people, particularly first-time buyers, to buy their own homes. Is not the problem with First Homes that it is going to take the first top slice of any

funding through section 106 agreements and therefore displace an element of social and other affordable housing for rent? That is the challenge with First Homes: it displaces homes for rent.

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend makes a very good point.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): I, too, welcome my hon. Friend to her place. Indeed, this is not just a failure of home ownership. There has been over a decade of Tory failures on housing. We have seen home ownership decrease. We have seen rough sleeping and homelessness increase. We have seen council house waiting lists increase. We have seen the failure to deal with the Grenfell tragedy, and, in the wake of that tragedy, the failure to ensure that all homes are safe, so does my hon. Friend agree that there is a litany of failures, not just on home ownership?

Lucy Powell: I very much agree, and when I made some of those points earlier, it was met with silence from Government Members.

In conclusion, the dream of having a secure, safe and affordable home is a powerful one, and rightly so. Housing is much more than an investment or a commodity. Homes are the places we grow up in, the places we grow old in. How safe and secure they are shapes who we are—the opportunities we can take, the freedoms we have, the successes and happiness we share—but for too many in this country after 11 years of a Conservative Government that has become a pipe dream. The Government's market-driven ethos just will not create the homes we need, and for people trapped in buildings with dangerous cladding that dream has become twisted and has become a waking nightmare. Today we can start to fix that at least, and I hope Members from all parts of the House will join me in supporting our amendment.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I remind Members that while their contributions should address the terms of the amendment, it is in order to refer also to other matters relevant to the Gracious Speech. To begin with there will be a five-minute limit on Back-Bench contributions, but I suspect that may be shortened later.

2.20 pm

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): As the Prime Minister has made clear, the future beyond the pandemic is not about restoring the status quo; we can and must do better, and last week's Queen's Speech set out our ambitious and comprehensive plan to do just that. For my Department, this means building back fairer and building back safer.

I welcome the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) to the shadow Front Bench, the third shadow Housing Secretary I have debated with across the Dispatch Box since I became Secretary of State. Shortly after becoming shadow Housing Secretary, her predecessor got off to a bad start by admitting to a journalist that the Labour party had no housing policies, so I would like to congratulate the hon. Lady on a

[Robert Jenrick]

noticeable change of approach. I say that cautiously, as in her first TV interview she implied that it is now Labour party policy to oppose the building of more homes, a position that she herself has advocated for many years even in her central Manchester constituency, with all its brilliant opportunities for growth and regeneration.

We are told that the Labour party is under new management—well, at least for now—and it seems that its maxim is “Tough on homes, tough on the causes of homes”, but we are going to take a different approach. It seems from the hon. Lady’s opening remarks today that the Opposition accept there is a major problem, which is welcome: they accept that there is a generational problem that we need to come together to tackle, but it does not seem that they are yet willing to support any of the policies that will actually change and improve the status quo. We cannot wish more houses to be built; we have to make it happen, and we have to accept some of the difficult choices that are required. Despite the hon. Lady’s rhetoric today, we consider this to be an issue beyond party politics; we do want to work together, as I said when we spoke the other day, and I do welcome her appointment.

No reasonable person in this House, or indeed across the country, can credibly make the case that we should not be building more homes, because all of us in this House aspire to be or are already homeowners, and we aspire for our own children and grandchildren to be homeowners as well. The property-owning democracy is one of the foundations of this country—the belief that home ownership should be achievable for all who dream of it, and that young people, irrespective of where they are born, should be able to own the keys to their own home. For too many, this uniquely British dream has proved to be out of reach, and we face a generational divide between those who own property and those who do not. By the age of 30, those born between 1981 and 2000 are half as likely to be homeowners as those born between 1946 and 1965. Too many young people are being locked out of the benefits of capitalism. As we work hard to level up the country and to bridge this home ownership divide, we must do everything we can to make home ownership accessible to even more people.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The scheme the Secretary of State has on the mainland here is called shared ownership. We have a similar scheme in Northern Ireland in which, with £80,000, people can go on to co-ownership. It is a really good scheme; my son is in that scheme. But the Secretary of State will be aware that house prices are going through the roof. In my constituency, in the last month alone prices have been going up by 16.7%, so what extra help can be given to first-time buyers who just want to get on the housing ladder?

Robert Jenrick: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and many of the policies we are pursuing are UK-wide. They include, for example, the mortgage guarantee that is enabling young people to get on the housing ladder with 95% mortgages, which will benefit his constituents as much as it will benefit mine. Through these schemes—such as the 95% mortgages, our reformed and more consumer-friendly model of shared ownership, and the Help to Buy equity loan—we are helping more

people on to the ladder. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), the First Homes scheme will ensure that there are 30% discounts for first-time buyers, those on low incomes and key workers such as our NHS and social care workers, veterans and young police officers to get the keys to their own property.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): We all want to see more affordable homes, and we badly need them on the Isle of Wight. Why are we not doing more to free up the 1 million homes—planning applications for properties—that have been landbanked by developers? This is a massively quick win. What can we do about it?

Robert Jenrick: I will come to that point in a moment, if I may, because the good news is that the planning reform Bill does that as well. We are not divided on this issue; we are united. We want a better planning system, and we want planning applications that are granted to be built out as quickly as possible. The Bill will achieve both of those objectives.

But again, just as no reasonable person could contest the fact that we need to build more homes, no reasonable person could argue that we are going to achieve those aspirations through the demand-side interventions that this Government have been pursuing alone. However significant those are—even though we have now given the keys to the 300,000th property purchased under Help to Buy—and however beneficial those schemes are to people across the country, we also need to tackle the supply side of this challenge, and we are doing that.

Last year alone, more homes were delivered—244,000—than in any year in my lifetime. Were it not for the pandemic, more would have been delivered than at any time since Harold Macmillan stood at this Dispatch Box as Housing Secretary. To put these numbers into perspective, under the last Labour Government, in one year work began on just 95,000 homes—the lowest peacetime level since the 1920s. Behind these numbers and targets, the millions of ordinary working people trying to achieve their dream of getting on the property ladder are being frustrated.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The Secretary of State cites some interesting statistics, and I will cite one back at him. In the last 12 months, 80% of house sales in Cumbria have been to the second home market—for people who already have a house and are therefore depriving, in numbers, the communities they bought a home in of a full-time resident population. Does he understand the damage that does to communities such as the lakes and the dales, and what will he do to make sure the houses he builds actually end up in the hands of people who will live in them?

Robert Jenrick: I would say two things to the hon. Gentleman, who makes an important point. First, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his predecessors have brought forward tax changes so that there are further costs involved in purchasing second homes or for international buyers to enter the market. That money of course helps to fund our affordable homes programme. Secondly, I hope he will become an enthusiastic advocate of First Homes, because not merely does it provide homes for first-time buyers and key workers, but it does so for people in their local area. So his constituents will

be able to benefit from those homes, and then they will be locked for perpetuity to first-time buyers and key workers from his area. If he wishes to work with me on that, I would be delighted to ensure that some are brought forward as quickly as possible in his constituency.

Mr Betts: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: I will, and then I really must make progress.

Mr Betts: The Secretary of State mentioned Harold Macmillan. As someone who was brought up in a Macmillan home back in the 1950s—I am old enough, in case Members have not noticed—I think we then built 300,000 homes for four years. A very substantial number of those were built by the public sector. The Select Committee recently recommended that to get to 300,000 homes today we would need to build at least 90,000 in the public sector through housing associations and councils. That would cost about £10 billion a year of Government grant. We have not had a response from the Government, have we, to that proposal?

Robert Jenrick: There has been a response and I will come on to that in a moment.

We have brought forward the biggest affordable homes programme for at least 10 years—£12 billion, a very substantial sum. At the moment, there is no sign that the market is even capable of building more homes than that. If it can, I will be the first person to be knocking on the door of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor asking for more money so that we can build more affordable homes of all types. Our ambition is to build 1 million new homes over the course of this Parliament and, yes, to get to that target of 300,000 homes a year that was set by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) when she was Prime Minister. She was right: we do need to build more homes.

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: I will come to my hon. Friend in a moment.

Since 2010, we have delivered over half a million new affordable homes, including 365,000 affordable homes for rent, many of which—148,000—are going to social rent. The new affordable homes programme we have just brought forward has the largest contingent of social rented properties of any of its kind in recent years. Over 700,000 households, many first-time buyers, have now been able to take advantage of these schemes. We are committed to affordable homes of all tenures. That, of course, includes those that will be delivered through the £12 billion affordable homes programme, which, as well as building homes in its own right, is unlocking £38 billion-worth of private sector investment to drive affordable and market rent housing. That is the highest single funding commitment to affordable housing for at least a decade.

The truth, however, is that even those bold steps and record investment will only get us so far. To build the homes that I think we are agreed in this House we need and to level up truly, we have to face up to our generational duty and responsibility to increase the supply of homes at pace and at the volume that is required. That means taking decisive action to remove the barriers that for

too long have held us back. My Department has a unique opportunity to achieve transformational change that will improve the lives of millions of people. We will be working on the most substantive reform of leasehold, property rights, building safety, renters' rights and planning in a generation.

Kevin Hollinrake: On planning reform, as the Secretary of State knows, 30 years ago small and medium-sized enterprises built two thirds of new homes and today that figure is only 23%. The costs of planning have a disproportionate effect on small and medium-sized housebuilders. Does he believe that his reforms to the planning system will change that and improve the life of SMEs?

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend touches on the litmus test for our reforms. Each and every one of our reforms must help small and medium-sized builders to prosper, so that small builders in every one of our constituencies, local entrepreneurs and the people who depend on them, from plumbers to brickies, benefit from the reforms, creating a more diverse and competitive industry. Everyone can be assured that it is in their interests that we are working day and night in my Department, not for the big volume housebuilders. They have the money to navigate the current system; they hire the best QCs and consultants; they love the current planning system. It is the little guy whose side we are on and that is why we are committed to reforming the system.

Bob Seely: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way again. We all agree on the principles. My worry is that by saying we have to scrap the current system, we simply create a whole host of new problems. By reforming the system and improving it, which does need to be done, we have a much better chance of the Government achieving their goals, rather than a big bang with all the unforeseen consequences.

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend has not seen the Bill yet. When he does, I hope he will be reassured and converted into an enthusiastic supporter of it. He and I are going to meet in the coming days, and I hope I will be able to reassure him that this is not about casting aside the good, but about reforming and building on it so that we can have the planning system we all deserve.

The principles behind our planning reform are simple. This will be good news for smaller developers, and everything that we do is designed to assist them. It will move the last paper-based system into the digital age, with interactive maps at our fingertips. It will get more local people—more than the 3% who currently engage with plan making—actively engaged and interested in what a local plan is. It will return planning to the social and moral mission that it began as, inspiring plans for the future of a local area, not simply paper-pushing and development management.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): It is entirely right that we support small and medium-sized builders to get houses delivered, but at one end we will need more system building—houses that are prepared in a manufacturing plant and then assembled—to get to the 300,000. What support is the Secretary of State providing for that sector, and what innovation can he tell us about?

Robert Jenrick: That is an extremely important point. Through our home building fund, we are investing in a number of ways in the emerging modern methods of construction industry, which I know my hon. Friend has championed for some time. We have been supporting new entrants into that market, including from overseas so that we internationalise the market; for example, Sekisui, the leading Japanese manufacturer, has now come to the UK. Our affordable homes programme makes a commitment that, in time, a quarter of all affordable homes in this country will be built to modern methods of construction, which helps to create the pipeline for investors to come into that sector.

The other thing that the Bill will do is empower local people to set standards for beauty and design in their area through design codes that developers will have to abide by, putting beauty at the heart of our planning system for the first time, and embedding the work of the late Sir Roger Scruton and everyone who was involved in the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission in the planning system as a matter of law. There will also be a greater emphasis on better outcomes, rather than simply on process, to protect and enhance the environment. We will ensure that biodiversity net gain is met, we will ensure that all streets are lined with trees, and we will deliver on net zero homes as a matter of national priority.

This is also, remember, the Bill that delivers the planning changes that we need to build the 48 hospitals and the schools that we need, and to ensure that we protect heritage and statues from those who would seek to tear them down. It provides the planning framework for our eight new freeports, and it ensures new powers and opportunities for the regeneration of high streets, town centres and brownfield land, which of course has never been needed more.

Jo Gideon *rose—*

Robert Jenrick: Appropriately, I will come to my hon. Friend at this point.

Jo Gideon: As my right hon. Friend will know, Stoke-on-Trent City Council is rightly proud of its record; we build 97% of all new homes on brownfield sites. The latest data shows that the house building sector has bounced back after being temporarily shut down last year. Does he agree that the measures announced in the Queen's Speech will continue to prioritise building on brownfield land so that we can protect our green fields?

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Stoke-on-Trent is exactly the sort of place that is building the homes that the local community needs. It is meeting—indeed, exceeding—its national targets, and it is managing to do so sustainably and responsibly, in line with the preference of local people to build on brownfield land first. We have brought forward a £100 million fund to support that, which I think Stoke-on-Trent is already benefiting from—or I expect that it will in the future. That is exactly the kind of investment in sites that are less than viable, or where viability is challenged, that I expect to be able to announce later in the year.

These are once-in-a-generation reforms that will help us to build back fairer, increasing supply, improving affordability and unlocking opportunity for millions of young people. So too will essential reforms championing both homeowners and renters. As announced in the Queen's Speech, the leasehold ground rent reform Bill

will put an end to ground rent for new leasehold properties as part of the most significant change to property law in a generation. For too many, the dream of home ownership has been soured by leases imposing crippling ground rents, additional fees and onerous conditions.

That Bill is the first of two leasehold-reforming pieces of legislation that will put that right, making home ownership fairer and simpler, saving millions of leaseholders thousands if not tens of thousands of pounds, and reforming a system that we inherited from our distant forebears—an essentially feudal system that no longer meets the expectations and preferences of homeowners in the 21st century. Today, I will also be launching the Commonhold Council, which will pave the way for homeowners to take greater control of their home through a collective form of home ownership unusual in this country but ubiquitous in others around the world—another vital step towards people enjoying their homes as homeowners in the truest sense of the word.

We are also backing a fairer deal for the millions of renters. To that end, we will publish our consultation response on proposals to abolish section 21 no-fault evictions and improve security for tenants in the private rented sector, while strengthening possession grounds for landlords when they need that for valid reasons.

Mr Betts: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I will keep going, because I appreciate that other Members wish to speak.

We will set out our proposals for a new lifetime deposit model, to make it easier for tenants moving from one tenancy to the next. We are also committed to raising standards, for example by ensuring that all tenants have a right to redress, and that well-targeted, effective enforcement drives out poor and criminal landlords. I am pleased that these plans have been welcomed by many across the sector, including Shelter, which has said that they breathe fresh hope for Britain's renters. We will be working with Shelter and many others as we approach the publication of our White Paper in the autumn.

As we build back fairer, it is right that we also ensure that we build back safer. It feels especially poignant to be introducing the Building Safety Bill so close to the fourth anniversary of the tragedy at Grenfell Tower. I am acutely conscious of its significance to the bereaved and to survivors, who, more than anything, never want any community to go through what they have suffered. That is what our landmark Bill aims to deliver, through the biggest improvements to building safety regulation for a generation.

Building on the Fire Safety Act 2021, the Building Safety Bill will embed the new Building Safety Regulator as part of a wide-ranging, rigorous approach to regulating the built environment in this country. By implementing the recommendations made in Dame Judith Hackitt's independent review, the Bill will strengthen accountability and responsibility across the sector, with clear duties and responsibilities for building owners and managers. It will ensure that products used in the construction of buildings are bound by rigorous safety standards, which I am afraid are being found wanting day by day at the Grenfell inquiry. Crucially, it will give residents a stronger voice in the system, making it easier for them to seek redress and raise concerns.

The Building Safety Bill also supports the removal of unsafe cladding, with a new levy on developers seeking permission to develop certain high-rise buildings. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer expects to raise at least £2 billion from a new tax on the residential property development sector to support this work, ensuring that the industry pays a fair share towards the cost of the situation it contributed to. As Members are aware, leaseholders in high-rise, high-risk building over 18 metres will pay nothing, with their costs being paid either by developers, insurers or warranty providers, or by the taxpayer through our £5 billion Government fund—the largest ever Government investment in building safety, and five times the size of the building safety fund set out in the Labour party's 2019 manifesto.

We have heard nothing today from the Labour party on its plans, other than the fact that it would set up a new committee. I will of course take up the suggestion from the hon. Member for Manchester Central to work with her, as I have done already. Working together on these issues is in the national interest, so we should be doing everything we can to unite as a House.

Despite the challenges of the past year, the Government's ambition and determination to answer this call for change are clear. We will ensure that we level up across the country. We will ensure that we take advantage of the historic opportunity to build back better. As one of my predecessors, Harold Macmillan, said when he began his task of building the homes the country needed in the 1950s, this is the start of an "inspiring adventure." We are seizing it with both hands. We are building more homes than at any time for 30 years. We are helping more people on to the housing ladder. We are delivering fairness for renters. We are reforming property rights and leasehold as no Government have done since that of Margaret Thatcher. We are ensuring that no one needs to sleep rough on our streets, as we build on the phenomenal international success of our Everyone In programme.

With the promise of more to come, through once-in-a-generation reforms to planning and building safety, and record investment in all forms of affordable housing, these measures promise to extend opportunity and security for millions, to bridge the generational divide, and to recreate an ownership society—a society in which everyone has a stake and everyone can open their front door with pride and say, "Welcome to my home." This is what the Queen's Speech seeks to deliver. This is what my Department will work day and night to ensure in the weeks and months to come. I commend the Queen's Speech to the House.

2.44 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am delighted to participate in today's session of the Queen's Speech debate on the theme of safe and affordable housing for all, which I will come to in just a moment.

It has to be said that the Government's plan outlined last week was a bit of a damp squib. In terms of the challenges faced by our constituents, it was pretty much a non-event; indeed, it contained proposals that caused some alarm. There was nothing about using the levers that this Parliament has, which devolved Governments do not have, to tackle issues such as child poverty or even commit to the modest ask to retain the £20 per

week universal credit uplift. In contrast, the Scottish Government are using their limited powers to double the Scottish child payment to tackle child poverty. Plans for social care seem to have come to naught, while the Scottish Government seek to establish a national care service for Scotland.

Despite all the hand-wringing from this Government, there was no action on fire and rehire, as set out in the Bill brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands). While the UK Government continue to throw their hands in the air over this very serious issue, the Scottish Government will review the Fair Work First criteria for contracts and Government support grants to include specific references to fire and rehire tactics, and we will continue to press for employment law to be devolved to Scotland's Parliament, where it rightfully belongs.

Moreover, the absence of an employment Bill is very disappointing, not least because it means that the Government have decided to do nothing about exploitative unpaid work trials, just as they refused to back the Bill brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald). In addition, I and others in this place had some hope for the inclusion of statutory paid bereavement leave for all—an idea whose time has come as we work towards a post-pandemic world, reminding us of all the crushing loss that grief can inflict on us, which, as a society, we would do well to give better recognition to. We had hoped that that could be put on a legislative basis.

All those hopes to improve the lives of hard-working people across the UK have been dashed in this rather empty programme for government—and all of this is before we come to the fact that the Government's programme is set to deregulate and privatise wherever it can. The procurement Bill, which will seek to privatise Scotland's NHS not by the back door but increasingly by the front door, is an act of legislative aggression against the express wishes of the people of Scotland, all taking place in the teeth of amendments to the Trade Bill put forward by the SNP to protect Scotland's NHS. We continue to see the narrative of the democratic outrage committed against Scotland that was started by the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill.

Then we come to the so-called electoral integrity Bill for compulsory ID by 2023, which will suppress voter participation, and I fear that that may be the intention. Indeed, without my parliamentary pass, I, too, would be excluded from participating in voting for elections, alongside 3.5 million other citizens. It seems that maintaining electoral integrity demands that a huge number of voters be excluded from voting.

I suppose it is easier to speak of integrity by crushing the suffrage of those who do not have photo ID and, coincidentally, may be less likely to vote Tory than it is to do anything meaningful to tackle the murky world of political lobbying, as set out in a Bill brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson). If there is a desire to protect the integrity of our politics, would that not be a better place to start? Nor are there any measures to deal with dark money, which is yet another very real danger to electoral integrity. Folk will no doubt wish to speculate as to why nothing is being done to properly tackle those issues. It would be laughable if it were not so very serious and dangerous to our democratic system.

[*Patricia Gibson*]

I wish to turn to the theme of safe and affordable housing for all. Housing and local government are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, and the Scottish Government require buildings to be constructed in ways that better withstand fires and actively prevent their spread. That explains why Scotland has only a handful of buildings with Grenfell-type cladding, whereas that is a much more widespread problem across England. We, in Scotland, can look forward to a single building assessment programme. It is soon to be launched and will be carrying out safety assessments on all properties with external cladding, so that the scale of the funding needed for the necessary remedial work can be identified. There will be no “first come, first served” approach to building safety in Scotland. Funding needs to begin with an understanding of need.

Although the Building Safety Bill applies only to England, part 5 contains applications to Scotland where a new homes ombudsman is to be created for the whole UK, and paragraph 8 of schedule 1 amends the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. Therefore, this Bill must not be pushed through unless and until the necessary legislative consent is secured from the Scottish Government. A very important principle of devolution is at stake. The people of Scotland elect MSPs to govern in devolved areas. This UK Government have no business or remit to encroach on those areas, so they must engage in dialogue—constructive dialogue—with those elected to represent the people of Scotland in devolved matters if they wish to secure legislative consent. It is understood that the regulation of construction products is a reserved matter, but it is essential that Scottish Ministers are consulted about such regulations before decisions are made, as they will have an impact on Scottish developers, builders and homeowners, and could also interfere with the Scottish Parliament’s freedom to legislate on devolved matters. So a legislative consent motion should be sought in that case, too. By the same token, appointments to the Health and Safety Executive amending the 1974 Act should not just require Scottish Ministers to be consulted; their agreement should be required for such appointments.

As well as being safe, homes must be affordable. The Secretary of State will be aware that the Scottish Government have provided about 100,000 new affordable homes since 2007, but we clearly need to go further. The Scottish Government are planning for another 100,000 new affordable homes. In order to help first-time buyers to get on the property ladder, the Scottish National party’s Scottish home fund helps to boost the finances of those seeking to purchase a property. This shared equity pilot scheme provides first-time buyers with up to £25,000 to help them buy a property that meets their needs, located in an area where they want to live. So far, the investment has been £240 million in this fund and it expected to support more than 11,000 households to buy their first home. So far, so good, but it is deeply disappointing that the total Scottish Government financial transaction budget in 2021-22 was cut by almost two thirds as a result of the UK Government’s spending review in November.

As for the planning Bill in England, such a Bill will not of itself magically build homes, as the Secretary of State knows. We know—and we have heard it mentioned by somebody else in the Chamber—that 1 million homes

in England have approval but have not yet been built. Government investment and political will are also necessary to deliver affordable homes, which are so desperately needed. The Secretary of State may wish to look closely, as he will find it instructive, at the Scottish Government work done in this area, which has already delivered 100,000 new affordable homes—the other 100,000 are to be delivered by 2032. The fact is that despite the claims made by the Secretary of State today, the UK Government are playing catch-up on house building—I do not think there is any dispute about that. I remind him why I have made that comment about playing catch-up. He will recall that in 2015 the incoming Tory Government promised to build 200,000 new starter homes. Not a single one has been delivered. That is a terrible record, almost as bad as—actually, a little bit worse than—that of the Labour-Lib Dem Government in Scotland between 2003 and 2007, who built merely six houses. The broken promise of the UK incoming Government of 2015 makes those six houses look like a titanic effort—not an easy thing to do.

In the course of the new Parliament, the Scottish Government will put £1.6 billion into decarbonising how buildings are heated. Ambitiously, that equates to one third of all homes by 2030—a very important step in tackling climate change, since heating homes is a significant contributor to our emissions. Sadly, the UK Government are investing only one third of what has been invested in Scotland to decarbonise homes, which means that they are unlikely to meet their own targets to decarbonise homes by 2050.

I am sure that the Secretary of State understands the importance of increasing the supply of affordable housing. We have seen how urgent it is, and we know that it will improve the lives of the people across England who his Government represent in housing, who have suffered cramped, overcrowded conditions—conditions in which I myself grew up. Overcrowding fractures family relationships and has a hugely damaging impact on children as their development, schoolwork and self-esteem suffers. As we emerge from this pandemic, we know that so many people suffer these intolerable conditions under the strained relationships that lockdown has foisted on many of us.

What of supporting people to stay in their homes? We have seen from this Government repeated missed opportunities to cover the average cost of rents and ensure that people are supported to stay in their homes not just during the covid crisis, but beyond. The decision to maintain local housing rates in cash terms in 2021-22 represents a return to a freeze for renters. According to the Resolution Foundation, that means that 450,000 households have fallen into rent arrears since last January because of the covid pandemic. How will freeze local housing allowance rates help those families? It will not. It will disproportionately hurt them and further exacerbate the already deep financial difficulties that they face. The Secretary of State may wish to reflect on that.

We know that restoring local housing allowance rates to the 30th percentile has a positive impact on homelessness and poverty, as well as wider economic and social benefits, but the Scottish Government are finding that UK budget decisions have an adverse impact on their work to support those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, since they are priced out of private sector tenancies. We also know that the temporary

restoration of housing allowance rates facilitated moves out of temporary accommodation, which is something that we should all want to see. Does the Secretary of State believe that the positive benefits of restoring local housing allowance rates, with all the positive impacts that that can have on homelessness, are worth saving—or are those at risk of homelessness worth sacrificing? If so, why? What price social cohesion?

All this is before we even mention the ongoing, the continuing, the dreaded, the hated Tory bedroom tax. Of course, the tax has been fully mitigated in Scotland, with the Scottish Government spending £71 million in 2021-22 to do so because we do not have the powers to abolish it, although we are often told that we have a powerhouse Parliament. This cruel and punishing policy, imposed on Scotland by a Government rejected by the people of Scotland, has meant that the discretionary housing payment spend in Scotland is estimated at approximately £82 million. We are safeguarding tenancies and working hard to prevent homelessness, doing all we can with the limited powers that we have to mop up the damage wreaked on Scotland by this Government. While they impose this cruel and damaging policy on the people of Scotland, the mopping up is increasingly difficult, with 85% of welfare powers still reserved to this Parliament. We have a job on our hands as we continue to try to help struggling families to meet the cost imposed on them.

Keeping people in their homes—sustaining tenancies—matters because the best way to tackle homelessness is to prevent homelessness in the first place. The Secretary of State may wish to reflect on that and on the fact that cutting local housing allowance rates and the bedroom tax, and preventing homelessness through the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, becomes much more difficult alongside these policies. Short-sighted welfare policies force people into unmanageable financial hardship and can lead to a spiral of difficulties, leading them to lose their home.

The Government's programme lacks ambition and substance; vitally, it does not command the support of the people of Scotland, who have repeatedly rejected this Government at the ballot box. Indeed, last week they could only muster a feeble 21% on the constituency vote. The people of Scotland favour progressive politics and progressive policies that put people first, seek to be inclusive, and offer support to those who need it when they need it in order to build a fairer and more compassionate country. Governing our own affairs, we could do so much more for the people of Scotland, and increasingly the people of Scotland are persuaded of that argument.

Self-government, of course, is not controversial. It is only controversial, uniquely, when we talk about Scotland. No country can be better governed than by the people who live and work there. That is why, when we have our opportunity to put Scotland's future back in the hands of the people of Scotland—as we will as we emerge from the pandemic—the answer will be a resounding rejection of the values of this Tory Government and of the values of this Parliament, so that Scotland's future is back in the hands of the people of Scotland and the democratically elected Scottish Parliament. We will then no longer need to tolerate Tory attempts at voter suppression, failure to deal with cronyism, dark money and lobbying shenanigans. We reject those things in the name of the people of Scotland.

I wish I could say something more positive about the programme for government presented today, last week and the rest of this week, but, sadly, I fear that there is nothing to say.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): As we are moving to the five-minute time limit, I remind everybody contributing from a remote location that they should have a visible timer at the bottom right of their device. If they do not, I ask them please to get a timer because there is a lot of pressure on time today. We do not intend to be rude, but Members will be cut off if they go beyond whatever the time limit happens to be.

3.2 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Unlike the bizarre and perverse world view expressed by the SNP in the previous speech, I very much welcome as a tonic the enthusiasm, innovation and creativity that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has brought to his brief and exhibited today.

Of course, the success of housing policy is dependent on balancing two elements. The first is encouraging home ownership in order to provide stability and security in the way that many of us have been able to enjoy, but which too many young people are not yet able to. That needs to be balanced against the interests of existing communities where houses are built, so that we do not have overstretch of infrastructure such as healthcare and education. We need to ensure that visual amenity and quality of life are not unduly damaged, and that we are able to create more jobs where housing is being built so that we do not continue to have commuter towns with all the disbenefits that they have seen in recent decades.

As part of my view of Conservatism, I have always had an indispensable view about the value of the green belt. I am pleased that the Secretary of State is placing great emphasis on the maintenance of green-belt land. It is there for a purpose: to stop urban sprawl and the concreting over of our countryside. Once it is gone, it is gone forever. It is therefore our duty to protect it for future generations, rather than giving in to short-term interests in one way or another.

This matter is tied up with the concept that the housing targets set by the Government are not instructions to build, but targets; and they are targets that need to be netted off against other interests that the Government may have set out, for example: the green belt, not wanting to build on floodplains, and not damaging our areas of outstanding natural beauty. They are difficult balances to get and they are always controversial in any one area.

As the Secretary of State knows, we have many of these difficulties in North Somerset—a part of the country that is well away from the nimby part of the spectrum. In fact, as the new Boundary Commission is likely to show, many of my constituents, because of the rise in our population, will be represented in constituencies outside North Somerset. It is very important to point out to district councils that the setting of the Government's targets is not an excuse for them to try to build on green-belt land, because that is, I am afraid, what some of them are attempting to do.

The Government's plans on the housing numbers have to be seen alongside some of the other elements of policy and the levelling-up agenda. The regeneration of

[Dr Liam Fox]

some of our great cities, particularly in the northern part of England, will stop the drift of people to the south of England, which adds to the pressure on housing. The ability to get greater regeneration in terms of jobs in that part of the country will enable people to stay and to have the sorts of careers that they have otherwise only been able to get by moving closer to London. We must stop being a London-centric country when it comes to our planning system. I very much welcome that, as I do the opening up of competition in the house-building sector. Far too much power lies in the hands of the oligopoly in this country, and we need to see far more smaller companies coming into that sector if we are to see the sort of improvements that many of us want to see.

We still have to deal with the issue of cladding. The £5.1 billion set aside by the Government is a very large amount of money, particularly in the current fiscal circumstances. I caution my colleagues against thinking that they will be able to get substantially more money from the Treasury. We have to ensure that we get the end of forfeiture, which is why I welcome the leasehold reform. We need to ensure that the cost falls in the appropriate place, not on leaseholders, and that we do not absolve developers and builders of their responsibility to put right the mistakes that they created. We must ensure that taxpayers' money is spent only where it is absolutely necessary and that taxpayers are not ripped off by putting right things through public money that should be put right through the private money of the developers.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to look at Portishead in my constituency as an example of many of these issues. I look forward to welcoming him or his officials—as many of them as would like to come down. I end with a word of warning at the risk of presenting myself as an unreconstructed fiscal Conservative: money will be very tight. The effect of quantitative easing, as set out by the OBR, means that we, as a country, are vulnerable to rises in interest rates, and we must therefore limit the way in which we seem to be splashing money in every single direction. We need to return to sound money and fiscal Conservatism, because we need to conserve the opportunities for the future by not landing the next generation in undue debt.

3.7 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): First, the Building Safety Bill has already been considered by the Select Committee as part of prelegislative scrutiny, and we have welcomed it, as it implements Dame Judith's recommendations. I say gently to the Secretary of State that we conducted our review to a strict timetable. We published our recommendations last December, but we are still waiting for a Government response. We look forward to it. Generally, we welcomed the Bill and made quite a few suggestions about how we thought it could be improved.

However, I say to the Secretary of State that this is a building safety Bill, not a cladding removal Bill, and there is a danger that we see building safety simply in terms of removing dangerous cladding. It is absolutely important that that is done, particularly the aluminium composite material cladding, but also the other forms of cladding as well. We know that there are a multitude

of defects in buildings that can cause fire problems: faulty balconies; faulty fire doors; missing fire breaks; faulty installations and so on, all of which make buildings unsafe. We could get a situation where the Government pay for the cladding to come off, but it still leaves the buildings unsafe, and leaseholders cannot afford the rest of the costs.

I have just been talking today to Jenny and Laura. The interview was organised by Yorkshire Calendar. Leaseholders were explaining to me that their buildings have other defects and that they and other leaseholders are worried sick that they are living in buildings that are unsafe, but that they do not have the financial ability to pay for the defects to be dealt with. That is a terrible situation. Hundreds of thousands of leaseholders are facing that problem in this country today.

We still have not had an explanation from the Government of their loan scheme and how it will operate. There are also people living in lower rise blocks worried about the future. Most renters will be expected to pay for all fire safety defects to be dealt with through their rent, which is unfair on them when the leaseholder next door may get assistance. We, as a Committee, have therefore recommended a comprehensive building safety fund to cover all fire safety defects. It should be paid for initially by the Government, with a major contribution from industry, including the providers of construction products. Of course, developers should be held to account wherever possible, but in the end, there needs to be certainty for homeowners who simply cannot afford to pay that the Government will get the problem resolved for them. That is the requirement that we have asked for.

On the planning Bill, back in the early days of the coalition the then Chancellor, George Osborne, called planning an "obstacle to growth". That is untrue. Planning is a means to achieve growth, but it has to be a means to achieve the right sort of growth in the right places. That is the challenge of the planning system. I think the Secretary of State will recognise that, in the White Paper, there is a major emphasis on local plans. I am sure that the Committee will support that, because we recommended some years ago that local plans should be made statutory and be simplified. The Government did not agree with us at the time, but I am pleased that they have come round to that point of view.

There are, however, major challenges around how we convert a situation where the public have a right to be consulted and express views about every single planning application to one where that consultation takes place at the local plan stage. That will be a major challenge under the new system that the Government are proposing. How we get to a situation where a local plan can contain all the relevant issues in relation to the multitude of different sites in the renewal category is a major challenge. We look forward to seeing how it will be resolved in the Bill.

In the end, the real challenge on planning reform is in the technicalities and details, so I make an offer to the Secretary of State. The Bill might be an awful lot better were it produced in draft form and he once again asked the Committee to have a look at it. I do not think that there will be a lot of disagreement on some of the issues, but the Government might have a think about getting the technicalities right so that the main beneficiaries down the line are not planning lawyers. On the housing needs assessments, it is slightly perverse that the latest

iterations say that the number of homes to be built in the north and the midlands, in areas outside the major cities, will be lower than the number currently being built. That seems a bit like building fewer, rather than building better.

On renters' reform, I am a bit disappointed that we are now having a White Paper rather than a Bill. Again, if it is about technicalities, why not at least produce a draft Bill for us to have a look at in this Session of Parliament? Finally, social care reform is an issue for other Select Committees on one level, but it is important to get it right to ensure that the finances of local councils are put on a stable basis for the future.

3.12 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for pointing out at the beginning of today's debate, that there is no restriction on the subjects that can be raised on any day of the debate on the Queen's Speech. Before I move to address other subjects, I would like to say how pleasing it was to see the Secretary of State nodding in response to the Chair of the Select Committee's invitation to work on a cross-party basis on the grave concern about the plight of leaseholders following the cladding scandal. I am sure that the Secretary of State is as concerned as Members on both sides of the House by reports of leaseholders facing bankruptcy and lease forfeiture right now, which must be prevented at all costs.

Barely a day goes by without some fresh horror story emerging from our universities. Teenage totalitarians are shutting down free speech, egged on by activist academics and compliant administrators who could not win an election if their lives depended on it. The latest case is of a mature law student on the eve of her finals threatened with the loss of her degree for defining a "woman" in terms with which more than nine out of 10 people would agree. The Education Secretary's proposals to put an end to such abusive indoctrination cannot come too soon.

No day was selected by the Opposition to focus on defence, foreign affairs or security. If time permitted today, I would return to such issues as I have raised in the past, including that of the 250-plus war widows who are still waiting for the return of their war widows' pensions, forfeited when they remarried or cohabited. That loss will not happen to war widows in the future, but it has not been put right for war widows in the past.

I would refer to the possible misdiagnosis of veterans, who in reality have mild traumatic brain injury resulting from blast injuries in Afghanistan or Iraq but are being misdiagnosed as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

I would refer in particular to the urgent necessity to permit to resettle in the UK, before they become trapped, locally employed Afghan civilians, including interpreters, who helped our troops. That could lead to a wider debate about what we and our NATO allies can do to deter or counteract a total Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and the slaughter of those we supported and encouraged for so many years. For example, will we maintain in the region a strategic base from which action can be taken if necessary?

Finally, I will refer to this, as opposed to just mentioning it in passing. According to a rather impressive scoop by Larisa Brown in *The Times* a few days ago, some very

good news about the plight of Northern Ireland veterans is coming at last. It appears that troubles-related cases, up to the signing of the Belfast agreement, will have a line drawn under them, and that will be coupled with a truth recovery mechanism on the model of what was done in South Africa on the inspiration of Nelson Mandela.

The proposals, if true, are closely aligned with the recommendations of the Defence Committee's seventh report of 2016-17, published in April 2017. That report drew heavily on the expert testimony of four eminent law professors that was given on 7 March 2017 and is well worth studying today. Their testimony made it clear that anything done to resolve the question of vexatious reinvestigations and prosecutions must apply across the board. It later became clear that, as a result of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998, no more questions should be raised about putting terrorists and security forces on the same level. Everyone is on the same level before the law, and the 1998 Act said that even the most heinous murders would result in nothing longer than a two-year prison sentence.

How much better will it be to take a leaf from the book of what was done so successfully in South Africa by substituting for investigation and prosecution, with little chance of success, a truth recovery mechanism to bring closure to the bereaved?

3.17 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab) [V]: On the cladding crisis, I regret that there was nothing in the Queen's Speech to protect leaseholders from having to pay to fix faults that are not of their making. When the Building Safety Bill comes before us, Ministers will find that amendments are tabled to provide that protection to leaseholders. We are not giving up and there are a growing number of Members of this House, including on the Government Benches, who are determined to do right by our constituents, because they have run out of patience and are running out of time. As their lives remain on hold, their flats remain worthless, they face monthly bills for waking watches and insurance premiums, and the demands are starting to arrive for sums of money that they simply do not have.

As the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), rightly pointed out, offering to solve half the problem will not work, because there are other fire safety defects. As the recent fire at New Providence Wharf reminded us, living in an unsafe building is not a theoretical risk; it is an actual risk. I know it is difficult for Ministers, but believe you me it is nothing like the difficulty that our leaseholders are living with. The only solution is to make loan funding available to the blocks to fix all the problems and then to pay back the cost of that loan over the long term by levying the house builders and developers.

My second concern in the context of this debate is for all those in rent arrears because of covid. As the moratorium on evictions comes to an end, what is the Government's plan to stop lots of people being made homeless? I am not aware that there is one. At the beginning of the crisis, the Secretary of State said, as we heard earlier, that "no renter who has lost income due to coronavirus will be forced out of their home",

[Hilary Benn]

yet when the Government recently announced that the bailiff-enforced eviction ban would be extended to 31 May, their own press notice said:

“This will ensure residents in both the private and social sector can stay in their homes and have enough time to find alternative accommodation”.

Those two statements do not square. Either my constituents will be able to stay in their own homes or they will have to find alternative accommodation because they have been evicted. Which is it? And by the way, where is the alternative accommodation that they can afford?

This brings me finally to the planning Bill, which I think will have a rough ride. I do not think it will fix the problem that it is trying to address. Ministers have announced many changes to the planning system in the last decade or so, and all of them have tried in one way or another to remove power from local communities, because it is argued that they are the main obstacle to house building. I think that analysis is wrong. A growing number of people contact me as an MP because they live in unsatisfactory and overcrowded accommodation. They bid with hundreds of others for a council property, they cannot afford to buy and they cannot afford to rent privately. There simply are not enough council houses, so local authorities need the means and the funding to build them.

We are never going to have enough homes if we just rely on the volume house builders, because they will build only the number of properties they think they can sell at the price they want to get for them. That is why we have planning permissions unbuilt, which is hardly a sign of a planning system that is working. I read that Ministers are contemplating a “use it or lose it” levy, and I think that is a very sensible idea. Indeed, we proposed it six years ago. Even where local communities come forward to designate sites, they do not have the power to ensure that that is where the new homes are built. Community after community can tell the story of sites being identified locally, whereupon the house builders come along and say, “I’m really sorry, that doesn’t work for us, but what about that greenfield site over there?” And even if their planning application is refused, they are pretty confident that they will win on appeal.

I cannot think of a system less likely to encourage local communities to take responsibility than one in which the final decision is removed from their hands. That is why local communities should have the power to determine exactly where the new homes are built, what kind of homes are constructed and who gets them. It is not surprising that we see resistance to new homes if the community knows that no one on its waiting list and no one living locally who is hoping to buy their first home can have any chance of affording them. How many more planning Bills will it take before we come to the realisation that in the end local communities have in every sense to take responsibility? I believe that if we give them all the tools, they will do the job.

3.22 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Thank you very much for calling me in this debate, Mr Deputy Speaker. Over the past few days we have been debating the Gracious Speech of our monarch, who has been

nobly carrying out this duty for longer than anyone else has been sitting in either House. Over that time, she has been the only constant. Her words and policies have changed with the will of the people who have chosen her scriptwriters through election. It is an extraordinary recognition of the reality of power and duty. Her subjects have the power to force her to read the words, and she dutifully does so, giving us an illusion of constancy in a changing world. That illusion is no trick; it is a vital part of the stability of our nation. It allows continuous innovation without fear, and novelty without revolution. As democrats have always known, the alternative to constant change is not stasis but sudden violence. The earthquake is no alternative to the bicycle. Her Majesty has been providing the constancy that has enabled that change and avoided violence, and we have been blessed to live in a newer, more peaceful Elizabethan age.

Our civic Union, which has grown out of the union of the high kings of Ireland, the tribes of Wales, the clans of Scotland and the kingdoms of England, is another constant. It has provided certainty for 300 years, and those who threaten it should think about the difference between expedient interest and long-term strategy. To lose our nation would be not just a question of currency or governance but a moment of profound disorientation for many, as so many would be left with the question of what is home. That is why I have chosen to speak today on the importance of home.

Across our nation today, almost 100,000 people are living in temporary housing. They are families like ours who are living with the uncertainty that temporary housing ensures. They have narrower windows for decisions, timelines moved from months and years to days and weeks, and injections of transience, not just in geography but in aspiration. This corrodes the ties that bind communities and undermines the ability to invest in the future. Children find it harder to study and make friends, and their results suffer. Adults cannot invest in their own futures, turn jobs into careers or accommodation into homes. At every level, this costs us all. How many Einsteins could not finish their schooling? How many Flemings did not start their education? How many Dysons did not have the time to set aside to innovate?

That is why this emphasis on housing matters, but it is much more than an emphasis on housing; it is an emphasis on community. It is a reversal of the policies that have sadly endured for too long and have slowed down the ability of owners and occupiers to be one and the same. That has stolen energy out of our economy and stability out of our nation. As Jack Airey argued in a Policy Exchange report in 2019, “Building Beautiful Places”, which built on the work of so many others, including of course Sir Roger Scruton, we need to feel at home not just in our home but in our community, our town and our country. How we build what we build builds us up or drags us down. It is profoundly important to remember why we build, not just where.

There are huge examples of successful construction and opportunities where we have seen shared space inspire co-operation and inspire changing, caring atmospheres. We can deepen community and we can intensify co-operation, but it demands that we build on the nature of our community and respect those who are there. When we rebuilt this place, we did not just enrich Pugin but enriched Britain, because the fire that started with the tally sticks destroyed not just an old Parliament

but an old world. It brought about a new innovation in currency and a change in our economic future. It removed the restrictions that for many had held back our economy.

This is a time when we need to talk again about those changes, because the Queen's Speech does not cover the changing nature of currency, the changing nature of the economy, and the innovations that we are seeing online through various forms of cryptocurrencies. I will not, in the few moments I have left, go into why I am going to be bullish on Ether and not Bitcoin, or the nature of the change in the Treasury that is needed to enable innovation that sees the sharing of prosperity on a global basis rather than a local one.

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for giving way. Does he agree that we need to ensure that we have local engagement in a digital way in our planning concerns as we go forward?

Tom Tugendhat: I completely agree with my hon. Friend and neighbour. As she has kindly spoken about digital, I will continue for a moment on why I think the Treasury needs to create a safe space for cryptocurrency development.

Setting the standard for this new economy will shape a new electronic age—a new digital world. Just as our laws—the laws passed in this place and in the old Parliament—created the trading economy that enabled so many to prosper, and created the concepts of individual ownership, corporate responsibility and indeed private responsibility, we now need to see those values injected into new changes. If we do not get this right, these standards will be set by authoritarian Governments with no interest in innovation, or in wild places where there is no regulation and no accountability.

As we come to the end of the Queen's Speech debate tomorrow, I hope that the Government, and the Treasury in particular, will reflect very hard on the nature of crypto exchanges, because they will fundamentally be the underpinning of a new trading world, and the standards that are set for them will either see us all prosper or see us cut up.

3.28 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): On the planning Bill, the Secretary of State, and the Government, could have listened to those concerned about high land values. He could have tackled the Land Compensation Act 1961 to bring down unrealistically high land values and to make more land available for developing more affordable homes. He could have listened to those who had called for councils to be given the power to do what Macmillan did in the 1950s and to build directly within communities with the support of communities. He could have listened to those observing the situation with the already parlous state of the construction workforce, noting that the Government's immigration changes have now reduced that workforce by a further 9%.

The Secretary of State could have listened to all those sensible voices. Instead he listened to the voices of a few people saying that all we need to build more homes is to have permissive planning legislation. That is bogus because, as we have heard from other hon. and right hon. Members, nine out of 10 planning permission applications are granted and over 1 million planning permissions were given over the past 10 years and not delivered.

Jim Shannon: When it comes to the issue of land that has been banked for development, some 1 million homes are set aside for that purpose. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that there should be a timescale on when that land can be dealt with? Does he also feel that, within the land banked development plan, there should be provision for social housing for people who cannot afford housing by going for a mortgage?

Tim Farron: I agree with all those points. It is vitally important that land that can be used for housing is made available for affordable housing—for homes for local people that they can afford.

It is worth bearing in mind that there are other problems in the planning system. In my part of the world, south Cumbria, we have three planning authorities—the district council, the Yorkshire Dales national park and the Lake District national park. One problem there is not the overweening power of the planners, but the overweening power of developers to be able to run rings around the community. The viability assessment, for example, allows a developer to get planning permission for developing, let us say, 30 or 40 houses and then, having agreed to build a dozen or so affordable homes, to tell the planners, and indeed the local community, “We’ve changed our mind; we’ve found a few rocks, so we won’t go ahead as we had promised.” The planners’ lack of power to ensure developers do what the community wants them to do undermines local democracy and undermines the ability to deliver affordable homes to local communities.

One hugely worrying aspect of the Government's proposals is that developers will be able to build up to 50 homes without any affordable homes among them whatsoever, which will be massively ruinous to a community such as mine where the majority of developments are smaller than 50 houses and where the average wage is less than a 12th of the average house price. I heard the Secretary of State's offer earlier about first homes and I will take him up on his offer. In the South Lakes we will offer to be a pilot for first homes, on the understanding that it is not a replacement for the existing provision for affordable homes through the planning system. I am all ears because we need to do everything we can to ensure there are local homes for local people.

I mentioned in an intervention a desperately worrying thing. People talk about an increased number of homes being available, but in the past 12 months we have seen a reduction in the number of homes available for local people in south Cumbria, and other parts of the country as well, as second home ownership has rocketed, in part fuelled by the Government failing to think through the impact of the stamp duty holiday. Eighty per cent. of homes purchased in Cumbria in the last 12 months have gone into the second home market. They are not lived in. What does that mean for the local community? It means we are robbing that community of a permanent population.

People can talk about levelling up, but it does not look like levelling up to me when we see a school closing because there are not enough permanent homes locally to send children to that school. Levelling up does not mean very much to us in Cumbria if there is no demand for the bus service, so the old person who wants to attend a GP appointment 10 miles away cannot physically get there; and the post office shuts down because there are not enough homes in the village to sustain the post

[Tim Farron]

office all year round. That does not look like levelling up; that looks like the Government deciding to ignore the plight of rural Britain, including my part of Cumbria.

Therefore, I urge the Secretary of State to look at my early-day motion, which has the backing of the Lake District national park and the Yorkshire Dales national park, calling for councils in England to be given the same powers they have in Wales to increase council tax on second homes, but also to intervene to change planning law to protect first homes in communities such as mine, so those places do not become ghost towns. It is deeply troubling that there is nothing in the Queen's Speech that allows us to tackle the explosion of second home ownership, which is undermining community in places such as mine.

I want to say a few words about the Building Safety Bill. That is an opportunity for those of us who care about those who are the victims of the staggering unfairness of the cladding scandal to seek to address it, but it would be even better if the Government were to do a U-turn now and decide not to lay at the door of those people who are blameless the price incurred by those who are guilty of recklessness and lethal decisions in both the development side and the Government regulation side of the development of properties over years. It is outrageous that we are apparently about to penalise the innocent for the failures of the guilty.

We must protect our environment, create a planning system that listens to local people and protects our landscape, and make sure that we have homes that are available and affordable for local people, so that our communities in the likes of the lakes and the dales remain sustainable. My great fear is that the Secretary of State's plans are all about listening to the people with the power and ignoring communities such as ours, which are in desperate need of support.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am going to have to reduce the time limit to four minutes if we are to have any chance of getting everybody in. I remind Members that, if they take interventions, they should take them within the time limit. I know it is difficult, because we have a lot of speakers, but if those who did not put in to speak intervene, it prevents those who did put in to speak from making their speeches. I am sorry about this, but I will reduce the limit to four minutes, and if people take interventions, please try to stay within the limits that we have set.

3.35 pm

Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con) [V]: I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I hope to make three quick points—or perhaps only two, but we will see. I strongly support the levelling-up agenda as set out in the Queen's Speech—not only levelling up between north and south and London and the regions, but—perhaps the most important aspect—helping generation rent to become homeowners. During my 29 years as a parliamentarian under Governments of both colours, roughly 85% of people have aspired to home ownership—that figure has remained constant—but sadly the percentage of people who own their own property has fallen to roughly 65% now.

In 1979, my first home in Plymouth cost £13,250. I was 24 and at that time it was quite common to buy one's first home in one's early or mid-20s. In Devon now, the average age of first-time buyers is mid-30s. My starting salary as an assistant solicitor was £4,800. That same house is today worth £190,000—fifteen times more—and the starting salary is six times what it was. That is the problem: the affordability gap, which cannot be bridged without specific and consistent intervention. We simply have not built enough homes in the last 30 years. We need to ensure a better balance of supply and demand by building more. I support the focus on the First Homes policy. A 30% discount is very attractive. Let us wish the Government every success in rolling out that important new policy.

I also recognise that a significant minority of people do not want or are not able to purchase a property, so the rented sector in both the private and the social housing sectors must also be vibrant. We have a real problem in the private rented sector in the south-west right now: it has virtually disappeared. Intervention may be needed at some stage if the market does not respond as we hope it will. I wish the Government well with their First Homes policy, but I am sure the Minister who winds up the debate will confirm that it is about not just first homes or social renting, but a range of innovative housing products and solutions that will sit alongside those important policies.

My second point is to support the proposal to amend permitted development rights to enable more rapid conversion of office and retail stock into residential stock. That is significant, because as traditional retail declines under pressure from internet shopping and more people work from home, we have a new opportunity carefully to identify new strategic brownfield sites and to turn them into residential areas. Planners have been talking about brownfield sites for decades, but many towns and cities throughout England do not have large pockets of old industrial land sitting there, waiting to be developed. Many places in our country do not have derelict factories left over from the industrial revolution, but they do now have empty shops and under-occupied offices. We have to capture this moment.

Plymouth is a prime example. Virtually nobody lives in our city centre, and now it has far more retail stock than is required, so rapid conversion into homes for local people would be a very desirable move—a win, win, win. Not only would it create more much-needed homes, but it would help to bring our city centre back to life and it would protect the precious rolling hills of the south downs that surround our city. In developing this policy as they intend, the Government are pushing with the grain of social change and bringing additional benefits with it. It is an important policy and I strongly support it.

I support the Government in building back better. This Queen's Speech will help us to do so.

3.39 pm

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I want to address whether the Government's proposals help many of the leaseholders in Garston and Halewood in any meaningful way. Liverpool City Council is currently monitoring 149 high-rise residential blocks across the city because of fire safety issues relating to cladding, and the Liverpool Cladiators, among others, are

campaigning to have the horrendously costly fire risk remediation done to their homes without the blameless leaseholders having to pay. That is one problem.

In addition, many ordinary families in my constituency who bought new build leasehold houses on estates in good faith are being financially exploited by unscrupulous freeholders who see them only as cash cows. All those people—most of them young families—are trying to get on in life in aspiring to own their own homes. That is an admirable thing that we should be encouraging, but instead, they have found themselves in a living nightmare of escalating costs and financial exploitation that they knew nothing about when they signed up to home ownership. Indeed, some of them were actively misled.

In spite of the warm words, the legislation announced by the Government leaves many of these people in the same trap, with no guarantee of relief, and in some cases only very partial relief. The Building Safety Bill does nothing to help those who live in buildings under seven storeys. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) set out, it does not pay the costs of non-cladding remediation needed to ensure fire safety. It does nothing to stop freeholders passing on the ruinous costs to their leaseholders or to ameliorate the soaring insurance costs passed on in service charges. In Liverpool, insurance costs increased this year by between 300% and 1,400%—costs that will be passed on. Before this legislation, leaseholders were facing unpayable, ruinous costs in the tens of thousands of pounds each, literally trapped in fire-trap buildings, in homes that are unmortgageable and unsellable, with no way out. After this Bill is enacted, with its regulator, its new homes ombudsman and its new framework to provide national oversight of construction products, they will still be in exactly the same position.

What about the many hundreds of my constituents who have bought new build leasehold houses and find themselves being financially exploited? They are having to pay escalating service charges, ground rent and fees because the freeholds have been sold on as an income-producing financial asset, thus ensuring that agents squeeze every last penny out of them, while providing as little as possible—usually nothing—in return. The Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Bill does nothing at all to help existing leaseholders, and the Government appear content to allow these people, who bought their homes in good faith, to be left with no redress under its provisions. My constituents in existing leases will have all the same expensive problems after the enactment of this legislation that they had before it and no way of improving things. Even if they purchase the freehold, exploitative covenants are placed in the contract for sale. Wholesale leasehold reform is needed, but this Bill does nothing about that.

Despite two Bills in the Queen's Speech that promise solutions to these intractable problems faced by leaseholders, leaseholders will not be given the legislative help that they need and that their predicaments demand. They will still face the prospect of having to pay thousands of pounds and put up with very large, exploitative costs into the far future. They will be left with unmortgageable and unsellable homes, massive, unaffordable bills and no real help from this Government. Rhetoric won't cut it, Minister—you have to help these people properly.

3.43 pm

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con) [V]: I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Housing is a central area of policy that must be a priority for the Government. On adult social care, I share the disappointment of many across the House and country that there is no detail about the future of adult social care in the Queen's Speech. I still believe that the solution is the one that has been effectively argued for many times by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), which involves an insurance component and has long been in use in countries such as Germany. What is obvious to me and to others who have been involved for many years is that a—very much in quotes—"solution" for adult care that is in fact simply an addition to general or indeed even hypothecated taxation and a power grab into local government by the NHS is no solution at all. It would disempower not only local government, with its ability to tailor offers to those in need of care to local needs and circumstances, but local charity and private sector partners. Those partners include Anchor Hanover, which I met last week, with its innovative work in housing for the elderly, including an extraordinary number of centenarians, and with stepped-up levels of care according to need—a model very much like the one Derbyshire County Council was working on under my leadership and has been again more recently.

Housing is central to good adult care solutions in the future, but housing is not, to put it mildly, an NHS specialism. An example of this needed innovation is buyer shared ownership, a mechanism often regarded as being for young people, but something with a valuable application for older people too, in their being able to trade down, retain equity and fund their care in both the housing and nursing sense. I look forward to the Government bringing forward their vision of the future sustainability framework for adult social care in this country, and I hope the MHCLG stays involved.

One of the main themes of this Government is levelling up the country, but I do have some concerns about the introduction of a levelling-up Bill rather than, instead of as well as, a devolution Bill. Local government needs to be just that—not just local administration for central diktats or a vehicle for the bidding-in culture for Whitehall funding pots. As a board member of Northampton Forward, I see how much time, effort and resources go into bid proposals from central Government funding pots, with plans changed to fit the criteria for each. Of course, as MPs we welcome the award of funding for our areas from these bidding rounds—I certainly do for mine—but it does not stop us simultaneously suggesting that there may be an even better way.

As a Conservative, I have always believed that increased home ownership is something that should be within the reach of an ever larger number of British people. It is one of the reasons I founded and chair the all-party parliamentary group on SME house builders. As a result, I know at first hand the willingness to build more houses that sits at the core of the SME sector, so I am encouraged to see the planning Bill brought forward in the Queen's Speech and the emphasis on SMEs within it.

Time prevents my discussing the need for more details on a renters reform Bill, particularly for a housing court, and concerns about the affordability of the environmental measures, such as ending gas boilers, especially for the elderly, not to say my welcome for the Bacon review—another time—but I do hope that the Government will listen to those with expertise in these areas as the details of their plans are worked on.

3.47 pm

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Last week, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) pointed out, on jobs, that while the Gracious Speech may sound good, it is severely lacking in substance. It is not just on jobs that the Government are providing little more than rhetoric, but on housing, skills, employment rights and financial inclusion too.

The need for a deadline to make all homes safe was powerfully outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), and I congratulate her on her new role. I will be backing Labour's amendment today. The Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Bill must make leasehold more transparent and as fair a system as for homeowners, but while the Building Safety Bill looks at the safety of future buildings, it does nothing to help those trapped in unsafe buildings, including many in Feltham and Heston. Indeed, it seems to be reinstating regulations removed by previous Tory Governments. The £50 a month supposedly maximum bill for leaseholders in buildings of under 18 metres still means a bill of £600 a year, with no clarity on how many years they will be paying it or any leverage over what landlords seek to charge them. Since 2017, Tory Ministers have promised at least 15 times that leaseholders will not have to pay unfair costs, yet that is what this Government voted for last month, rather than ensuring that those responsible must pay. Living safely is not a privilege; it is a right.

Let me turn to the economy. There was no announced employment Bill, which the Tories promised in 2019. TUC polling shows that 84% of working people want all workers to have the same basic rights. The Prime Minister promised that he would enhance workers' rights after our departure from the EU, so what happened? Did he lose the memo? Did it get lost in his refurbishment? The time is now to finally introduce a long-awaited employment Bill that would include measures to create a single enforcement body to enforce employment law, improve rights to flexible working, and end the deeply immoral practice of fire and rehire. This has been a hugely unequal pandemic. The number of people on zero-hours contracts is at almost 1 million. Women, ethnic minorities, young people and the lowest paid have paid the worst economic price. Poor employment rights and low pay cause the in-work poverty that is a modern-day scandal.

Vital for employment is reskilling and upskilling. A decade of Tory Government has meant spending on further education has halved and 200,000 apprenticeships have disappeared since 2016. The Government's proposed lifelong learning entitlement is, bewilderingly, set to start in four years' time. If improving our skills system is so crucial, why is action being left until after the next general election and after the next spending review? Why are we only focusing on certain sectors?

On financial inclusion for businesses and consumers, the Government's plans must also include the 5.9 million small businesses and sole traders who are at the heart of our local economies. Bringing small businesses into public procurement processes is well overdue and a vital first step, but there must be a focus on small business finance.

On the poverty premium highlighted by Fair by Design, people on low incomes are forced to pay more than better off consumers on a range of products such as

energy bills and high-cost credit, and they pay more in insurance because they are more likely to live in areas considered high risk. This costs the average low-income household an extra £490 per year. In 2017, the House of Lords Select Committee on Financial Exclusion recommended the Government expand the remit of the Financial Conduct Authority to include a statutory duty to promote financial inclusion. That must be on the Government's radar.

In conclusion, the Queen's Speech should be the road map to getting our economy and society back on a path to a fairer future for all. Its gaps are glaring.

3.51 pm

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): We must fix our broken housing market not just because it is the right thing to do—we need to build more houses in the right places, at the right price, to the right quality standards, at the right speed, and to the right environmental standards—but because we must keep our promises to future generations and keep our promise to level up. We cannot achieve levelling up without fixing the housing market.

The White Paper and the measures announced in Her Majesty's Gracious Speech will not in and of themselves fix that entire problem, but I am very heartened. Reading the introduction to the White Paper or speaking to one of our wonderful Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Front Benchers, one gets the impression that we are on the right track but we will not solve the problem all at once. It is that kind of realism, dosed with the enthusiasm that this Government have for levelling up and for fixing tricky problems, that gives me the confidence that we are heading in the right direction.

The housing market is incredibly broken. We have suffered decades of tinkering. Well-meaning policy interventions from Governments of every type over decades and decades have nicked away at what used to be a market but now operates as some kind of amorphous blob with an incentive coming in one way and an unintended consequence coming out the other.

There are lots of things to like in this Queen's Speech. I am keen to address the speed at which we can get through the planning process. Seven years to put a local plan together! How can communities stay the same for seven years, when what we want them to do is grow, progress and become better? If we plan on the basis of what we were looking at seven years ago, we will never build the right houses in the right place at the right time.

The digital agenda is close to my heart. We need to make planning smarter, more digital, more accessible. We need to break the stranglehold of big business. Anybody who has ever been through a planning situation knows that the system seems to be set up so that nobody wins—apart from perhaps the developers with the deepest pockets and the longest time to wait. We need to make sure that we break up that monopoly of big players in planning and housing development.

Freeports are part of the infrastructure revolution that we have planned, and a key part of delivering on our promises to level up to stimulate the economy. It is the ambition and the appetite, with that realism, that will take us through, but we need a lot more shooting for the moon. To what we already have, I would add an ambition to reform how we tax property. The stamp

duty land tax holiday was a fantastic and very welcome measure to support the market through the pandemic, but we now need to take the opportunity to look in the whole not just at stamp duty, but at business rates and locally raised revenue. Add that to our freeport ideas, and put freeports on steroids—stimulus and tax breaks for inward investment like the special economic zones in some of the highest-growth areas of the world—and we will be cooking.

We need to build the right houses in the right places at the right time, at the right speed and to the right environmental standards, to keep our promises.

3.55 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab) [V]: The Queen's Speech claims:

"Measures will be brought forward to ensure that children have the best start in life, prioritising their early years."

Let me measure that against the situation in Rochdale. The awful fact is that in some wards in Rochdale, one in five children live in a home below the poverty line. In fact, those are the most advantaged wards, because as many as half the children in some wards live in homes below the poverty line, which is a scandal in modern Britain. It is heartbreaking for those families and those children because we know that poverty leads to ill health, less adequate education and all the things that are consequent on them. It is not simply lack of money, but lack of hope and ambition. There is nothing in this Queen's Speech that remedies that, and nothing that says that schools in areas such as mine will have extra funding to cope with that disadvantage.

We are in an almost bizarre situation. Most of those homes will be dependent on universal credit. The £20 cut in universal credit is a bitter blow to those families—it is unreasonable and unfair. It will take about £12 million out of the Rochdale local economy every year. That is not levelling up; it is the levelling down that we have seen over the past 10 years-plus, as Rochdale Borough Council has had to cut £185 million from its budget. The lack of adequate funding has an impact on social care: there is not enough of it and not enough guarantee of its quality. We waited for this Queen's Speech to tell us what would happen to social care, and we heard nothing at all.

Social care is just one of many areas that are missing from the Queen's Speech, such as fire and rehire. Ministers made promises and said it was a disgrace, but we have seen large national companies such as British Airways and British Gas using fire and rehire tactics. Locally in the north-west, the bus company Go North West is threatening to fire and rehire its employees; fortunately, because they had the protection of a big union, Unite the union, they were able to fight off that challenge through industrial action, but many employees do not have that opportunity. That kind of bullying in our workforce is shameful to Britain and shameful to a Government who say that it is wrong but do nothing about it.

As in many other aspects of life, there are things that are missing, but the biggest challenge that we face in the long run, of course, is climate change. I listened carefully to the Secretary of State's speech on housing. Of the 30 million houses in Britain today, most will still be around by 2050 when we have to be carbon neutral, but I did not hear any plan from him to fund the retrofitting of existing homes. In towns such as Rochdale, probably

half the houses are pre-first world war terraced houses in need of retrofitting. Many of the post-first world war houses will be the same. There was nothing in the Gracious Speech or in the Secretary of State's comments saying where the money will come from to make that kind of retrofitting difference. This is now a crisis.

I say to the Secretary of State that it is time for the Government to go beyond words. I have read the housing White Paper that says what can be done. We know what can be done. What we want to know now is what will be done. Do the Government have the policies? Do they have the insistence that we will make that change?

4 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Before we approach reform of the planning system in this country, it is vital that we actually get the homes built for which planning applications are still outstanding. The reality is that more than a million homes have planning permission but remain unbuilt. My suggestion to the Secretary of State—I think he knows this—is that after all planning conditions are discharged, developers should be given 18 months to start on site. If they do not, they should lose their planning permission. If they have not built the homes after three years, they should be charged full council tax on every single one of the dwellings that they have failed to build.

I hope that the Secretary of State will consider the planning Bill a work in progress and allow Members across the House to have some input so that we can get it right once and for all. In particular, if he enabled the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee to undertake prelegislative scrutiny, I think that would improve the Bill no end.

I have no objection to planning permission not being needed where a local authority sets out a planning brief for a site and invites developers to come in and build exactly as it has determined, but every other planning application and proposal to build should be subject to local democratic control.

On social housing, we need to be more ambitious. We need to be building between 90,000 and 100,000 units a year. That would mean that there were rents that people could afford, rather than rents being subsidised through housing benefits. We should also transform the position by giving tenants, when they move in, a guaranteed price at which they can exercise the right to buy when their circumstances allow, and then all the receipts should be invested in new social housing. That is an area that we can all improve on.

The Government have been brilliant on Everyone In, and we now need to roll out Housing First right across the country. I hope that we can ensure that we provide the homes that people need so that they are not forced to sleep rough on the streets because of their circumstances.

The Building Safety Bill is clearly welcome. As the Chairman of the Select Committee stated, we did the prelegislative scrutiny and we are still waiting for the Government to respond to that. If they accept all the recommendations made by the Select Committee, that will smooth the process of the Bill, and we will have a Bill that people will be proud of.

[Bob Blackman]

The reality is that we need to protect leaseholders from the unscrupulous behaviour of developers. The leasehold reform Bill will take things forward from now on, but we have to combat companies such as Bellway, which sell freeholds from under the noses of leaseholders, without even informing them, to finance companies that then exploit them to no end.

I was disappointed that we did not hear in the Gracious Speech about the repeal of the Vagrancy Act 1824. I reiterate my view that we need to ensure that people who are homeless are assisted but not arrested.

Equally, on health, it is time that we had a tobacco manufacturers 2030 fund, with a levy on producers of tobacco, so that we can invest in encouraging people to give up smoking for the good of their own health. Unfortunately, that was not mentioned. I hope that we will hear a commitment from the Health Secretary tomorrow.

4.4 pm

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): Members of Parliament right across this House—certainly my colleagues representing constituencies in London—will know that most of the casework we receive relates to housing. A secure and safe home is the most basic need that is denied to far too many. The Government repeatedly talk about levelling up, but, knowing this need, they continue to fail on all fronts those who are most in need.

The proposed leasehold reforms mean that new leaseholders will not be subject to high and escalating ground rents, but what about the 4.5 million existing leaseholders? Just look at safety and security. The Government have promised to protect leaseholders from cladding costs no less than, I believe, 17 times, but we are now four years on from Grenfell and up to 11 million people are still living in homes with unsafe or unsuitable cladding. Leaseholders continue to be hit by profiteering at every single stage of this scandal. As well as having to pay to remove dangerous cladding at their own expense and all the other safety issues that have now arisen, this Government continue to fail them as they are hit with sky-high insurance premiums and extortionate waking watch costs.

This issue affects an estimated 12,000 people across Lambeth alone, where my constituency is. It is very clear that the Government must provide upfront funding to make these homes safe, and be clear that neither interim nor remediation costs will fall on leaseholders. But again and again, this Government fail to deliver. That is why I am so pleased that Labour has tabled an amendment to set binding targets to remove all cladding by June 2020 and to protect leaseholders from these costs. If the Government want to actually keep a promise for once, they might consider walking through the Lobby with us today.

We certainly need more housing and the capacity to build it. We need so much more right across the country, but at what cost? Handing more power to developers, reducing the amount of real affordable housing—not what we currently call affordable—and taking power away from local government does not make much sense to me. Social housing providers have already expressed concerns that these changes to planning will actually reduce housing affordability. I do not understand how that is levelling up.

The Local Government Information Unit says that the changes would

“leave local government with the political liability on planning whilst depriving them...of the powers to manage it effectively.”

From planning to leasehold reform, I just cannot see how this Government can reconcile what they call building safe and affordable housing with these measures, which leave many with a guarantee of neither.

As we come out of this pandemic, the Government will have missed a major opportunity: their own target to decarbonise by 2050. Even doing this by 2050 is not good enough, so why are there no specific measures in the Queen's Speech about driving forward all our plans on protecting the environment? We have so little time and we should be doing so much more as a country.

I was extremely disappointed to find that the Queen's Speech did not specifically provide more funding for homelessness. I would like to see the Everyone In scheme turned into long-term policy. We saw how much we were able to deliver during the pandemic for those who are homeless. Ultimately, we should be removing the Vagrancy Act 1824, which criminalises the homeless, and doing all that we can to support them. Under this Government, buying a home has become the preserve of the rich, and nothing in the Queen's Speech is doing anything to change that.

Overall, the legislative proposals in the Queen's Speech and the laws that have already been put forward, including the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021 and the spy cops Act—the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Act 2021—all point towards a new type of authoritarian Government. I certainly did not expect this Government to be a champion of civil rights, but all this put together is something else. From the Bill that will disenfranchise millions of voters by barring those—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am afraid that the hon. Lady's time is up.

4.8 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker,

“The purpose of life is a life of purpose”,

according to the American author Robert Byrne; and so it goes with Governments. Governments are edified and enlivened by their driving purpose, which brings the practicalities of a defined philosophy to life. As ever, priorities are pressing, but I have no doubt that, with the support of experienced Back Benchers and the sage advice of former Ministers, my friends in Government will succeed.

Home-making matters, for home is where the heart is. Attachment to somewhere, security for oneself and one's family, and a sense of pride in place, are essential links in the great chain of being. Personal places are at a premium, and the Secretary of State is right that more Britons deserve the chance to fulfil their dream of home ownership. However, for the public to support house building, what is built must be better. With at least 750,000 empty homes, and countless sites with planning permission undeveloped while the highest grade agricultural land is concreted over, it is clear that the current planning system is not working, so reform is welcome.

Such reform should certainly involve a streamlined system, but with much more demanding standards. As we build, we must build beautifully. I was proud to give advice to the Scruton commission and the work that is being done following it. We should only ever make places that our generation can be proud of, and that those who come later will revere.

In essence, the focus on housing policy has for too long been on quantity and housing targets at the expense of quality. How very sad that the horrors wrought by volume house builders have left communities filled with fear at the mere rumour of a planning application. A home is not “a machine for living” as Le Corbusier believed it was. Rather homes are a reflection of our humanity. Beautiful buildings have extraordinary power to excite and enthrall, both on their own and as components of lovely places.

The work of craftsmen shaping buildings as an ode to what is already known and loved rather than as monuments to garish, modish vanity—is what most people say that they admire, yet seemingly we have become incapable of building much of worth. It is time that that changed. Yes, the Bill will make land designated under “growth” or “renewal” easier to build on, at least in theory, but with communities driving and defining the system, improvement is within reach. Developers must be told that if what they intend is more hideous identikit volume housing, it simply will not get planning permission.

Once areas have been identified for development, there must be a master plan for the locality, and every component and space must be designed to excite and inspire. People are not opposed to development that enhances their community, but developers must raise their game, and local planning authorities have the right to expect the Government—and their agent the Planning Inspectorate—to give them the confidence to say no to poor design, no to endless out-of-town commercial developments, and no to the consumption of greenfield land when brownfield sites go unused.

No more good-grade agricultural land should be lost, there should be no building on the floodplain, and no more ugly housing estates bolted on to small towns. Developers must be allowed to build, but only when they adhere to rigorous standards.

With the revitalised sense of pride in place born of community involvement in the evolution of settlements, a Government-led planning renaissance could give birth to something truly wonderful, leaving a legacy not of obnoxious building imposed on unwilling residents but of happy childhood memories of special places, communal fraternity, and villages, towns and cities full of character, particularity and charm. Such should be the scale of ambition for this Government and this House—a future for Britain even more glorious than the best of what has been.

4.12 pm

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): It is always pleasure to follow my friend the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes). I agreed with a lot of what he said. I also very much agreed with everything said by my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy). As a fellow London MP, in my case east London, housing makes up the largest single section of my case load. That did not use to be the case. It has grown enormously over the

past decade. Immigration used to be the single largest section of my case load. Now it is housing, and it is growing and growing.

My constituency covers two east London boroughs: Redbridge and Waltham Forest. Today, I will talk largely about the problems in Waltham Forest, which is one of the biggest London boroughs. Demand is very clearly outstripping supply in every section of housing, and has been for a great number of years. The number of households on the general waiting list in Waltham Forest is now 9,025—nearly 10,000 families. When I say the general waiting list, I mean the housing association registered social landlord waiting list and the council waiting list. That figure has been rising since I was elected 10 years ago, when it was a great deal lower than it is now.

Only 600 to 700 vacancies arise each year. That suggests that the average wait is 14 years for accommodation. The reality is that, because of the way that allocations and demand work, many of those applicants will never be housed. It will not be 14 years, or even 20 years; they will never be properly housed. Purely in Waltham Forest, 1,275 households are homeless and living in temporary accommodation. Of those families, 626 are housed in temporary accommodation within the borough, 584 are outside it but in London, and 65, sadly, are outside London, largely in Essex and other home counties, the furthest place being Colchester. That is an improvement on the situation a couple of years ago, when I was regularly dealing with cases of people who would contact me to say that they had been offered accommodation in the west midlands or even further afield. That has been addressed not because of Government investment and an increase in supply, but because of the work of the registered social landlords, the housing associations and council staff and councillors, and their dedication in trying to find, by whatever means, places that people can call a home.

Moving to the supply, the number of new builds has dropped like a stone. In the year just gone, 2020-21, there were only 64 new builds in the whole of Waltham Forest, one of the biggest London boroughs. Ten years ago, that figure was nearer 500. The Secretary of State talks about building and it will be miraculous if he gets anywhere near his aims, because in my case load I am seeing the exact opposite of what he talked about. The severe lack of social rented housing also means that I spend an awful lot of time dealing with people who live in very substandard and overpriced private rented housing, where cowboy landlords are taking advantage of people, largely those who are poor and vulnerable, and very often those with little command of English, who therefore do not know the system. The supply of social housing across London is inadequate, and my constituents are the people who are paying the price.

4.16 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I welcome the Gracious Speech: setting out how this Government will boost jobs, drive growth and innovation, and increase opportunity for everyone, with the significant objective of levelling up our country such that young people will not need to move in order to improve their life chances. Today's focus is on housing and it is relevant to consider what is happening in my constituency, which has a strong record of delivery, with a total net increase in the number of homes between 2012 and 2020 of 4,464. That is 25% higher

[Mark Pawsey]

than the figure for the country as a whole. If the rest of the country had delivered new homes at the same rate as Rugby, we would be much closer to achieving the objective of 300,000 new homes a year.

That has been achieved through Rugby Borough Council, as the planning authority, having been a long-term proponent of plan making as a method of development control for many years. It was a shock to me, as a member of the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government between 2010 and 2015, to learn that not all planning authorities have an emphasis on plan making. Even today, only half of all areas have an up-to-date local plan, and I welcome the Government's proposals to change that.

Rugby has identified zones of development on predominantly brownfield land and has delivered a good mix of housing. An exemplar of new housing at pace is at Houlton, where the council, working closely with Urban & Civic as the master developer, has delivered a great example of how a detailed plan makes better development. It is a template for identifying a parcel of land, as suggested by the Bill, and taking it through to a development site, with associated infrastructure. We have had the early delivery of a link road and of our schools—the primary is already open and the secondary is due to open in September—and plans for community assets are at the plan making stage. That should be looked at by others.

I welcome the White Paper on planning reform. The system is outdated and ineffective. It goes back to the 1940s and is largely unchanged from what I studied at university in the 1970s. I support the proposals for growth and renewal, and protection zones, and I want to empower local authorities to be able to lead on developments. I want plan making to be focused on, exactly as Rugby has done, but there needs to be substantial democratic involvement and we need to consider the role of the planning committee in making certain that we get good-quality development. Good, effective engagement will be the key to success.

On speeding up housing delivery, I hear with concern proposals to levy council tax on approved but unbuilt houses. I fully agree that there need to be proposals to deter land banking. Presumably, any such proposal would apply only to new consents and not the 1 million homes approved but not yet built. It would be a fundamental change to the basis on which applications would be granted. It might provide an incentive to build out before applying for further consents, but housing markets operate in peaks and troughs, and circumstances change. Market conditions two years after an approval might be very different from those at the time an application was made.

I believe that proposal would encourage developers simply to delay putting in their applications until they are absolutely ready to build. It would almost certainly reduce the number of outstanding consents, but it would put huge pressure on council planning departments, with applications coming in en masse in good times and little activity at lower times. There is already no incentive for a developer to sit on a planning approval, because it has already cost him a great deal of money to get where he is today. We do need to change our planning system and get homes suitable for all our residents.

4.20 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind) [V]: I start by acknowledging the important work of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee in scrutinising the Government's plans for safe housing for all. I also put on the record my membership, as co-vice-chair, of the all-party parliamentary group on fire safety and rescue.

The UK Government announced in the Queen's Speech that they plan to introduce Bills that will modernise the planning system: the planning Bill, the Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Bill and the Building Safety Bill. Although their plans for leasehold reform are welcome, concerns remain that they have no intention of addressing a persistent and key problem with many tower blocks across England: the issue of remediation costs for faulty cladding.

At present, leaseholders face—and under current plans they will continue to face—remediation costs passed on to them by the owners and developers of buildings with unsafe external wall cladding. This indefensible situation is affecting the mental health and wellbeing of thousands, and it is putting them at real risk of financial ruin, despite being in no way responsible for the use of these dangerous materials. Many of those affected are on medication, due to stress over the worry of finding these funds and anxiety over the potential of fire while living in an unsafe home. They cannot sell their homes either, as lenders will not offer mortgages until the dangerous cladding is removed.

This is a national disgrace, and the UK Government must take immediate action to rectify it. They had an opportunity to address the issue in the debates on the Fire Safety Act 2021, but they did not do so, despite multiple amendments proposed by Members of this House, including the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), and in the other House. Those amendments aspired to introduce a real prohibition on the passing on of remedial costs to leaseholders.

In this new Session, the UK Government must follow the example of the Scottish Government, who have taken a holistic approach, with the priority for remediating faulty construction on public funds and developers. In Scotland, a programme of single-building assessments will be carried out, undertaken on a whole building, rather than individual flats. That will allow buyers and sellers in affected buildings to access mortgages without being forced to pay for an external wall system report on individual properties.

As elaborated in the Select Committee's report, the UK Government have the option to create a comprehensive building safety fund to fund all fire safety remediation projects and high-risk buildings of any height. That should be fully funded by the UK Government and industry, with clear principles for delineating how the costs should be split between the two. That should also be followed by a re-examination of the principles under which funds are allocated to remediation projects. Instead of the current height-based approach, the Government should prioritise allocating money to residents living under the greatest safety risk. They must also at last address the worries that many have felt since the tragic Grenfell disaster and put in place a legally enforceable deadline for the removal of all historical building safety defects, as part of a Government-led, UK-wide effort to make homes safe, at no cost to leaseholders or tenants.

The UK Government cannot continue to turn a blind eye to individuals and families being forced to pay for safety defects that they did not cause. The dream of many is to own their own home, but if they find themselves trapped in a home that they can neither be safe in nor sell, that dream can quickly become a nightmare. Until any planned leasehold reform recognises that problem and commits to fighting it, the UK Government are complicit in perpetuating that nightmare.

4.24 pm

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con) [V]: I wish to convey to the House a tragedy that occurred in my constituency in the early hours of Sunday morning—at 2.36 am to be precise. As it happened, I was wide awake. I heard a loud explosion from my community, a quarter of a mile from where I live, and my windows shook. Watching the scene from where I live—I live on the top of a hill and can see all around the district—I could see blue lights coming from all directions. About an hour later, I found out that a house had exploded in Mallowdale Avenue in Heysham, not a quarter of a mile from where I live. A little boy, George Arthur Hinds, who was only two years and eight months old, lost his life. His parents were severely injured, as were the people next door. Three houses in all were affected; we think two were completely obliterated.

The next day I was invited by the local council to look at the site. I have to tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, it was heartbreaking. I was not prepared for what I saw. Belongings and toys were strewn all over the streets. Debris was everywhere. The whole community were out and they were all in shock, but they rallied together. Some are related to the families concerned.

We had phone calls from the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and good wishes from the Prime Minister conveyed through his Parliamentary Private Secretary. That made my community feel very valued indeed. I thank the emergency services for being there so quickly; it was just unbelievable. I cannot imagine what they had to contend with, but we are so lucky to have them. My whole community in the wider area have clubbed together to make sure that anyone who was affected was looked after. I am so proud to represent them.

What it brought home to me is that the Government's proposals, which I welcome, should ensure that we all have a safe home in which to live and that any measures to be learned from the still ongoing investigation into this tragedy in my community should be heeded by the Government. I thank the Government for everything that they have done not just at Westminster, but all the way down to local government and on to the emergency services.

4.27 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris). My deepest condolences go out to all those affected by the tragic events in Heysham.

There is a real sense that the current planning system and the Government's new proposals do not have people at their heart. Newcastle Great Park in my constituency, which already has 2,000 homes, will see more than 4,500 homes once it is complete. Some of those estates have

stood for more than a decade now without the kind of amenities that most people take for granted, such as GPs, dentists, public transport links, schools or even local shops. The current system is clearly flawed, with residents feeling that their rights come a firm second to those of developers who seem to increase the size of developments and miss targets for delivery of services and infrastructure with few consequences, and residents pay the price.

The Government's new proposals will only make the situation worse, reducing local input and giving developers even more of a free hand. I am deeply concerned about the long-term failure to deliver on infrastructure and local facilities, which has been so problematic in Newcastle Great Park; it could be replicated across swathes of Newcastle's Outer West where many thousands of homes are already being built and thousands more are in the pipeline.

The scale and pace of housing development across the Outer West of Newcastle feel overwhelming for constituents who are contacting me. The Government's decision to impose a 35% increase on the housing supply in our city is, understandably, causing considerable alarm. I therefore urge the Government not to go down the path of further deregulation, but to look at ways of incentivising more genuinely affordable homes and supporting the installation of infrastructure and community facilities at an early stage of development. New developments must be more than a collection of houses: they must build communities.

Speaking of communities, one of the Government's ambitions in the Gracious Speech is for us to emerge from the pandemic a healthier, more resilient country, but the reality is that our gyms and leisure centres are under threat of closure after taking heavy losses over the past 14 months. In Newcastle, we are concerned about the future of West Denton pool, which closed when the first national lockdown began and has yet to reopen. There is no lifeline for such facilities in the Government's legislative programme. The communities that the pool serves already suffer from health inequalities and I worry that we are seeing an emerging perverse pattern, whereby sports and leisure facilities in the areas with the biggest existing health inequalities are the ones at greatest risk of closure. We have seen this pattern emerge up and down the country. The nation's health is far too important to be left to a postcode lottery. If we want to emerge from this crisis a healthier country, the Government need to invest now in health and fitness for all communities.

So much is missing from the Government's agenda. There is no meaningful progress on social care reform, despite the Prime Minister's clear promises. There is a failure to grasp the educational inequalities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic and a real lack of urgency in addressing them. There is nothing in the leasehold reform Bill to support existing leaseholders who have been misled about the property that they bought. The promised employment Bill to extend and protect workers' rights is absent. This is a Government who neglect social care, education recovery and employment rights, yet they have no problem finding space in their legislative programme for laws that make it harder for low-income and minority groups to vote. That tells us everything we need to know about the values and priorities of this Government.

4.31 pm

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell).

On principle, we need a planning agenda that is community-led, levelling up-led, flexible, thoughtful and environmental. If the planning Bill is about those values, I will support it; those values are good Conservative aims and I recommend them to Ministers and their special advisers. However, I have a couple of caveats. I do not believe that Ministers have made the case for why we need to scrap the current system rather than reform it. We are better off improving what we have. To seek revolutionary change rather than evolutionary change is un-Conservative and more likely to result in failed policy, unforeseen outcomes and, frankly, disenfranchised and irritated constituents.

Specifically, when it comes to the plan to strip away local democracy in individual planning applications, there is going to be considerable disquiet. The plan threatens to give our opponents throughout England a rallying cry of “Save local democracy from the Tories”. That is a very bad position for us to be in. The system is already weighted far too much in favour of developers.

Let me give an unfortunate example from the Island. AEW, a multibillion-pound property firm, bought a site, Ryde ice rink, a few years ago. The firm fell out with the community group that was using it, kicked them out and finished skating on the Island, meaning all the kids have had to go to the mainland. AEW’s tactics have been to sweat our council to allow a change of use—it has gamed the system to make more money by achieving a change of use. Its behaviour has been utterly wretched—the firm is little more than white-collar bully boys who care little about Ryde, my community and the Island more generally. When asked to do something about it, the firm boasts about its exceptionally expensive lawyers—it is part boast, part legal intimidation of Isle of Wight Council and, presumably, me. Under the current system, as imperfect and in need of reform as it is, we can fight these dreadful, arrogant people, in the hope that they will eventually give up, get fed up when they do not get change of use and, frankly, go forth and multiply. I am genuinely worried that under the new system communities like Ryde will not have a voice in what is happening to the property—especially significant property—in their patch, and it is ethically questionable companies like AEW that will profit.

Many Government Members and, I am sure, Opposition Members have a lot of ideas, and I strongly advise the Government and Ministers to engage with us, because we are only too keen to come up with workable ideas that get the planning Bill through and deliver for our communities. In the one minute I have remaining, I will rattle through some of those ideas.

As my hon. Friend the excellent Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) said, we must introduce a “use it or lose it” system for land-banking, because 1 million land-banked properties is a scandal. Secondly, for future development, there must be a meaningful start-by date or the developer loses permission to build. They must start paying council tax on a given date in the future, and if they have not built the properties, they must pay the council tax anyway.

Thirdly, if we are serious about our environmental agenda, we must lift VAT on brownfield sites and slap VAT on greenfield sites. We can then use the VAT from

greenfield sites to equal out the equation, equal out the economics, equal out the true environmental and social costs and double down on brownfield sites. Fourthly, we must give councils more permission to make compulsory purchases. There are 600 long-term empty properties on the Isle of Wight alone; we could be using every single one of those. Fifthly, we must provide a legal requirement for brownfield sites.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): My hon. Friend’s constituency is not an area that I know well, but could he tell me what realistic prospects there are for young people to buy their own home there?

Bob Seely: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I am aware of what you just said about timing, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I will go on for no more than another 30 seconds. There is not enough—we badly need affordable development, and that is what I want to see on the Island. What we do not need is speculative, low-density greenfield development that is not built for Islanders but is built for second home owners, is bad for our community and is dreadful for our visitor economy.

Seventhly, we must ban, except in exceptional circumstances, low-density greenfield development. Let us close speculative loopholes that allow people to game the system and introduce a character test that is applicable for planning applications. Out of respect to others, I will leave it there.

4.36 pm

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab) [V]: I welcome the idea of a renters’ reform Bill with lifetime tenancy deposits and the proposal to scrap section 21 no-fault evictions. It is a real move forward, because the pandemic has been especially hard on renters, who have had to battle poor conditions, illegal evictions and indifferent landlords without proper protections, although I am concerned about the resumption of bailiff action and evictions.

However, the Bill will not help with the money that many people owe. The fact is that the covid crisis has led to greater arrears and a build-up of household debt generally. The most recent figures from the Money and Pensions Service show that 9 million people have had to borrow to buy food and other necessities—for example, rent, utilities and council tax—in the last year, whether that is through credit cards, overdrafts or friends and families. There has been support from the Government, but it has never fully compensated people for their loss of income, and in many cases the debt has simply been deferred. Many in the debt advice world fear that there is a tsunami of debt around the corner, and perhaps now is the time to thoroughly review the debt solutions and bring forward a rationalised and coherent range of options, rather than the current piecemeal and outdated set.

Another thing that is missing from the Gracious Speech and could have helped is legislation to protect access to cash. Cash is one of the best ways to budget, especially for those on a low income. After all, you cannot spend more than you have in your pocket or your purse. The pandemic has seen a move away from cash, with shops refusing to take it and ATMs being shut down in their hundreds. I am really pleased that many retailers have adopted the Which? pledge to accept cash in future, but there may be a case for making cash

mandatory for some businesses—for example, those providing essentials such as food and medicine. We need to look at a universal obligation, so that banks are required to ensure access across the whole country.

The shift to online shopping creates other problems. Online scams have proliferated during the pandemic. They are ever more sophisticated and have a devastating financial and emotional effect, and they should be included in the online harms Bill. The Government need to do the right thing by bringing online scams and fraudulent scams within its remit. It is the duty of a Government to protect the public from criminal activity, particularly in these strained and difficult times when more people are online, and it is remiss to do absolutely nothing.

Consumers need to feel that regulators are given proper enforcement powers by the Government, who are on their side. The Government must strengthen competition and consumer policy to make it work better for consumers and give regulators the powers they need to intervene when businesses fail to comply. Building back better means rebuilding all sectors of the economy, not just the housing sector. However, if the economy remains built on a foundation of unsustainable household debt and borrowing and low levels of saving, it is built on sand, and that will never end well.

4.39 pm

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue).

I want to start by commending my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher), who seconded the *Loyal Address* last week. She gave an impassioned speech on the levelling-up agenda, on improving opportunities and life outcomes for people across the north of England and on more devolution. It was a speech that many of my constituents in Southport, her neighbouring constituency, would agree with, and it was a speech that should make us all redouble our efforts to support the Government in working for everyone irrespective of where they were born.

It is in that context that I welcome the important steps taken by this Parliament to begin levelling up this country while also tackling the covid pandemic, delivering on the will of the British people and leaving the European Union, increasing the size of our police force, tackling inequality, introducing tougher sentences for those desecrating our war memorials and statues, and establishing a £4 billion levelling-up fund and of course the fantastic town deal programme, from which my constituents greatly appreciate having been given £38.5 million to improve our town.

I want to make just three points on safe and affordable homes. First, the planning system is archaic and chaotic and has not really been touched since 1947. It requires reform and that can be achieved through this Queen's Speech's legislative programme. If we are serious about levelling up we must reform the planning system. We need to continue to focus on delivering for local people, facilitating a culture of fairness, decency and affordability that will apply equally to renters and homeowners. The Prime Minister and this Government have already started to put our planning system on a much better path, with plans to move to a digital service and for cutting red tape, changing local plans and establishing new frameworks

for funding infrastructure, but there is still more work to do to allay Members' fears that any reform could pave the way to allow controversial developments against the wishes of local people.

Secondly, any reform should welcome conversions above shops. That is happening in my town and I am immensely supportive of it, but if we are to revitalise towns and get this step more prominently on the agenda the Government must step in and ask local councils to develop plans for it. One big problem in my town is that many people would move into these converted homes but there is nowhere to park their car, so facilities should be made available through local councils so people who want to live in one of the flats in town where they would support all the local shops and businesses can park their cars near where they live, not miles away.

Thirdly, we must do more to encourage the right type of housing. Not for the first time, certainly from me and occasionally from the Prime Minister, Members will now hear a championing of *Lord Street* in my constituency as the basis of the *Champs Élysées*, but like many great high streets in our country it has seen better days. We want to encourage more people back into town centres, and not just living in flats but in houses as well, so we must empower local authorities to step in and change plans if needed, where they are not in keeping with their surroundings. My town is a grand Victorian town with Victorian houses. That is the type of housing people want in our town centres, and, again, the people moving back into town centres would help to support the local economy, which they would also be passionate about because it is right on their doorstep.

I welcome the Queen's Speech as a first step in levelling up our country; my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister began last week to point the way down that path, and I look forward to working with him and colleagues on the Conservative Benches in delivering for my constituents and the British people.

4.43 pm

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab) [V]: A year on from the global pandemic and we have lost so many of our fellow citizens; in Tower Hamlets, in my constituency and across the borough, we have lost more than 518 of our fellow citizens. This pandemic has shown and exacerbated the deep inequalities in our society, with those who face severe levels of overcrowding and who suffer from inequality and poverty being disproportionately affected. That is why it was so important in this Queen's Speech for the Government to ensure an ambitious programme to protect our citizens, bounce back and recover from what has been the most unprecedented crisis since the second war and the most unprecedented economic hit on our country for hundreds of years—and why it is so deeply disappointing that the Government have not gone far enough to address the crisis in social and affordable housing in our communities.

In Tower Hamlets, we have more than 20,000 people on the housing waiting list. When the pandemic hit, the first thing that I said to the Chancellor when he came before the Treasury Committee was that in areas like mine, where the risk factors are higher because of high levels of health inequality, they are made even greater by the high levels of severe overcrowding, because if infection comes within a household, it is impossible to self-isolate. We have seen that over the past year not

[Rushanara Ali]

only in my constituency but across our city, and across communities where families live with severe overcrowding. That is why it is so important for the Government to introduce proper funding and support and empower local authorities with backing and finance to work with social housing organisations to build.

We need a building programme for genuinely affordable housing and for social housing, but we have not seen that, and the planning reforms will not help the process. We have a Government who are much happier in the pockets of developers, as we saw in the scandal last year about property deals and planning permission, as well as in more recent scandals that we have seen in the papers. We need a Government on the side of the public to build homes that are safe.

That point takes me on to the cladding crisis. At the forefront of any Government's responsibilities should be the duty to protect their citizens from the likes of the Grenfell fire disaster. It was an absolute catastrophe for those who lived in that block. More recently, in Tower Hamlets, there was a fire in a block in New Providence Wharf, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Apsana Begum). *The Sunday Times* reported that it

"was 'minutes' away from being another Grenfell Tower."

Yet tens of thousands of people, not only in my borough but across the country, have still not had their cladding removed or their homes made safe by this Government.

Once again, I call on this Government to get their act together. Four years have passed since the Grenfell disaster, yet we still have fires, we still have the risk and we nearly had another Grenfell disaster in Tower Hamlets. I call on the Government to set an urgent timeline and timetable to get rid of flammable cladding and other risks to people's homes, and to support Labour's amendment today.

4.47 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

One of the things that I am most proud to have achieved in the past 13 years is the introduction of neighbourhood planning, which has been an enormous success for communities. I hope that the planning Bill will resolve the position of neighbourhood plans. I urge the Minister to do that; I know that he has been following the issue. Neighbourhood plans involve the whole community and allow people to participate in the development of their community for the future. They do not produce nimby charters; they produce plans that take a look at what is involved as a stake in the future and produce affordable housing. They produce more housing than the district councils had allocated to those communities. In every way, they achieve a win-win.

I am aware of the enormous time that it takes to produce neighbourhood plans. I have tried over the years to simplify the process, but in many cases it is district councils that make them more complex than they need to be. Many district councils simply do not want to give up power, but in my experience—my constituency has more neighbourhood plans than people might imagine—people have interest and experience that can be of great value in the production of a

neighbourhood plan. One district council told me that it simply did not believe in them, and that it gave little encouragement to communities to produce them. Another said, "Well, if we produce another local plan, then all neighbourhood plans are null and void." That is completely the opposite of what is the case, as neighbourhood plans need to agree only with the strategic aims of the district council plan. Also, neighbourhood plans must be upheld by the Planning Inspectorate; otherwise, there is no point in doing them and no point in putting in all the work involved. It is quite right, and very good, that the Government are strengthening the idea that they should focus on design. That is important, but they should also give back the allocation of sites, because that is crucial.

In another area that is linked to this, we must ensure that the planning system is speeded up, that the cost is driven down and that people have access to it. The way to do that—this could be a useful hint for something to give credibility to the planning Bill—is by recommending the use of mediation as a technique to use. I declare an interest as an associate of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators. I am grateful for the discussion that I have already had with the Planning Inspectorate in which we have looked at some of these issues, and the issue of trying to find independent mediators to do this work has been solved. This is something for the future, where anyone can be involved in accessing this to get a good result for their community.

4.51 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It really is disappointing that we did not see more ambition from the Government in this Queen's Speech, when the need for Government action has never been greater. The past year has revealed the cracks in our creaking social care system and also highlighted the immense contribution made by those who work in it. In this National Dementia Week, I hoped that I would be standing here talking about the fact that the Government had finally revealed the plan for social care that they have supposedly been working on for the past two years. I appreciate that this is a difficult task. There are no easy answers, but leadership is about taking those difficult decisions and finally acting on something that we all know requires action, so why are the Government still dragging their feet? They have also failed to deliver an employment Bill to ban inexcusable fire and rehire tactics and to address record youth unemployment.

Turning to the subject of today's debate, the housing crisis, the proposals to overhaul the planning system risk sidelining communities and eroding protection for green spaces, while offering no guarantees that the housing bill will be genuinely affordable. In Bristol there is a pressing need for new affordable housing. This stems from the fact that it is such a great place to live, not just for the people who have grown up in the city but for the many people wanting to move there. This presents challenges. Bristol Mayor Marvin Rees recently announced that Brislington Meadows, an ecologically important site in my constituency, would be protected from development after being lined up for new housing by the previous administration. As I have said, we absolutely recognise the massive need for new housing in the city, but Labour is also committed to implementing its ecological emergency strategy, which it is developing under its one city plan, and very much with the sustainable development

goals in mind. Bristol is really leading the way as a city using the sustainable development goals as a model and a blueprint for future action. It is disappointing that we do not see the Government doing that at national level.

There will be difficult decisions to be made about planning and housing, and about the transport infrastructure that goes with that, but those decisions should be made by local people and by those who have been elected to represent them, not by developers or by their mates in central Government. It was interesting to hear the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) saying that he believed the system was already far too weighted in favour of developers. I think that many people on his side of the House will agree with that.

I am glad to see that the Environment Bill is back, but it does seem to have been making its way through Parliament forever, leaving us without an effective environmental regulator, which was meant to be in place before the end of the Brexit transition period. It is disappointing that the Government have refused to accept amendments to that Bill—for example, to adopt World Health Organisation air quality targets, or to address our overseas carbon footprint and the rampant deforestation linked to supply chains. I hope that during the second part of Report stage next week, the Government will look again at that. I have high hopes that our friends in the other place will significantly strengthen the Bill, but it is disappointing that the Government have not taken the opportunity to revise it of their own accord.

The animal sentience legislation was meant to be in place before we left the EU—another Government promise they have not kept. Although I am glad to see that such a Bill made it into the Queen's Speech, I hope it can be amended before it becomes law to recognise crustaceans as sentient beings. I will probably be the only person who mentions lobsters in today's debate—it is very on-brand for me, but I do think we have to get the lobsters in there somewhere.

Finally, the Government have shown their true colours with their shockingly undemocratic voter ID proposals. They show the Government's real priorities—not building back better or greening the economy, but rigging the system in their own favour.

4.55 pm

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con) [V]: They say an Englishman's home is his castle—or a person's home is their castle, if they prefer—and in this country we have led the way in home ownership for many, many years. What we must now focus on is making that dream a reality for today's young people and their families.

I remember my father telling me about his own upbringing in the impoverished Meadows area of Nottingham, and the stories of tin baths in the yard and a large family crammed into very small accommodation. In the 1950s, the family moved to newly built Clifton estate—then the largest council estate in Europe. It had well built homes, indoor bathroom facilities and bedrooms suitable for families. Many of the families who moved to the estate are still there today, and I am proud to hail from that community. It was the right to buy and the vision of Margaret Thatcher that encouraged many of those people later to pursue the dream of home ownership, and today the area stands as a testament to the success of that scheme.

Compared with those families who moved in the 1950s, we live in a very different age. As we have heard, the people born between 1981 and 2000 are half as likely to be homeowners as those born between 1946 and 1975. I was born in the 1980s, but I am not quite sure where I fit in there—I probably just missed it. Home ownership does not just give us a stake in society; it provides us with security and gives us something to hand down to our children, to give them a better life. Although some decry the sale of council houses, it should be recognised that if they had not been sold, people would still be living in them anyway, so it does not affect general problems with supply. The fact is that we need greater supply of housing, and that means building more homes, not just for the future but for today's families.

People in Bassetlaw want to be able to buy a house at an affordable price and have access to the funds needed to finance that. The emphasis nowadays must be on helping people on to the housing ladder. That is why schemes such as shared ownership, Help to Buy and the new 95% mortgages will make such a great difference and help people to realise that dream.

Gone are the days of cheap and nasty buildings, whacked up to meet targets with no regard for infrastructure, building design and quality, or community cohesion. We must learn from the mistakes of the 1960s and '70s. We must ensure that we build the right sort of housing in the right areas and that developments are not over-intensive, like some we have seen in Worksop, Retford and Harworth. That is why having a good neighbourhood plan that properly takes into account what the community wants enables councils and communities to turn down applications without endless appeals from developers.

We need good-quality family homes. The houses need to be affordable for the right reasons and not because corners have been cut, as they were in the past. Affordable must not mean low standard. The new planning reforms will help to ensure that, as well as help people on to that very British ladder of home ownership.

4.59 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): We see each other again, Madam Deputy Speaker.

There cannot be a more positive note on which to start my remarks than to welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Anum Qaisar-Javed) to her place in the Chamber. She fought a hard campaign and I know she will make her mark in the House on behalf of her constituents.

In trying to stay positive for as long as possible on the issue of the Gracious Speech, let me first acknowledge the work the Government are doing to prepare for COP26, which comes to the city of Glasgow later this year. There is a good positive working relationship between the Governments and the authorities in the city to get the event ready as we welcome the world to the finest city on these islands. All of us want to see it succeed, because the challenge we face is the biggest of our time.

That, I am afraid, is where the consensus ends. The speech, gracious though it was in its delivery, is deeply egregious in its content—not just what is in it, but what is not in it. Let me start with the Government's proposals to require voters to have some form of photographic identification to vote, chasing a phantom fraud that all of us, including Government Members, know does not

[Stewart Malcolm McDonald]

exist. A levelling-up agenda that seeks to disenfranchise people who will probably not vote for the governing party is a fraud in and of itself, and should be fought tooth and nail by every Member of this House. Indeed, Conservative Members will note that the right hon. Ruth Davidson, who will be joining the other place, has also called out the Government's proposals for what they are.

Let me deal with two issues that are not directly related to housing, but which, if the Government do not get them right, will result in their housing policy lying in pieces: work and good, sustainable work. Members will know that I brought forward a Bill in the 2017-19 Parliament to outlaw unpaid work trials. Unfortunately, it was talked out by the Government, but the practice still continues. People are still being abused by loopholes and the Government's action to clamp down on them has so far been so weak that it has all the performative muscle of a new-born kitten. That is why we are seeing young people in particular being exploited in the way that they are, and it is costing the Treasury up to £3 billion each and every single year. How can Conservative Members of Parliament not see that it is in our collective interests to clamp down on that kind of egregious practice? If people are not getting paid for work, they ain't paying their mortgage or their rent.

That leads me to a case I want to quickly draw to the attention of the Minister—I know it is not his portfolio, but I know him to be a versatile type—relating to workers in Glasgow who work for Blue Dog and AdLib. Next month marks a year from when they still have not received any full furlough payments from their employer. HMRC confirmed to me recently that those furlough payments have been paid out, but they are still not in the bank accounts of staff members. They are people whose rent, mortgages and bills have not been getting paid. My appeal to the Minister—the Paymaster General, the right hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt) is aware of the case—is to please take up this case and come back to me in some form in future.

We will have many fights over the course of the Government's programme in the days to come.

5.3 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con) [V]: I note that we, Madam Deputy Speaker, have just entered our 25th year of service in the House. In all that time, I have been clear that there is no more important issue to the residents of the constituency of Reigate than planning. Crucially, the protection of our environment hangs on the fact that we are London's green belt.

I just want to pose a couple of warnings for my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench. They might have noticed that in the last set of local elections only the Borough of Reigate and Banstead remains a district or borough council in Conservative control. These cases almost always turn on people feeling disenfranchised and remote from the planning process. Unless things change, it is only going to get worse. There is also the issue—despite our right hon. Friend the Paymaster General's machine-gunning at the Dispatch Box of the deputy Leader of the Opposition—of the noise around the developer connection with the Conservative party. The delivery of a developer-led system of house provision will haunt us in future if we do not address it.

I want to point my hon. Friend the Minister to the comments made by our hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) about enabling a plan-led system. If the local authority is coming forward with its own plans, of course it should not need planning permission. The local authority will have produced a plan, which developers would then bid to build.

Within that, however, we need a more important national debate about where housing is to go and about how we are to deliver levelling up so that we can get good houses, good jobs and good infrastructure in those parts of the country where people have drifted away—provincial towns in the midlands and the north—to seek employment elsewhere. I draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to the excellent article in *The Times* today by our former leader, our noble Friend Lord Hague. We need to address the levelling-up agenda, and we can do it within the planning system, but if we do not, we will be in the deepest trouble, because we will not be able to deliver our principal political objectives.

I want to make two other points. First, I draw the attention of my hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Department to the concern about the building safety fund and how it affects the leaseholders of Nobel House. I have written to the Secretary of State urgently, and I have now had two letters from his colleague, the noble Lord Greenhalgh. Unhappily, the last letter, which arrived today, was in response to my letter to the Secretary of State of 17 December 2020—I did have a previous response to a letter I sent a month later—but this is now absolutely urgent. These leaseholders are in the deepest trouble because of the failure of Avon Estates properly to register a claim for the building safety fund and, indeed, for the waking watch fund.

Finally, on another element of the Queen's Speech, the welcome ban on conversion therapy lacks any detail on how it will work. The accompanying notes imply that people who are inflicting it at the moment might get protected. We need assurance on that very shortly.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Nominations closed at 5 o'clock this afternoon for candidates for the post of Chair of the Backbench Business Committee. One nomination has been received, and a ballot will therefore not be held. I congratulate Ian Mearns on his re-election as Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

5.7 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab) [V]: Sadly, the Queen's Speech demonstrated a failure to act on acute social housing shortages, while thousands languish on housing waiting lists. It failed adequately to protect renters as the evictions ban and furlough schemes come to an end, and it failed to act urgently on fire safety and to protect leaseholders and residents from the cost of a crisis they did not cause.

On social housing, the reality is that, over the last five years, less than 10% of the amount needed has been built, but the Government had absolutely nothing to say. They should have adopted calls from organisations such as Shelter, which has suggested an investment of at least £12.8 billion a year over 10 years, which would have delivered 90,000 social rented homes a year.

On private renters, of course the Government reaffirmed commitments to end section 21 no fault evictions, but we have been waiting for over two years for that. If the

Government honour their promise, that still leaves a glaring lack of protection for all those tenants in pandemic arrears who can still legitimately be evicted. The Government should have set out a package of support for them.

Finally, on cladding and fire safety, we saw nothing: no support for the victims and no remediation deadlines, just the promise of a building safety regulator. Members across this House have repeatedly called on Government to protect leaseholders and residents from the cost of a crisis they did not cause. Absurdly, the Government told us that amendments that defined responsibility for the cost of remediating fire safety defects were too complex an issue to go in a Bill whose purpose was to deal with the responsibility for fire safety defects, and it seems they were also too complex to go in the Queen's Speech. The Government know that the building safety fund only covers unsafe cladding, yet 70% of the buildings surveyed have non-cladding fire safety defects. They know that there is no support available at all for interim measures such as increased insurance premiums and waking watches. They know that providing cladding remediation funding for buildings over 18 metres yet forcing leaseholders in buildings under 18 metres to pay is simply unjust. The Government must honour their moral duty to these victims. They must provide up-front funding to remediate all residential buildings urgently and finally legislate to protect leaseholders and residents from the cost of the crisis they are not responsible for. It is not a complex issue; it is a moral issue, and the Government need to sort it out.

5.11 pm

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): It is with some irony that I follow the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) and look over the border from Wales. In Wales we look enviously at the Queen's Speech and many of the reforms that are being made to the housing market, because the housing market in Wales has stalled. At the moment, according to the Welsh Government's own figures for 2018-19, the housing market is at 35.5% less than when devolution started. For anyone who is in any doubt about the responsibility for that shocking revelation, I remind them that the Welsh Labour party has been in control of this policy area since the start of devolution—for 22 years.

The border in Montgomeryshire is incredibly porous and we do not want the continuing brain drain. We do not want a generation continually moving over the border to England. We need an enrichment of our own communities in Montgomeryshire, and for that we need the kind of reform that we find in this Queen's Speech. I commend those on the Treasury Bench for much of it.

One thing that I will pull out is renters' reform. The reaction that we have heard from other Members and from Shelter and Generation Rent rightly highlights that this reform is not just needed but is hugely long overdue. I welcome what is going to happen in England and, again, look very enviously from the Welsh side of the border. In Montgomeryshire many young people are unable to buy their own home. For that to change, we need to build, and at a rate that has not been seen since the beginning of devolution.

I have to confess that Lord Hague, whom we heard referenced earlier, is a constituent of mine. Sadly he cannot vote because he is in the other place, but I very much welcome the fact that he resides in Montgomeryshire.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke), who, in his op-ed, really encapsulated why Government Members need to support this Queen's Speech. There is a generation who have not had access to capital. If we are to defend the notion of capitalism and all the ideas of the good and the great that we represent, we need to build. We need to enable renters to turn into buyers and generations to have a real renaissance in their housing community. I commend those on the Treasury Bench and ask that we see these measures in Wales soon.

5.13 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): Much has been made of this Queen's Speech but it does not meet the challenges of post-pandemic Britain and continues to illustrate the weak foundations of public services after more than a decade of austerity, which impacts on my constituency. My constituents are frankly sick and tired of this Government failing to address historical inequalities after 10 years of austerity that impact on education, jobs, health and social care, housing and economic recovery in my constituency in a post-covid world.

Speaking of the world, the Queen's Speech also fails to address the international challenge and our having a foreign policy that rises to the challenge we are seeing played out on our screens today. We sit here in the mother of Parliaments, the House of Commons, living under the rule of law, upholding fundamental freedoms for all who live in our green and pleasant land without any fear and without having our rightful connection to it denied. Palestinians do not live in the same security; rather, they live in constant fear of being forcibly dispossessed from their ancestral homes by the Israeli army. They have been abandoned by the international community, and they have been abandoned by us.

This weekend was the 73rd anniversary of what the Palestinians call the Nakba—the catastrophe; the day that marked the beginning of their dispossession in 1948. That dispossession continues—by bombs, by mob lynching, by expulsions, all against innocent Palestinian civilians. These crimes are the root cause of the tragic violence we are seeing across the Holy Land today. When this Government urge the restoration of calm in Palestine, they must remember that Palestinians have been robbed of their calm for 73 years, with the occupation's checkpoints, the siege in Gaza and the various types of discrimination against Palestinians across the Holy Land.

Israeli human rights groups such as B'Tselem, international groups such as Human Rights Watch, and others have concluded from painstaking analysis that the Israeli Government stand guilty of the internationally defined crime of apartheid. I ask: how should that affect our relationship with Israel? This is not a conflict with two equal opposing sides; rather, one people dominates the other through illegal occupation, siege, dispossession and discrimination.

If we claim that there are two equal sides, why is it that we recognise only one while we have yet to recognise Palestine? Israel is the occupier of the Palestinian Territories, not the other way round. Israel has placed Gaza under siege, not the other way round. Israel is dispossessing Palestinians with illegal settlements, not the other way round. Israel applies policies of apartheid, not the other way round.

[Naz Shah]

The just and peaceful solution we all seek will not be possible until the UK and its allies recognise this imbalance and take effective action to address it. The violence will not end until impunity does. The Government's support for a ceasefire in Gaza is welcome and vital to preventing further needless loss of life, but there will be no sustainable and just peace in Palestine and Israel until all are equal and accountable before the law.

The Government must therefore urgently support the following actions: an independent investigation by the International Criminal Court into the situation in Palestine; a special session of the Human Rights Council looking into potential war crimes and accountability based on human rights; a review, in line with our own laws, of all licences issued for arms and equipment used by the Israeli security forces that may be used, directly or indirectly, to commit acts of internal repression, external aggression, including de facto annexation, or violations of international humanitarian law; and an end to the empty words of a two-state solution while recognising only one state; and, finally, recognition of the state of Palestine.

5.17 pm

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): Back to housing, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I welcome the Queen's Speech last week and remain very enthused by what lies ahead in the planning Bill. There is no question but that the UK needs to build more affordable homes. In my humble opinion, we should all aspire to a much higher rate of home ownership so that everyone can take an equity share in their future. Having a place to live that we call home is surely one of the most fundamental rights that we have.

The Government are really investing in this. We have a new £11.5 billion affordable homes programme, a new mortgage guarantee scheme, discounts for first-time buyers, the abolition of section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 on no-fault evictions, the extra £140 million in discretionary housing payments, plus much more. It is a good news story.

However, the thrust of my argument today is that while there is a clear need for new housing, it needs to be in areas that have the capacity to absorb it. To put it bluntly, it cannot be at the expense of the quality of life that our constituents enjoy, notably in the south-east, and it must not include building on the green belt, eroding what is left of our open spaces or ripping the heart out of our rural communities. I therefore urge the Government to take note of what my constituents in Bracknell and Wokingham are telling me.

In Bracknell Forest, a total of 1,688 new houses were built last year, a 123% increase over the previous year. Of those, 404—23% of the overall target—are affordable homes, with 125 for affordable home ownership and 279 for affordable rent, as well as 107 new houses for the elderly. So we are doing it, but it is wrong that councils should be forced to build on whatever scraps of land are left over. It is a similar picture in Wokingham, where the council was almost powerless to stop the activities of speculative developers.

I therefore urge the Government please to consider the following. The ripping up of the Lichfield table was a welcome step, but I would now propose a new formula

that focuses on residual land availability as a percentage of the total area. If there is nothing left in a constituency except for residual farmland, golf courses or school playgrounds, do not build on it. We must also build on urban and brownfield sites, and we should build up, not out. Areas such as the midlands, the north-west and the north-east are full of such potential development sites and investment is needed there.

I am led to believe that up to 1 million homes across the UK are currently unoccupied. Councils must make the best use of them. Permissions for a further 1 million homes have already been granted too, so let us do this with a time limit. We also need extra protections for farmland, so let us please impose punitive and progressive taxes on those who seek to build on what is left of it in our constituencies. To be frank, the net zero argument is daft. If we concrete over trees, fields and hedgerows and then plant a few daisies, do not be surprised if the oxygen stops flowing.

We must allow our councils to honour existing local plans and not have extra targets forced upon them. We need to allow them the autonomy to say no and give our communities a proper voice. Democratic consent must therefore be implicit in any new Bill, and it must not become a weapon for the big state. Finally, there is no moral justification for concreting over our green and pleasant land with yet more dark satanic mills. Not only will we continue to haemorrhage loyal voters who have simply had enough, as we saw last week in the council elections, but we will never get that land back, so let us please ensure that the planning Bill becomes what we would wish it to be.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): In order to accommodate all speakers who have applied, after the next speaker I will reduce the time limit to three minutes.

5.21 pm

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. According to Shelter, a quarter of a million people were homeless and stuck living in temporary accommodation at the start of the pandemic, and more than two thirds of all homeless people living in temporary accommodation are in London. That equates to one in every 52 people living in the capital. In Lewisham, there are currently 10,000 people on the housing register, 7,739 people are living in temporary accommodation, and we have waiting times of up to 10 years for a two-bedroom property and 22 years for one with four bedrooms.

One of my constituents, a health worker in the NHS, was placed in temporary accommodation with her three children, aged between three and seven, nearly a year ago. She said:

"We have a single room with a door, a kitchen and a toilet. My 2 girls share a single bed and I share the other with my 3-year-old son. I work with covid patients and living in a single room with my kids does not allow me to isolate if and when I need to".

Another constituent, who has been on the housing register for five years, lives in a two-room hostel with shared facilities with her four children. During their time at the hostel, a shotgun was let off by a neighbour and they have endured other antisocial behaviour. They have also dealt with disrepair such as broken windows and cockroach infestations. The family are at breaking point. Another constituent, living in the private rented

sector with her 12-year-old and 22-year-old with mental health conditions, is facing a section 21 eviction after eight years, having raised numerous complaints of disrepair.

The daily anxieties that my constituents are facing are unconscionable. Far too many lack even the basic security of knowing that there will be a roof over their head and a safe place to sleep. Since 2010, there has been a 78% increase in the number of children living in temporary accommodation. Lockdown and home schooling has been hard enough for most of us, but when someone lives in poor conditions with no space to learn or play it becomes unbearable. This Queen's Speech could have been an opportunity to offer hope to my constituents that many of those problems would be fixed.

The Conservatives' 2019 manifesto promised to ban section 21 evictions, yet in the Queen's Speech this commitment has been watered down from a renters' reform Bill to publishing a consultation on a White Paper. It looks like this commitment has been pushed into the long grass, but my constituents cannot wait any longer. Equally, the Queen's Speech did not include a Bill to improve regulation of social housing, despite a Government White Paper on the subject last year. The paper put forward a new charter for social housing residents to ensure that they are safe, live in good quality homes and have access to redress when things go wrong, yet it is now nowhere to be seen.

Finally, we will never really tackle the problem without commitment to investment in a new generation of social rented homes that are genuinely affordable for families on low and average incomes. My constituents desperately need this, and until it happens thousands of families will continue to go to sleep at night not knowing whether they will ever have anywhere that they can truly call home.

5.25 pm

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): The crisis of unaffordable housing is shredding our social contract. What are we actually offering some of our young people today—£50,000-worth of student debt and a room in a shared house, if they are lucky? In the new town of Charlton Hayes in my south-west constituency of Filton and Bradley Stoke, a new build three-bedroom terraced house now costs more than £330,000. In 1995, the average house price in my constituency was £53,000, which was approximately 2.75 times the average annual salary. Now the average house price is about £293,000, which is more than nine times the average salary. Of course I welcome the Government's commitment to build 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s, but it does not go far enough; we need to be bolder and more ambitious.

Shelter has said that we will need 2 million more social homes in 10 years to match the growing need. I welcome the £12 billion of investment in affordable housing over the next five years, and the unlocking of £38 billion of public and private affordable housing investment. Moves to speed up the planning process will also help, but the manifesto on which my party fought and won the 1951 general election stated:

"Housing is the first of the social services. It is also one of the keys to increased productivity. Work, family life, health and education are all undermined by overcrowded homes. Therefore a Conservative and Unionist Government will give housing a priority second only to national defence."

I could not agree more.

At the launch of our 2015 manifesto, David Cameron said that

"Conservatives have committed to building a property-owning democracy for generations".

However, analysis by the Centre for Policy Studies shows that in the decade following 2010, the fewest new houses were built in England since the second world war. The same could have been said for the 2000s, the 1990s and probably every decade before that for the past half-century. The inability of Governments of all political persuasions in the past few decades to address the housing crisis means that the simple laws of supply and demand push house prices even further.

I have to say that too many colleagues across the House have made a virtue of opposing much needed housing development anywhere in their own areas. How many hon. Members churn out leaflet after leaflet making pronouncements that we need affordable local homes for local people, but then oppose just about every single planning application in their constituencies, using excuses like, "They're the wrong type of houses" or "They're in the wrong place"?

In the post-war era, Britain faced a similar housing crisis and a Conservative Government solved it. Harold Macmillan oversaw a programme that built 2.8 million homes in the 1950s and 3.6 million in the 1960s. That is the sort of ambition that we should have today.

5.28 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): "Build back better" is not just a simple catchy headline. Quite rightly, the Prime Minister and the Government have created the expectation that we will build back better, and in time the great British public will judge whether they believe we have achieved that aim.

Today's subject for debate is "Affordable and Safe Housing for All". A significant measure of our commitment to build back better will be how well we have driven down the harmful emissions of the built environment. It was a Conservative Government who set in law the commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050, and only recently this Conservative Government strengthened that commitment with a pledge to reach a 78% reduction by 2035—just 14 years from now.

Housing accounts for 14% of total UK emissions, so I am glad to make the case in this debate for stepping up our efforts to drive harmful emissions from our homes. We must start by including in the planning White Paper tangible and ambitious measures to deliver environmentally friendly protections and climate change mitigation. They must be part of a legislative framework that determines the quality and efficiency of new homes. We need to strengthen energy efficiency standards and we certainly need to review how energy performance certificates are organised—if you have ever tried to get one, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will know that it is an absolute nightmare.

We need strong assessment of the environmental impacts of the built environment. We need to bolster the national planning policy framework and drive up the requirements for net-gain biodiversity. Basically, in my view, the build back better White Paper must in effect become the green Bill. The Government and the Queen's Speech have set out a commitment to support growth through significant investment in infrastructure,

[Derek Thomas]

skills and innovation, and to pursue growth that levels up every part of the UK to enable the transition to net zero. The Committee on Climate Change has already made its message clear, saying that

“the 2020s must be the decisive decade of progress and action on climate change”

including by taking on the significant task of “renovating and decarbonising the UK’s...homes.”

We must turn to fixing the problem rather than keep building on it. There is no better way to do that than by transforming the house building sector to ensure it has a highly skilled, highly motivated workforce that leads the world in developing and building homes that are great to live in, cheap to run and carbon neutral. To achieve this, a concerted cross-departmental effort must be made to ensure that planning rules accept only the greenest homes; that construction colleges shift towards teaching the latest methods and technologies, harnessing young people’s interest in the environment; and that building companies large and small have every reason to take on and train apprentices to build the homes in which we can be proud to live.

5.31 pm

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): I want to talk about my constituency, which has been in the news recently, and the problems it faces. There are many intergenerational households in my constituency, and they are often overcrowded, not out of choice but because people cannot afford housing in the private sector and there are long waiting lists for social housing. Many of them are on the minimum wage, on zero-hours contracts and in insecure work, and most are unable to work from home. They are the factory workers, kitchen workers and hospital workers. Many do not have cars and have to use public transport.

It is not uncommon for many people to occupy one house—perhaps six people living in a two-bedroom house. If one person gets infected, how are they supposed to self-isolate in that house? For those and many other reasons, it has been quite hard for many people to self-isolate. The Government say they have provided money and support, but that is not correct—certainly not in Bolton, because the rules are so vague and unclear and access to money and support has been an extreme nightmare for my constituents. In fact, it was recently reported that Tory-controlled Bolton Council was found to have the lowest rate of uptake, as the council had made it exceptionally hard for people to access support.

I have raised this issue for many months, but to date nothing has been done. Instead, we hear Ministers talk about the issue of vaccine hesitancy, trying to blame my constituents for the issues we have. Let me explain: the vaccine roll-out in parts of Bolton that are in my constituency was done differently from how it was done in other places. We started with one vaccination centre in the town centre, with around five vaccinators. That was supposed to cover six sevenths of my constituency—a massive area. Some people have to take three buses to get to the town centre.

I raised this issue with the powers that be and the people involved in the vaccine roll-out—I mentioned the locality, the issue of accessibility and the fact that vaccination rates were low because of that. I asked for

two additional fixed vaccination centres in my constituency, but that has not yet happened. Over the weekend, we had a temporary vaccination site which was able to vaccinate around 5,000 people. That shows that there is no vaccine hesitancy; the problem lay in the original roll-out.

I am not trying to criticise or blame anyone. Everyone has been working really hard in the NHS, and I pay tribute to all the volunteers who have been acting as marshals, the St John Ambulance brigade and everyone else who has been involved in rolling out the programme. But we have to remind Ministers that their words carry consequences and have effects. I have already had emails from constituents saying, “Well, many of us British people did not go abroad, and therefore your people are causing the infections.” These kinds of comments must be made very carefully.

5.35 pm

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in response to the Queen’s Speech, which laid out an ambitious and exciting programme of legislation. It is a Queen’s Speech to build back better from the pandemic, and it is the literal sense of building that is an intrinsic part of the theme of today’s debate.

A property-owning democracy is at the core of what we as Conservatives believe, and I wholeheartedly share the Prime Minister’s desire to move from generation rent to generation buy. I well remember the day I bought my first flat. It was the realisation of an ambition and the culmination of working hard and saving harder, but for too many young people today, this dream is beyond reach. In my constituency, house prices are now more than 10 times earnings. Despite many thousands of new homes being built already, in the past five years, Aylesbury has seen prices rise by 27%. The market therefore clearly calls for a greater supply of housing, but it is important that local development always reflects local circumstances and listens to local voices. I am grateful that Ministers did indeed hear the concerns of local people over the previously proposed algorithm, and I am confident that they will do so again as they move forward with the planning Bill.

The consultation that has already taken place contains some bold and praiseworthy ideas. I will certainly welcome proposals that could be used sensitively to redevelop and renew town centres such as Aylesbury, becoming places where people really do want to live, work, visit and invest. Carefully thought through densification and regeneration can undoubtedly help to reinvigorate towns and at the same time preserve our precious green belt. I am particularly pleased that the planning Bill will ensure that infrastructure is delivered at the same time as new houses, not years after. Anyone trying to drive through Aylesbury will agree that that is a long overdue change.

I have one small suggestion for my right hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues in the Department, which is to consider the issue of empty commercial buildings that are all but abandoned by absentee owners—often overseas companies sitting on the land for its potential capital growth over decades but with no interest in a sense of place or community now. Aylesbury, unfortunately, has a few of those structures. They spoil the streetscape and are an impediment to ambitious and imaginative plans for development. Those sites could be much better used. The buildings could be repurposed

for hospitality, retail or housing, or they could be demolished to create further brownfield sites. I hope that the ministerial team will look into ways of enabling that to happen.

The people of Aylesbury are far from nimbys. We already expect some 16,000 houses to be built in the next 30 years, but those developments must be right for residents, both new and old. Aylesbury garden town can help to fulfil that as a project, because it is not about bricks and mortar; it is about creating communities.

5.38 pm

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab) [V]: Housing has become an increasingly expensive commodity, consuming an ever larger proportion of a family's disposable income. Many people in this country no longer have the prospect of being able to buy their own home, and private sector rental costs have grown out of all proportion to incomes, especially in our large cities, and most of all in the capital, London.

Five years ago, I co-authored a report with my friend Simon Jose entitled "Building Homes for Britain". In that report, we proposed that local authorities could work regionally to build huge numbers of new homes based on the German passive house model. These houses are built in factories not too far away from the sites in which they will finally be based. Their most important element is the energy they save, which can help to reduce consumption by up to 90%.

Simon and I proposed using a national housing investment bank to help fund these new housing developments. The bank would be set up by statute, and the taxpayers' money needed to fund the building projects would be match-funded by some of the UK's largest pension funds—organisations that we spoke to and that were very sympathetic to the idea. Let us imagine for a moment a future where mass house building, managed responsibly and ably by vastly experienced local authorities, not only delivers the affordable homes that this country so desperately requires, but saves its tenants a huge sum of money every month in reduced energy bills and much lower rental costs. Suddenly, some of the UK's most hard-pressed families, particularly those who have been hit hardest financially by the pandemic, would have considerably more disposable income available, and the construction work itself would ensure increased economic activity and employment.

Our report showed that for every £1 of taxpayers' money invested in housing construction, the economic output equals £2.84 in local activity, and that would have a multiplier effect across the whole of the UK economy. More apprenticeships and construction jobs would be needed, thus helping to create work in relatively well-paid sectors and encourage more young people into training and education within the construction industries.

In total, our report forms the basis of a blueprint for housing regeneration. It is not about construction for profit, but about construction of homes based on need. If we truly want a more stable, more prosperous society, which will give every citizen the opportunity to live in a decent, affordable home, it seems to me that the Government, even this current Conservative Government, should adopt our ideas and get on with building the homes that Britain really needs.

5.41 pm

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): I warmly welcome last week's Queen's Speech, which helps to meet the challenges of recovering from this pandemic while also delivering on our 2019 manifesto commitments. More importantly, it aims to improve people's lives on a day-to-day basis. Whether it is backing our NHS, supporting our police to protect our communities, or improving our infrastructure, this Queen's Speech and this Government show that they are committed to delivering the people's priorities.

Our challenge in Bolsover is to try to change our local economy so that we have skilled jobs and a skilled workforce to meet those jobs. There are huge elements of the Queen's Speech that help us move in the right direction—whether it is the skills and the lifetime skills guarantee; whether it is the freeport, which is bringing £1 billion of investment just down the M1 to the east midlands; whether it is on infrastructure and connectivity; or, indeed, whether it is on affordable housing. Bolsover has been a location for many houses that are worth £400,000 or £500,000, but that is astronomical for people who are on the average wage in my constituency. Unfortunately, we cannot improve an area in a sustainable way without having jobs, housing and education side by side.

There are too many young people in my constituency who cannot get on the housing ladder. As we increasingly move towards an ageing population, it will be incredibly important that these communities are sustainable, that young people are able to live near their parents, and that they are able to send their own children to good schools locally. I really welcome the fact that we are making affordable housing a central part of what we are doing as a Government, because without that, communities such as South Normanton, Clowne, Shirebrook and Bolsover will not be sustainable over the coming years. We already have fantastic communities in my constituency, but our challenge is to build a better Bolsover where every young person can fulfil their potential to get a good job locally and buy their own home. This is not about Westminster giving us free gifts or giving us anything; it is often about working locally and it is good to know that this Government have our backs when it comes to our local endeavours.

5.44 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Last Monday, a mere 80 hours after polling stations had closed, a leaflet fell on our doormat. Even though consent is already in place for 4,000 homes, which is more than necessary, it was the start of a consultation, a new local plan for Warwick and Leamington and the wider area. So many constituents in Bishop's Tachbrook, Barford, Budbrooke, Hampton Magna and Hatton in my constituency will be rightly alarmed by what is being proposed, because it will be underpinned by the new planning Bill, which is nothing short of a developers' charter.

Let us be honest: the Queen's Speech did not present a realistic plan to fix the housing crisis. After all, we have seen an absolute reduction of 200,000 social rent homes since 2010. Where were the proposals to build more council housing and the 150,000 social rent homes that are needed and have been called for by Shelter and by Opposition Members? Since 2010, Warwick District

[*Matt Western*]

Council in my constituency has built only 21 council homes. Where was the security for private renters? The Government promised better protection, but the renters reform Bill has been kicked into the long grass. Where was the ambition to invest in existing council housing stock or to address some of the considerable inequalities that have been exposed in the past year?

What pains me so greatly is that in this year of COP26, the Government lack ambition to build zero-carbon homes. We are five years on from 2016, the date by which the last Labour Government promised to introduce them. Five lost years, 1 million zero-carbon homes that would have been delivered by a Labour Government—just imagine.

I will leave for another day topics such as higher education, but in the few seconds that remain, let me highlight a few other major issues in the Queen's Speech—a Queen's Speech with barely a full sentence on social care, perhaps the greatest challenge of our times along with climate change, which received little more. That point brings me to the need for a network of 2 million electric vehicle charging points, as highlighted by the National Infrastructure Commission and Sir John Armitt. Today, we have just 23,000 public EV charging points.

The Queen's Speech failed to recognise that commuting has changed forever. Instead, it favours iron rails over fibre-optic cables. It promises freeports, the emperor's new clothes. It promises, or claims, a jobs miracle, but it is a jobs mirage—low-paid, insecure work, zero-hours contracts, a gig economy. Finally, there is voter ID and the suppression of public protests. No wonder Her Majesty looked so ill at ease delivering her Gracious Speech.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I will just caution the hon. Gentleman that in this Chamber we do not mention Her Majesty's opinions on any political matter at all. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman was being careful in the way he said that remark, so I will not reprimand him any further, but just for the advice of new Members who might not have listened to a Queen's Speech debate before, nobody has any idea whether Her Majesty likes any policy or not.

5.47 pm

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con): I must say that the Government side of the House absolutely agrees with what you have just said, Madam Deputy Speaker. It was almost a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) until that point in his speech, but I venture to suggest that the environmental achievements of this Government dwarf anything attempted by any Labour Government.

This Gracious Address was a Queen's Speech for the next generation. The draft Online Safety Bill will protect our children online and make sure that what is illegal offline is also illegal online. The Environment Bill will protect our children's environmental heritage. There was a commitment to recover our public finances so that we do not leave the next generation in unnecessary debt. The planning Bill has the heavy responsibility of balancing a commitment to build the homes that the next generation absolutely need with protection of the green spaces that are absolutely our children's inheritance, too.

The importance of green space has been well rehearsed from a health and mental wellbeing perspective, but green spaces will also be very important in achieving our environmental targets; they capture carbon, are important for air quality and provide space to prevent flooding. Protecting the green belt will be vital in meeting our very ambitious and important environmental targets.

The White Paper that the Government produced last year was a clear step in the right direction in striking that delicate balance. Local plans will be at the heart of trying to strike the right note, protecting the green spaces that local people love while developing the homes that we need. I am glad that they will be streamlined so that we can stop the ridiculous situation in which we found ourselves in Sevenoaks: our local plan, which was supported by local people and would have delivered hundreds of homes, was thrown out by the planning inspector on the basis of a tiny technicality. That was absolutely absurd, so I strongly support the Government in what they are trying to do to streamline the process.

I also support the traffic light system being put in place, which will offer protection to the green belt. We must ensure that this is reflected in the housing targets given to local areas, because although we absolutely must and should build, we need to show flexibility so that we can protect our green belt and areas of outstanding natural beauty, which are as much our children's inheritance as are decent homes to live in.

5.50 pm

Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (Alba): Housing is pivotal in any society at any time, but it is critical in one devastated by covid. As a coronavirus recession beckons and climate change threatens, it is more pivotal than ever. Housing is a devolved matter, but factors and levers remain reserved to Westminster and are therefore critical for the ability of the Scottish Government and Scottish local government to respond.

There are three clear reasons why housing is critical. First, homelessness, couch-surfing and overcrowding are all increasing. Secondly, construction and economic stimulus are essential to create jobs and boost business. Thirdly, with the increasing challenge of climate change threatening, we require to act; and not just prepare for COP26 as a conference, but prepare to act as a society.

Some progress has been made by the Scottish Government. Ending the sale at a discount of council housing was long overdue. That has driven a change from social rent to welfare housing when renting should be a matter of choice, not something forced on people as a result of financial necessity. The Scottish Government have made a commitment to building 10,000 new homes for social rent per annum over the next 10 years. Frankly, that is underwhelming. We require to be building tens of thousands per annum, not 10,000.

Much more requires to be done, and that takes money. That is what this Queen's Speech is missing, because the Scottish Government will require the funding and borrowing powers, all of which they are denied. The election has taken place in Scotland, and we can argue over the outcome of the mandate, but what is clear is that the status quo of the United Kingdom was yet again rejected by the people of Scotland. Therefore, they should have the right, through their Parliament, to take steps to provide the housing they require for their

communities, and they should be able to have their Government access the funds that are necessary and that are there.

That is not just about addressing the housing crisis that exists, even in my own constituency, which has seen an increase in population and a decrease in available stock; it is about creating, as President Obama said, shovel-ready projects so that we can keep people in work. We require to create jobs. We require to boost business. As COP26 beckons, we have to recognise that the purpose of building new houses is also to retrofit old ones at the same time. It is not just a matter of addressing fuel poverty, which remains a significant problem in Scotland, even as we are coming into better weather; it is also about ensuring that our properties are fit for purpose for achieving net zero, so that we can meet the challenge of climate change.

It is for those reasons that we require to build homes, and in order to build homes the Scottish Government need the power to borrow money so that they have the cash to spend.

5.53 pm

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): I am delighted to speak in this debate on the Queen's Speech, and what better matter for me to speak about than housing, considering that the second office of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is currently in the process of moving to Wolverhampton? That news has been met with great delight across the city. I recently had a meeting with the local DWP, which is already recruiting for setting up the new MHCLG office. It is a credit to James Attwood and his team at the DWP, who are passionate about making sure that we get more people in Wolverhampton into jobs.

Why is that so important? Wolverhampton is looking to be at the forefront of brownfield-first development. We now have the National Brownfield Institute in Wolverhampton, and we want to pioneer new technologies, through modern methods of construction, to help protect our green belt but also ensure that we get affordable housing. We have just over 10% of green space in Wolverhampton, and we want to make sure that we keep it. We have prominent campaigns, such as Save the Seven Cornfields, the Lower Penn group and the Wolverhampton Environment Centre, which are trying to protect beautiful areas in and around Wolverhampton. They are a lifeline for so many people in our city to enjoy nature, but we also need houses. The argument always come back, "We don't have enough brownfield", but that is categorically not true in Wolverhampton, where we have a lot of brownfield sites, empty retail space and a large city centre that can be filled with a lot of residential accommodation. We are delighted by the towns fund, the future high streets fund and investment into our city, but more needs to be done to see a transformational shift of private investment into the city to help build those houses.

To summarise, this is very simple: we need more housing, especially affordable housing; we have an abundance of brownfield sites or underutilised buildings within our city; and we need to protect the small amount of green belt that we have. So I will fully support these planning reforms, because they provide all of that for Wolverhampton, to ensure that our city goes from strength to strength, keeps the green belt that we love so much and also provides the affordable housing that we need in our city.

5.56 pm

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The Queen's Speech has failed to meet the everyday challenges facing my constituents in Edmonton, who want safe, affordable homes, well-paid jobs, and funding for the public services they rely on. Though many across the House like to paint London as the hub for middle-class metropolitan elites, nothing could be further from the truth: the unemployment rate in Edmonton is almost 12%, compared with the national average of 6.3%; 39% of my constituents are paid below the real living wage; in the Edmonton Green and Lower Edmonton wards, almost half of the children grow up in relative poverty; and Edmonton has one of the highest rates of unaffordable housing in the country. If the Government truly want to level up, they must act now to reduce inequality across the entire country.

The Government claim to be the party of aspiration, so I looking forward to hearing what they are going to do to close the gap in racial wealth disparities in home ownership, especially in London. I therefore put to the Minister three priorities from my constituents. First, what are the Government going to do for my constituents living in Methven Court, Prowse Court, Brickland Court, Geary Court and Golden Lion Court, who remain trapped in unsafe buildings? If the recent fire at New Providence Wharf showed us anything, it was that we need a comprehensive building safety fund, fully funded by the Government and industry, that applies to all high-rise buildings, irrespective of height or tenure and which covers all fire safety defects and associated costs.

Secondly, half of my constituents rent privately, and there was nothing in this Queen's Speech for them. They face a rent debt crisis, with arrears that built up during the pandemic but with no offer from the Government for rent relief. The Government must therefore act now to provide rent relief, scrap no-fault evictions and give the Labour Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, the necessary powers to introduce rent controls in the capital. Finally, the Queen's Speech said nothing about the huge shortfalls in funding that face local authorities. Since 2010, this Government have cut Enfield Council's budget by an estimated £178 million, and the council expects to see income drop further, by £68 million, as a result of the pandemic. The Government need to reverse those cuts and reinvest in our public services.

In conclusion, we are emerging from the worst recession for 300 years and the worst public health crisis in a generation. The Government should have seized this moment to deliver the safe and affordable housing my constituents need, and not make it harder for them to vote.

5.58 pm

Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): Let me set the scene. The Friday before Christmas, I was stood in the road with rain and hail lashing down. It was pitch black, at half five in the evening. A gentleman was stood in front of me with a hi-vis jacket, a pair of Wellingtons and an umbrella. He handed me a pair of keys, because I had just purchased my first house, in my early 30s. We were moving in, and despite the weather and the very stressful day, which I would never like to share with anybody, I would like that experience to be felt by so many people across my constituency, especially those of my generation. It is very important, and the

[Gary Sambrook]

measures in this Queen's Speech, particularly the proposed housing legislation, will enable a set of circumstances where more people can get on to the property ladder and experience the benefits of a property-owning democracy.

I appreciate that some people become very anxious about planning applications for housing. That is primarily for two reasons: first, because of the protection of green open spaces; and secondly, because of the strain it can put on local resources. That is why it is shameful that Labour-run Birmingham City Council has had a commitment to building on 8 hectares of green open space and parkland every year; it has been allowing housing estates to sit empty for years across the constituency, in particular in Gildas Avenue in Kings Norton, while building on green open spaces. That is why, along with local campaigners and councillors, I have been doing what I can to make sure we get brownfield sites back into use as quickly as possible to give young people like me the opportunity to own their own home.

I was grateful that the Government's White Paper mentioned Bournville because I am very lucky, along with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), to represent part of Bournville. It is a beautiful suburb, and if we can replicate around the country what the Cadbury family did in that area of Birmingham the Government will be doing very well in their ambition to build good-quality decent homes.

Finally, I want to raise the issue of procurement, which is addressed in the Queen's Speech. For many years the boiler in the Hollymoor centre in Frankley Great Park was broken. Councillor Simon Morrall, working with the community group, got some quotes from private sector contractors. Their contractors said it would cost between £60,000 and £90,000 to fix the boiler, but unfortunately the city council had to go through its approved contractor system and costs then spiralled to £450,000. That shows why I am so passionate about this issue: taxpayers across the country have been ripped off for so long with many contracts that go out for procurement. We need to sort this problem out so that taxpayers get value for money.

6.2 pm

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook), and I too remember buying my first home; it was quite a few years ago, but I am sure we have all had that experience of getting the keys for the first time and knowing what it is like to be on the property ladder and faced with a 25-year mortgage.

I want to start by welcoming the intention to update the country's planning system to deliver the high-quality, sustainable, affordable homes that communities really do need. Getting on to the housing ladder is difficult, and many of the initiatives introduced by this Government—changes to stamp duty, first home schemes, Help to Buy—are designed to make it more accessible, but the reality is that the average house costs almost eight times the average salary. In Warrington, the average price of a home has gone from £140,000 a decade ago to £210,000 today. So we must consider affordability in what we are doing. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, we all aspire to see our children and grandchildren owning their own home, so I am very supportive

of the Government's mission to reverse the fall in home ownership and to give young people an opportunity to benefit from getting on to the property ladder.

The time limit is short, but I want to briefly talk about a couple of issues. First, on getting the 1 million approved homes built in developments that have been agreed but have been land-banked by developers, we need construction to start, particularly as many of these schemes are in areas where there is a significant shortage of new homes. That has to be a priority for Government, and if developers do not move forward within a time limit, they should not expect future permissions to be granted.

Secondly, I have looked carefully at the way councils base their housing needs, and it really is important that the Government are as certain as they can be on economic needs assessments. I am sorry to be technical here, but are we using the right data to project into the future? Covid has shown how behavioural needs and habits change in a very short space of time, and some of the projections will be based on population forecasts from 2014. Given that local plans will count for a further 20 years, anything we can do to update population forecasts should be considered; we should be using the latest census data from 2021.

During the local plan-making process, we also need a clear focus on prioritising brownfield and regeneration sites. In Warrington, our town centre is in a perilous state. Rethinking planning gives us the opportunity to redefine this space close to jobs and transport links, but where the local council has an opportunity to redesignate green belt—we know that this is something developers will push for—we need to ensure, in the plan-making process, that developers are challenged by planning inspectors to ensure that regeneration and brownfield sites are a priority.

Finally, I really want us to look very carefully at the way that we reform leasehold. There are so many in the leasehold sector who have been affected by long-term leasehold decisions, and this is something that the Government can do much more on.

6.5 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be able to contribute this afternoon. I want to address two areas; the first is my deep concerns about the Government's planning Bill in the Queen's Speech. I would like to reiterate the points made by our Front-Bench team and, in particular, to highlight some local issues in Reading and Berkshire, which one of the other Berkshire MPs here has hinted at.

I am afraid that the planning Bill, as it is set out at the moment, looks as though it will sweep away 70 years of relatively sensible town planning, which started with the post-war Government's Town and Country Planning Act 1947. That is a system that has given local people and local councils, as other Members have mentioned, the right to have a say. I personally would like to see councils and local residents' groups having more of a say and big developers having less of a say. However, sadly, the Government's approach to the problem seems to be, rather than to listen to local people and, indeed, local authorities or other valid stakeholders, such as some of the countryside or planning groups, to listen to large developers and to redesign a system that has been quite accurately described, in my view, as a developers' charter.

I want to run through three specific problems that have a very direct effect on Reading and the neighbouring area of Berkshire, in other towns such as Woodley, and further afield. First, the pressure on out-of-town land—the development of green sites—in our area is enormous. We currently face a number of proposals on the outskirts of Reading that are completely unsuitable, will lead to large amounts of extra car traffic, pollution and congestion on already crowded roads, and will not necessarily solve our housing problems.

Secondly, we have the issue of unwanted development by irresponsible landlords in and around the town centre, with houses in multiple occupation over developed sites, residents overlooked, and people's back gardens taken for unnecessary development. As far as I can see, the Bill does not address these issues. In fact, it makes it easier for unwanted developments to take place because it grants developers *carte blanche*.

Thirdly, as other Members have mentioned, including the hon. Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter), there is the issue of brownfield. I am lucky to represent a town that has an ample supply of brownfield—enough in its local plan to provide all the housing that is needed in the borough of Reading until 2036. At present, we have difficulties getting that developed because of delays with developers and other issues such as contaminated land. I cannot see how the proposal from the Government to give developers yet more power and more influence on the planning process will actually address the very serious problem of developing brownfield, which is so important if we are to regenerate cities and towns in a constructive way, as other Members mentioned. So I urge the Government—the Minister is, I hope, taking notes—to rethink this proposal completely.

Secondly, I would like to raise some deep concerns about fire safety and mention correspondence that I have had with one resident that illustrates the scale of the problem. While the Government have made progress on Grenfell-style cladding—I do acknowledge that—a huge number of other related problems have not been addressed. I will give an example of just one typical block in Reading town centre: £150,000 of work is needed on fire safety doors, compartmentalisation and fire extinguishers. Please can we have some urgent action on this?

6.8 pm

Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con): At the heart of the Queen's Speech was a commitment to our nation's recovery and to building back better, greener and stronger. Planning reform is fundamental to achieving that, and I welcome the announcement in the Queen's Speech that reform will focus on ensuring that homes and infrastructure can be delivered more quickly and, crucially, that local plans will now be able to provide more certainty on the type, scale and design of development permitted on different categories of land. Beautiful villages such as Wymeswold, with its concentric circles of development over centuries and little nooks and crannies of growth over time, need to be able to maintain their character while some growth takes place.

Since becoming an MP, I have advocated more power being transferred from developers and officials such as the Planning Inspectorate and put into the hands of local communities, and local plans becoming, in effect, the tender document of local residents, instructing the market on what local people want and what will work

for their community. Grown-up conversations need to take place at local level, recognising that we need housing development but equally recognising the needs of local people and the communities in which they live. For too long, developments have been imposed on communities by the lack of a five-year land supply, or by taking surplus housing numbers from adjoining places—from Labour-run Leicester City Council, for example—into Sileby, Barrow and Shepshed. That needs to change. Linked with a 30-month timeframe to produce a local plan, that will transform the current set-up of delay, repetition of action and the inevitable outcome of piecemeal development, which often carries with it local criticism, to the unwarranted detriment of local planners, whose expertise is not currently recognised.

The average house price in Loughborough is nearly £199,000, but median earnings are £31,000—a house price to earnings ratio of 6.4. That is not an easy target for young and first-time buyers and those on low incomes. We need local people to be able to afford to stay in the area where they grew up, so I was delighted that, alongside planning reform, the Government last week reaffirmed their commitment to helping more people own their own home through the affordable homes programme, the new mortgage guarantee scheme and first homes programme. Furthermore, if the focus is put on turning empty floors above shops into affordable homes, we can also help to create a strong customer base for our high streets and town centres and so aid recovery while protecting our essential green spaces and areas of separation between settlements.

On the subject of rental reform, we have a thriving lettings market in my constituency, thanks in part to our large student population. While the vast majority of landlords provide safe accommodation and treat their tenants well, from time to time I hear of tenants who are in distress because they are living in unacceptable conditions, or their tenancy is cut short. I look forward to hearing the Government's plans on housing and planning in greater detail over the coming months.

6.11 pm

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate on the Gracious Speech.

Ensuring affordable housing for all really is a case of a tale of two Governments. It is not a competition—I wish the Minister and the UK Government well in tackling the housing crisis in England—but the Scottish Government can be judged on our actions and successes, and I suggest that there are some examples to take on in tackling common endeavours.

Since 2007, we have put housing and homelessness at the heart of policy. There is much to do, but much has been achieved. On buying, our first home fund has helped 11,000 homes to be sold and our open market shared equity scheme and our new supply shared equity scheme have helped thousands more to buy their first home. Since 2007, we have delivered 96,750 affordable homes, and we have just been re-elected on a manifesto to build 100,000 more by 2032.

During covid, we have proven to the citizens we all serve that homelessness need not exist. It is a question of political priorities and funding them properly. Since August 2018, the Housing First initiative in Scotland has helped 832 people to access permanent housing. It is a wonderful scheme, which I commend to the House.

[Alyn Smith]

But it is poverty that drives homelessness, and the Gracious Speech makes it clear that the UK Government are more interested in fighting culture wars than in fighting poverty. Poverty drives homelessness. Poverty drives precarious employment. Poverty blights the lives of millions across these islands, and this Government also can be judged by their actions. Freezing local housing allowance and continuing the bedroom tax will hurt the poorest hardest. The Resolution Foundation has found that 450,000 households are in rent arrears because of covid. This Gracious Speech offers them nothing in their continuing plight.

The Scottish Government can do much and have done much, but they can only do so much when 85% of welfare expenditure is controlled by this place. We want those powers and we want those budgets. We want all the powers of independence, not for the flags and the anthems, the old songs and the old stories, but because of what we will do with those powers. My party has concluded that independence within the European Union offers our best future, and we have just been re-elected as the national Government of Scotland with 85% of the constituency first-past-the-post seats. The fact that we have a mandate for an independence referendum is undeniable. The people of Scotland will get to make their choice between two Unions, and I am confident about standing on the SNP's record of achievement and our aspirations for the future.

6.14 pm

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate, especially as it gives me the chance to extend a welcome to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, which will set up its new headquarters in Wolverhampton later this year. Establishing a Ministry in Wolverhampton, along with a new Government taskforce into modern methods of construction, is a clear example of the Government's commitment to level up opportunity across the UK. We have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson) that it is already creating jobs in the city. It also brings a much bigger boost of anchoring the home-building industry in Wolverhampton. I assure any MHCLG staff considering a relocation to Wolverhampton, or indeed any businesses in the industry, that they will find a very warm Wulfrunian welcome.

The Government have set themselves a huge challenge to improve the planning system, and I commend their aims to ensure that we build beautiful neighbourhoods that add to people's quality of life, protect our green spaces, and make the dream of home ownership a reality for many more people. Over the coming years, we need to be innovative and imaginative to meet our housing need. Modern methods of construction will play a key part, as will rethinking city centres. We also face the challenge of an ageing population and ensuring that housing for older people ensures independence and quality of life well into our later years.

As time is short, I will turn to brownfield policy. For Wolverhampton and the Black Country, it is critical that we get brownfield policy right. Our marvellous West Midlands Mayor Andy Street has been clear that it is key to meeting our housing need for the west midlands. Although I welcome the introduction of local plans with the opportunity for restricted land designations

for green space, we have issues at the borders of the Black Country. My northern border in Wolverhampton North East is with South Staffordshire, and that beautiful green belt land is under threat to meet the additional housing numbers from the Birmingham and Black Country plan. We must ensure that the cart does not come before the horse. The worst outcome is that we build on the green belt to meet targets and then in a few years discover that those targets could have been met through other options, such as brownfield.

The brilliant work being done to make more and more brownfield land viable for housing is a game changer, and I ask that we review and make a new estimate of the number of homes that can be built on brownfield land in the west midlands over the next decades. As time is short, I finish by commending the Government on the aims set out in the Queen's Speech. I also thank them for the investment in the National Brownfield Institute in Wolverhampton and for brownfield sites in the Black Country. That is absolutely the right way forward.

6.17 pm

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) to her new position. She is already doing a great job. Today, I will speak about the housing crisis that affects far too many of my constituents. The crisis takes many forms: families living in cramped, overcrowded accommodation; renters struggling with sky-high rents in the private rented sector; leaseholders trapped in dangerous flats with the Government letting them down; and people priced out of their local areas and struggling to save enough money to buy. Too often my constituents are at the sharp end of the crisis. The Queen's Speech was an opportunity to begin to solve those problems—to build more council homes and make safety a priority for all, to end the leaseholder scandal, and to properly regulate the private rental market.

Instead, the Government are choosing to introduce a planning Bill that will take power away from local communities and hinder, not help, efforts to build more social housing. The Government's failure to invest in social housing means that, according to Shelter, 10 times as many new social rented homes were delivered through section 106 obligations as through Government investment. The planning Bill will greatly reduce the scope for local authorities to insert those obligations into planning applications, meaning less social housing despite the scale of the housing crisis that we face. Instead, the Government need to give councils the powers and money to build more social rented homes as soon as possible.

The absence of a social housing Bill is a huge gap in the Queen's Speech. It is now nearly four years since the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower. In the aftermath of that appalling event, I was involved in community engagement on behalf of the Mayor of London. I heard at first hand from those in the community who had been repeatedly ignored as they raised concerns about the safety of their homes. I pay tribute once again to the dignity and courage of the bereaved and the survivors.

In the years that have followed, the Government have repeatedly promised to reform the social housing sector. In the document accompanying the Queen's Speech, they say:

"We will also continue to develop reform of social housing regulations and look to legislate as soon as practicable."

But we simply cannot wait any longer. We need action now. The failure to include safeguards for social housing tenants and leaseholders in this year's Queen's Speech is simply unacceptable. I do welcome the Building Safety Bill, but this is yet another missed opportunity to help hundreds of thousands of leaseholders, who are being forced to pay to correct a problem that is not their fault. I urge the Government to listen to the growing consensus from across the political divide.

6.20 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): We need more homes, affordable and safe, but homes built in the right place, and it is vital that we take a brownfield-first approach. I want to focus on the hard work of shaping places. That way, colleagues who insist that their own constituencies would be wrong for new housing can instead support the necessary investments to address the viability constraints faced in many cities, such as Stoke-on-Trent, that are happy to build.

Just to put this into context, despite the viability challenges last year, Stoke-on-Trent built more than the average London borough, and 99% on brownfield sites. The decades of decline we saw under Labour have ended. Stoke-on-Trent is on the up, and according to projections from the World Population Review, it will hit a new post-war population peak towards the end of this decade. It is vital that we receive investment to help deliver new homes and overcome the current constraints of a relatively low-value market.

The Government's levelling-up fund and brownfield fund are hugely welcome, and Stoke-on-Trent must receive its fair share. This support will enable us to overcome the remediation of the most challenging sites and convert empty town centre properties to new uses. This is particularly important for Longton to build on the work of the heritage action zone and the nearly £1 million PSICA—partnership schemes in conservation areas—scheme set up by the city council and Historic England. Further investment locally is likely to realise significant results and leverage private investment on top.

Although values remain relatively low, we are seeing strong growth, and Zoopla recently reported Stoke-on-Trent as being in the top five busiest housing markets. In some tenures, the Stoke-on-Trent market is relatively untested, but when new types of development do happen, developers have consistently been surprised by how high demand has been.

Affordability is less of an issue. It is certainly not a non-issue, just less of an issue in north Staffordshire. I do not in any way want to underplay this, however. In parts of my constituency, such as Newstead and Blurton South, the average property price is 7.9 times the average salary, as reported by the Stoke *Sentinel*, but this is more of an issue of low wages. Stoke-on-Trent has one of the lowest-paid workforces in the entire country. That is why it is also hugely welcome to see the proposals for the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, helping ensure our workforce have the skills they need to access better-paid work and get on to the housing ladder.

We also desperately need to mitigate past transport planning mistakes. Indeed, this was raised only last week at the launch of our city forum. It should be not just an afterthought to development. In particular, it is vital that the Government support our bids to reopen the Stoke-Leek line and to reopen the station at Meir. It will also be essential for north Staffordshire to receive bus funding.

There is a real opportunity to level up towns and cities so that they become increasingly the right place for affordable and safe new homes. With the right support from Government, cities such as Stoke-on-Trent, with multiple hectares of brownfield land, can be the key part of meeting the Government's housing needs and building back better.

6.23 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab) [V]: I am grateful to speak in today's debate.

"A home is where the heart is"

is a quote many of us know well. A home is supposed to be a special place. For some, this is true, but for others their everyday home experience is quite miserable. For instance, last month a constituent wrote to me in desperation about the fire safety Bill. Her building is under 18 metres in height, and it has been deemed to have flammable cladding. She has been unable to get an EWS1 form—a form she needs to satisfy mortgage lenders about any potential risks from the spread of fire or non-compliant materials within the external frontage. My constituent has been trying desperately to sell her flat for over a year and a half, and she has come to the disheartening conclusion that it is simply unsellable. She tells me:

"This hardship is having a huge impact on my mental health. I am unable to sleep and am suffering badly. I am struggling to work due to this stress."

My constituent is an NHS worker. She has been playing her part during this pandemic and has been pivotal in saving lives. She, like so many others in her situation, needs help from this Government to keep her safe and to improve her quality of life. I am sure that people listening to this debate will agree with that.

Too many people and families in our country are faced with risky situations, living in risky homes and feeling at risk of harms such as dangerous cladding and no fire safety measures, energy plans that are overpriced and ineffective, and being stuck in overcrowded homes or unable to find shelter at all. Young people, women and men, can often find themselves homeless when leaving prison, or being placed in houses in multiple occupation. All these problems are avoidable. The local housing allowance remains woefully inadequate and it continues to be difficult for people to find affordable accommodation of good quality.

This year's Queen's Speech is just more evidence of the Government's refusal to carry out their duty of care for the country. What we have seen from the Government is 11 years of poverty-inducing policies, with cuts to public services and cuts to the third sector. We have seen, and are seeing, a rise in food banks, and that was the situation pre-pandemic. Post-pandemic—we are still going through it—things are even worse. Young people and families earning a decent wage cannot afford to buy their first home. New, wonderful green homes are needed, along with support to get on to the market. The Government must prioritise safety. Fixing the problems in housing from the fire safety scandal to the rise in homelessness, improving the quality of life and responding to the climate crisis are all part of building back better. I support the Labour amendment.

6.26 pm

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con): I welcome the Government's ambition to build homes, including affordable homes, to help first-time buyers and to enable extended

[Angela Richardson]

families to live close to each other, strengthening our social fabric and allowing key workers to live near to their place of work. I welcome the commitment on locally decided design codes that builders will have to abide by, on tree-lined streets and on building net zero homes. Building back beautiful; building back greener.

However, it is important that I take this opportunity to put on record the concerns of my constituents over planning and infrastructure. We need to put in place either penalties or incentive schemes to ensure that developers build out their planning permissions. The penalty currently falls on the local authority if it cannot meet its five-year housing supply. In the Waverley part of my constituency, my villages of Alfold, Cranleigh and Ewhurst continue to be inundated with homes on pristine green fields miles away from decent transport links, with crumbling water infrastructure and on flood plains. This is not alleviating the concern but creating additional worry for my constituents, who want to know what protection Ministers can give them when neighbouring villages have green-belt protection. They also want to know why they have to take the unmet need from neighbouring councils.

In the Guildford part of my constituency, the local plan is controversial. It has a brilliant regeneration site in the Weyside urban village, but the additional 14,000 homes cannot be provided as there will now be no increase in road capacity for the A3 through Guildford that was promised. I am pleased that, after a concerted effort by my hon. Friend and neighbour, the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), Conservative councillors and me, the current administration have finally agreed to review the local plan. This is why I am calling for the A3 to be tunnelled under Guildford, taking traffic out of Guildford and improving air quality. Guildford will likely be zoned for growth, which should bring funding for big infrastructure projects such as my tunnel, but we are the party of localism who brought forward neighbourhood plans, and my constituents need to understand how the zoning system will strengthen local democracy and accountability and not erode it, as they fear. I thank my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Housing Minister for their proactive engagement since I was elected, and I know that they will continue to engage in the months to come.

6.29 pm

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): What we needed to hear from the Government was a plan to build our way out of the pandemic. Instead, we have heard a litany of missed opportunities.

On housing, we have a mounting crisis. We need new sustainable homes that working people can afford. We need to tackle the scandal of homelessness and ensure that support services are available. In Slough, because of funding cuts, we had already lost our citizens advice bureau. Now we are losing our local Shelter headquarters, too—lifelines of support for so many. In the wake of the Grenfell tragedy, we urgently need to tackle unsafe cladding. We needed a plan for housing. Where is it?

On education, a generation of children have had their education disrupted. Children without computers, wi-fi or desks have been held back. University and college

students have seen academic life torn to shreds, facing uncertainty about their futures. We needed a plan for education and young people. Where is it?

We needed a plan to rebuild the jobs market to make work pay, to make jobs secure and to recognise the seismic changes to the world of work brought about by technology and the pandemic. We needed to hear the Government's plan to end fire and rehire. Where is it?

We needed action to support those on universal credit who face a real-terms cut to their income. They will be made destitute by the £20 a week reduction and they need a lifeline. Nothing from Ministers—another missed opportunity.

We needed a plan for the NHS to properly reward NHS workers, not punish them with a pay cut. In fact, health and social care workers missed out on a combined staggering £400 million by earning below the living wage. They deserve much better.

What about transport? We needed a plan for green transport. We need answers on the issues with Hitachi trains. Slough constituents want action on the western rail link to Heathrow, which again seems to have been kicked into the long grass. We must do more to support the aviation industry, which has long supported the livelihoods of so many in my Slough constituency.

And don't even get me started on the mere nine words the Government could muster on social care! Where is the Prime Minister's long-promised, oven-ready plan for social care?

In conclusion, the Queen's Speech presented the perfect opportunity to transform our public services and rebuild our economy to create the jobs and build the homes we so desperately need. Instead, we have a Government Queen's Speech which lets down the people of Slough and our nation.

6.32 pm

Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con): It is an absolute pleasure to be called to speak in support of the Queen's Speech. There is much to applaud in the Queen's Speech and we have a very ambitious programme. Today I would like to concentrate my remarks on the particular aspects that will make a difference in my constituency of Great Grimsby.

I am very pleased that there will be a modern planning Bill in this Session. It is so important that we can build and deliver new homes and infrastructure much more quickly.

I am also pleased that the levelling-up White Paper will soon be published. I often hear representatives from Opposition parties deriding levelling up. They say it is meaningless and just a gimmick. Well, I would like to explain to them what levelling up means.

Since the war and until I was elected in 2019, Great Grimsby was a Labour-voting constituency. Until May 2019, the council had been in Labour hands. What had been the result? The result was years of neglect and decline, and no focus on helping to improve residents' skills and outcomes. Labour had no local vision and no effective leadership. All that is now changing. I am here to champion Great Grimsby: to support the people of Grimsby to achieve their potential, and to ensure that businesses know that my constituency is a great place to come and invest. That is what levelling up means: improved skills, more jobs, affordable homes and safer streets.

Let me refer to one area of my constituency in particular that I am working with: the East Marsh. The people of East Marsh voted to see change. They want increased home ownership. They want to acquire the skills to enable them to get better jobs in the area. We have a lot of hard work to do, and I am working with the residents of the East Marsh to help them level up their area. The community tell me that no Labour MP or Labour councillor has ever engaged with them. Well, now their Conservative MP and Conservative council are working with them, and together we will level up.

6.34 pm

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): It is an honour to address Her Majesty's Gracious Speech. This Gracious Speech was an opportunity for the Government to once and for all tackle the appalling housing crisis facing so many across the country and in my constituency. The planning regime is too often stacked in favour of housing developers and property speculators, rather than tackling the acute needs of many of my constituents, which could be met through real social and council housing. Coupled with the disastrous legacy of right to buy in east London, we have an untenable situation, with thousands of homes now in the hands of private owners exploiting their tenants, rather than those homes going to those who need them.

We have across our country one of the worst housing crises in living memory, with millions of homeowners and tenants suffering from dangerous and substandard properties coupled with skyrocketing rents, while young people looking to get on the property ladder face insurmountable obstacles to home ownership. Four years on from the Grenfell tragedy, far from addressing the cladding scandal, the Government have financially crippled tenants by forcing them to pay for protective housing materials that should be a fundamental human right. There is not a single Bill in the Queen's Speech that either addresses the root causes of the housing crisis or tackles its worst excesses—for example, by preventing the looming wave of evictions and homelessness or reforming the private rented sector—or deals with the ruinous cost of remediation works on buildings with unsafe cladding.

This crisis has been deeply felt in my constituency of Ilford South and right across the Borough of Redbridge, where more than 13,000 households are on the council housing waiting list—the third highest figure in London. That is exacerbated by the fact that in 2019, just 306 affordable homes were built in the borough, despite families being forced to wait on the list for years. For example, those who need a three-bedroom house in Ilford will have to wait 12 years. Furthermore, significant numbers are forced to live in squalid and cramped conditions. It is little wonder that almost 20% of all cases raised with my office by my constituents since I was elected to this House relate to housing—it is by far the most of any issue.

Across our country, more than 11 million people live in properties that have unsafe cladding four years on from the Grenfell tragedy, and that is nothing short of a national scandal. In Ilford South alone, more than 100 constituents have written to me, mainly from Raphael House, Centreway Apartments and the Paragon building, who have had their life savings wiped out because their freeholders have them over a barrel for enforced remediation and waking watch costs.

That is why Labour tabled a motion earlier this year to force a vote to end the cladding scandal. Disgracefully, not only did the Government not bring forward such a measure in the Queen's Speech, but Government Members voted against protecting homeowners from fire safety costs, which are estimated to run to £10 billion nationally. It is high time that this Government made good on their failed housing policies, stopped cosyng up to Tory party donors who are housing developers and instead tackled the problems in the genuine and serious way that my constituents need.

6.38 pm

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): This Queen's Speech was an opportunity to meet the profound challenges we face after the pain and turmoil of the last year, to address the deep-seated inequalities embedded in our communities throughout a decade of Conservative rule, and to create a plan to rebuild our country, secure the economy and create jobs for today and tomorrow across all parts of our country.

But this Government's plan was a lost opportunity—a lost opportunity to take steps to invest in and create the secure, green, well-paid jobs of the future and the here and now; a lost opportunity to deliver for families and boost communities such as those in my constituency, from Pontprennau to Tongwynlais; and a lost opportunity to put a plan in place to enable young people across the country to thrive and build the skills they need. That is what my constituents in Cardiff North wanted to see. There was nothing on welfare security beyond this autumn, when business support and the uplift in universal credit will come to an end, and nothing for the excluded 3 million, who have been continuously let down by this Government.

The Government's plan offers nothing to end scandalous fire and rehire tactics. The Prime Minister told me in November that these were, in his own words, "unacceptable" and that his Government would seek "redress". That sums up this Prime Minister and his Government's proposals for the country—always hoping, never delivering, and never addressing the many systemic issues raised in this House, from jobs to health, levelling up and climate action. Always heavy on the spin but light on action.

Rhetoric does not put food on the table for my constituents. It does not create secure jobs that allow people to raise a family without having to take on a second or third job. This Tory Government's plan neither relieves nor frees people from indignity or inequality. It does not speak, either, to people's hopes and aspirations to thrive and succeed on their own terms, or to the country and the conditions they want for themselves, their children and the future of their communities. What a wasted opportunity.

Instead, I look closer to home, back in Wales, at the fantastic job that the Welsh Labour Government are doing, with 150,000 jobs protected over the past year, 100,000 proper apprenticeships created, rail back in public ownership, and the public investment of Dŵr Cymru in customers, not profit. I look at a Welsh Labour Government who are delivering free school meals during the holidays, no questions asked; the abolition of prescription charges; the most generous childcare offer across the UK, and the promise of more. What we needed in this plan was real, transformative change that challenged the baked-in inequalities and provided a real way forward.

6.41 pm

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): We have enjoyed a very interesting debate, with good contributions on all sides, and I thank all my colleagues who have taken part.

The Government have trumpeted the proposed planning reform Bill as a flagship in their legislative programme, but it is a flagship that may yet be scuppered in the docks, because it is nearly as unpopular on the Government Back Benches as it is on our side. There are certainly real problems with the current planning system that need to be addressed. We are not building the level of genuinely affordable housing the country needs, the Government abandoned the Labour Government's target for net zero housing emissions by 2016, and public trust in planning is declining because the current process is neither fair nor particularly democratic. Communities are frustrated because they feel powerless to influence planning decisions that affect their own neighbourhoods.

However, the Government's planning reforms not only fail to address those concerns but actively make the situation worse. Changes they have already introduced to permitted development are deregulating the existing system, so councils and communities no longer have the power they need to develop town centres in ways that work for local people, deliver good homes or support the local economy. It is astonishing that the Government ignored the results of their own consultation on permitted development, which roundly condemned the proposals because they disproportionately benefit property interests over local communities and ignore the need for higher standards in housing development.

The planning reform Bill compounds all that with a renewed assault on local democratic control of planning and regeneration, as we have heard from Members on both sides of the Chamber this afternoon. The Government are attempting to sell the Bill as the solution to a problem that does not really exist. Ministers say that the planning process is too slow, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and others have already told us, the problem with getting homes built is not the planning process but developers who do not build the homes once they have got consent for them.

According to the Conservative-led Local Government Association, over 1.1 million homes that received consent in the past decade have not been built. That is over half of all homes that were approved by council planning departments. The Government have done nothing in an entire decade to incentivise developers to get on and build those desperately needed homes.

One of the problems—we have heard about it from Members on the Government's own Benches today—is land banking. That is where a developer who gets approval for an application, an outcome that increases the value of the land, then sits on it and waits for land values to rise with a view to selling it on at some future point. It is a lucrative way to make money without the cost of actually building the homes. Instead of a planning Bill that will do nothing about that we need new measures that will incentivise developers to get shovel-ready new homes built far more quickly.

If the Government's planning Bill is not really about building more homes faster, what is it for? Let us have a look at what they propose to do. Planning will be taken

away from democratically elected local councils and handed over to development boards appointed by Ministers in Whitehall. It is very likely that these Conservative quangos will be stuffed full of developers greedily eyeing up local neighbourhoods.

The boards will zone areas for future development. As we have heard this afternoon from my hon. Friends the Members for Reading East (Matt Rodda), for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and others, residents living in areas designated for growth or renewal will be astonished to find that they no longer have the right to object to individual planning applications on their own doorsteps. They will have no right to object to tower blocks at the end of the road, to the concreting over of precious green space or to oversized developments that will overburden local infrastructure such roads, GP surgeries or public transport.

The Bill will lead to more situations such as Westferry, in respect of which the Secretary of State admitted breaking the law to help a Conservative party donor to dodge £40 million in tax, as he pushed an application through in the teeth of opposition from the local community, the local council and officials in his own Department. If the Bill goes through, the safeguards that protect local communities will no longer be in the Secretary of State's way. Residents will be gagged from speaking out while developers will have the right to bulldoze and concrete over local neighbourhoods pretty much at will. It is Westferry on steroids.

The Bill is nothing less than a developers' charter that silences local communities so that developers can profiteer at local people's expense. So why are the Government doing this? We have heard this afternoon from their own MPs just how unpopular the changes will be with local residents. The answer is, I am afraid, all too plain to see: according to analysis by openDemocracy, donations to the Conservative party from major developers have increased fourfold since the current Prime Minister assumed office. All that cash was not given altruistically; it was a down payment in expectation of a return. Residents will lose their right to a say over their own neighbourhood so that the Conservatives can reward the developers who increasingly bankroll their party. The Prime Minister is paying back developers by selling out communities.

The Government's proposals have been criticised by the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Town and Country Planning Association, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Local Government Association, the Countryside Alliance and even the National Trust—and no wonder, because what the Government advocate is not how good development works.

I had the privilege of chairing one of the country's biggest regeneration projects, which delivered more than 5,000 new homes. I know from that experience how regeneration works for everyone only if it is a real and strong partnership between councils, communities and developers. The best developers know that, too: they do not want to develop in the teeth of local opposition; they want to work with the local community and build something that enhances the local area. Good regeneration is about not just bricks and mortar but people. Regeneration cannot be something that is done to communities without their involvement; it must be done with them.

The Government's proposals on planning entrench sleaze. They are anti-democratic. They further undermine confidence in the planning system. They promote low-quality housing and fail to act on climate change. They

do not deliver the level of affordable housing that this country so desperately needs. The Government must think again: if they persist in this brazen attempt to sell out communities to the wealthy developers who bankroll the Conservative party, they will deserve to reap the political whirlwind that will surely follow.

6.49 pm

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): We have had a spirited debate. We have also had a sombre one when hearing from my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris). I am sure that the hearts of all in the House go out to that little boy, George Hinds, and his family and the community in Heysham for the terrible tragedy that they have suffered.

We also heard from 58 other Back-Bench Members of the House. I particularly congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson) and for Wolverhampton North East (Jane Stevenson) on their plug for the National Brownfield Institute, which I shall be visiting on Friday, as a physical manifestation of our commitment to brownfield first. The national planning policy framework says “brownfield first”; our fiscal stimulus, the £400 billion that we put into brownfield regeneration, financially demonstrates it; and we have instituted practical regulatory levers through our permitted development rights with controls changes to ensure that gentle densification using brownfield sites can most effectively occur.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) not so much on his speech, because it was as predictable as it was inaccurate, but on hanging on to his job on the Opposition Front Bench. We know that the deckchairs on Labour’s Titanic are much sought after, and we congratulate him on hanging on to his. He will make a magnificent and, I am sure, very loyal understudy to the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell).

At the heart of this Government’s pledge to unite and level up our country is an unwavering commitment not just to build back from the pandemic but to build back fairer, safer and better, and to build back more beautifully, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) both eloquently made clear. That commitment underpins our planning Bill as laid out in the Gracious Speech: a sensible transformation of our 73-year-old planning system helping us build those new homes and the vital infrastructure that communities need.

The simple truth is that our planning system has not been delivering the homes that we need for many years. It can take seven years to agree local housing plans and five years before a spade cuts the ground, and after all that time, and often after a great deal of local concern, nine in every 10 applications get approved anyway. It is also too slow, too complicated and too exclusive, and it needs to change. We will end the glacial pace of planning by mandating every council to have up-to-date local plans, as called for by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey). With local plans providing greater certainty, more local people will be better engaged to have a say about the design of their neighbourhoods—what is built, where it is built, what it looks like and what infrastructure is required to support it. We will replace

our old, analogue planning system with new, map-based systems fit for the digital age, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Damien Moore) asked.

I have heard very clearly the views of many Members across the House, including my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) and my hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt), for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) and for Bracknell (James Sunderland), to name but a few, about the importance of providing good and effective incentives to make sure that developers build out the permissions that they have. We will ensure through our reforms that such incentives are available and that they work.

I am also committed to neighbourhood plans, which my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) raised. We want to make sure that they are rolled out into areas that are less rural, and into areas that extend further north where we do not see enough of them, so that they can be effective levers for local people to plan additional homes in their neighbourhoods.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset and my hon. Friends the Members for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) and for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) rightly mentioned, we will never solve the generational problem of demand outstripping supply without dramatically increasing the number of homes built each year. We made good progress before covid-19, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear: in the year to 2020, approximately 244,000 homes were built—the seventh consecutive year in which net supply increased. That is a fantastic foundation for us to build towards our ambitious target of delivering 300,000 homes a year.

That progress is underscored by the £12 billion that we are investing in affordable housing—the highest single funding commitment for more than a decade, which will deliver 180,000 new affordable homes, of which 32,000 will be for social rent. Approximately half of those properties will be available through our new shared ownership model, allowing people to buy additional shares in their home, because two thirds of people in social housing aspire to buy their own home. It is this Government who will help them to realise their ambition.

Building back fairer means creating a true property-owning democracy in which everyone has a stake in their own home, their community and their country. That is why the Chancellor implemented the stamp duty holiday and extended it earlier this year; why we have brought forward the new mortgage guarantee scheme, helping thousands of first-time buyers; and why last Thursday we reached a milestone in turning generation rent into generation buy when the 300,000th Help to Buy home was sold to Sam Legg from Asfordby, who is just 19 years old. He was able to buy his first home with his partner Megan—something that, in Sam’s words, “would not have been possible without Help to Buy.”

This Government are proud to be backing Sam, Megan and millions of people like them, including my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook), in realising their dreams of home ownership. We did it through Help to Buy and we are doing it through the right to buy and through our first home scheme, which will help first-time buyers to purchase their new home in their local community with a discount of at least 30%, and in some places up to 50%.

[Christopher Pincher]

That is levelling up in action, extending home ownership and the prosperity that it brings to as many people as possible in all parts of our country, because we are proud of our country; we like our people. We do not despise it and despise them, as the Labour party always seems to. We want to put up homes for people like Sam and Megan so that they have a future. The Labour party wants to pull down statues to heroes like Churchill because it is fixated on the past.

We must recognise that there are some people who have found it difficult to get on with their lives. Nearly four years have passed since the tragedy of the Grenfell fire, and we owe it to the victims, the bereaved and their families to ensure that this country has one of the most rigorous and robust safety regimes in the world. The Gracious Speech confirmed that we will soon introduce the building safety Bill, delivering the greatest improvements to building safety in a generation.

Crucially, the Bill will place clear legal duties on those who build and manage new homes. It will establish a building safety regulator with robust enforcement powers, which will oversee new building work to ensure that risks are properly managed. First and foremost, we will put residents at the centre of the new system by creating a statutory residents' panel.

The Bill will also restore confidence to leaseholders. We have always made it clear that building owners and the industry should make buildings safe without passing on costs to leaseholders. Where they have not stepped up, we have stepped in, investing £5.1 billion to remediate unsafe cladding on high-rise buildings. We have also instituted a generous finance scheme to support remediation on lower-rise buildings. It is an absolute priority of the Government, and we will bring forward our proposals for this as soon as we possibly can.

Ours is an unashamedly ambitious agenda set out in the Gracious Speech. We will build back fairer and safer and better. We will confront the building safety issues that no Government have dared to tackle and we will create a robust world-class system. We will level up communities the length and the breadth of our country. We have the overwhelming support of the people across the country from Accrington to Asfordby, from Hastings to Hartlepool, with the people behind us and the future before us. Brick by brick, home by home, we will build back Britain better.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 220, Noes 358.

Division No. 1]

[7 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary

Betts, Mr Clive
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam

Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dodds, Anneliese
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Ferrier, Margaret
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Gardiner, Barry
Gill, Preet Kaur
Girvan, Paul
Glindon, Mary
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanna, Claire
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate

Hopkins, Rachel
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lloyd, Tony
Lockhart, Carla
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorris, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Moran, Layla
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Nichols, Charlotte
Norris, Alex
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Paisley, Ian
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy

Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie

Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Winter, Beth
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jessica Morden and
Liz Twist

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack

Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishty, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth

Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann

Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie

May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh 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
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul

Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Maggie Throup and
James Morris

Question accordingly negatived.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

7.10 pm

The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Ordered, That the debate be resumed tomorrow.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION (COMMITTEES)

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

With the leave of the House, we will take motions 2 and 3 together.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO INDUSTRY

Ordered,

That the Motion in the name of Paul Scully relating to financial assistance to industry shall be treated as if it related to an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Delegated Legislation Committees) in respect of which notice has been given that the instrument be approved.

That the Motion in the name of Grant Shapps relating to financial assistance to industry shall be treated as if it related to an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Delegated Legislation Committees) in respect of which notice has been given that the instrument be approved.—(*Maggie Throup.*)

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker: With the leave of the House, we will take motions 4 to 9 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

EMPLOYMENT

That the draft Employment Rights Act 1996 (Protection from Detriment in Health and Safety Cases) (Amendment) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 17 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

FOOD

That the draft Food and Drink (Miscellaneous Amendments Relating to Food and Wine Composition, Information and Labelling) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 23 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS

That the draft Civil Liability Act 2018 (Financial Conduct Authority) (Whiplash) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 18 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

DAMAGES

That the draft Whiplash Injury Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 25 February, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (PLANT HEALTH)

That the draft Plant Health etc. (Fees) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 11 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

PLANT HEALTH

That the draft Plant Health etc. (Miscellaneous Fees) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 25 March, in the last session of Parliament, be approved.—(*Maggie Throup.*)

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT: WHITSUN AND SUMMER

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

That this House at its rising on Thursday 27 May 2021, do adjourn until Monday 7 June 2021; and at its rising on Thursday 22 July 2021, do adjourn until Monday 6 September 2021.—(*Maggie Throup.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

St Ilids Meadow postal round

7.11 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I rise to present a petition to the House on behalf of constituents of Ogmore regarding the inadequate postal service being provided by Royal Mail to the residents of St Ilids Meadow housing estate in Llanharan, in my constituency. I would like to draw the House's attention to a separate petition organised by a constituent, which has attracted 100 signatures. The petition notes that St Ilids Meadow is not yet served as part of permanent postal route but instead is delivered to in an inconsistent manner by way of overtime work at the Pontyclun sorting office. The petition further notes that post has taken as long as four weeks to arrive and waiting times have shown little sign of improvement. Residents have missed letters about medical appointments and letters advising the clinically vulnerable among them to shield, and work-related correspondence vital to their being able to continue to do their jobs from home. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to encourage Royal Mail to make the postal round at St Ilids Meadow, Llanharan a permanent postal round. And the petitioners remain etc.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of Ogmore,

Declares that the postal round at St. Ilids Meadow, Llanharan be made a permanent postal round rather than one which is overtime only.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to encourage Royal Mail to make the postal round at St. Ilids Meadow, Llanharan a permanent postal round.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002663]

Anderson School (Chigwell)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Maggie Throup.)

7.13 pm

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con) [R]: I am grateful to be given the opportunity of this Adjournment debate to raise a matter about which I have been concerned since before I was elected to this House. For the sake of the record, let me say that I was a district councillor and a county councillor for Chigwell in Essex, in the constituency of Epping Forest, before I was privileged to join these Benches. The Anderson School is a specialist school for autistic children and young people situated in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Dame Eleanor Laing). Again, for the record, let me say that I became a governor of the school for a short period to actively help turn around its future. It was appropriate for me to stand down as a governor when I was selected as the Conservative parliamentary candidate for South West Hertfordshire, and it remains one of my few regrets that I had to relinquish that role when I moved to Hertfordshire. I know that my right hon. Friend has consistently shared my concerns. She has been in correspondence about this matter for well over a year with Essex County Council, the Anderson Foundation, the National Autistic Society and the Minister's colleague, Baroness Berridge of The Vale of Catmose.

The matter has become sufficiently serious to require the attention of the House because if the National Autistic Society is permitted to go ahead with its plans to hand over the school buildings to the London Borough of Redbridge, the Anderson School as initially imagined will be destroyed, and with it the hopes and dreams of many autistic young people.

The Anderson School is not an ordinary special educational needs establishment. It was designed and built for a very specific cohort of people, for whom Essex County Council had identified a need that could not be met in any other school. It is not an exaggeration to say that the school is a pioneer in the provision of opportunities for autistic children who have the potential for high academic achievement but whose mental health issues would make it impossible for them to flourish in a mainstream school. I am led to believe that most of the children who attended the school were heading for university, college or meaningful paid employment. It is the only school of its kind in the area—indeed, it is one of very few in the whole country. It is about to be destroyed because of a series of unfortunate decisions taken by the National Autistic Society.

The Anderson Foundation, a charitable foundation, raised the funds to build this pioneering school on the land of the former Tottenham Hotspur training ground at Chigwell. The land on which the school is built is green belt, and the protection of green belt is very important to the planning authority, Epping Forest District Council, situated as it is between the urban sprawl of London and the Essex countryside. Strict conditions were therefore attached to the granting of planning permission, in the form of a section 106 agreement. That agreement specifies that the school is to be operated for children and young people in the very specific cohort that I have described.

[Mr Gagan Mohindra]

The Anderson Foundation collaborated with Essex County Council, specialist charities, engineers and constructors in the design of the school, resulting in state-of-the-art, first-class provision. Once the school was occupied, its ownership was transferred to the National Autistic Society, which paid the Anderson Foundation £6 million. That is approximately one third of the actual value of the land and buildings, so the NAS benefited from a gift of some £12 million. The NAS was thus given a wonderful opportunity to run the school for the benefit of these highly achieving autistic children. In my view, it failed.

The Anderson School opened for its first pupils in September 2017. Within a year, safeguarding and staffing issues became obvious. Several colleagues have received complaints from their constituents about the way their children were treated while in the care of the NAS. Ofsted carried out an inspection in March 2020 and deemed the school to be failing, and in April 2020 the NAS closed the school. The incompetence of the NAS is not in question; it admits its failings and it admits that it could not run the school as it ought to have been run. It was decided that a new provider should be sought to run the school, and that such a provider should be put in place as quickly as possible, in order to restore the opportunity that had been lost to the Anderson students.

The power to appoint a new provider appears to lie with the NAS, because it owns the school. My colleagues and I question that assumption. It is difficult to understand why the Department for Education considers it acceptable that an organisation that, by its own admission, was a failure at operating a school should be considered fit to be the sole judge of who should succeed it as provider. If the NAS was not fit to run the school, in my view it is not fit to decide who should run it next.

The NAS put the contract for operating the Anderson School out to tender approximately a year ago. The tender process was carried out under a veil of secrecy, with neither Essex County Council nor the Anderson Foundation consulted. The NAS refused to disclose which organisations had submitted a tender, claiming commercial confidentiality for the tender process. It chose a preferred bidder but refused to disclose its identity, again claiming commercial confidentiality. I was shocked to discover that the preferred bidder is the London Borough of Redbridge. The NAS has chosen the London Borough of Redbridge. The NAS deemed it to have offered “best value” because it was a government body, and therefore a very good tenant, and was willing to pay the significant rent requested.

The problem is—this is the point that I believe has been totally misunderstood by ministerial colleagues at the Department for Education—that the London Borough of Redbridge does not intend to operate the Anderson School for academically high-achieving autistic children. What Redbridge wants to do is to use the buildings at the Anderson School to decant the children with a wide range of special needs, some of whom are autistic, from two existing special needs schools in Redbridge—in other words, we will lose provision in the area. We can all understand the position of Redbridge. It has been presented with a golden opportunity. It can move its children, who have a range of complex special needs, from the old school buildings that it currently operates into the new building in Chigwell.

The land on which the two current schools stand is prime development land. Redbridge desperately needs to build more homes for its residents. In one fell swoop, Redbridge can rehouse its special needs schools, make a potentially large profit by selling the land and provide much needed additional housing. Who can blame it for using this financial strength to outbid everyone else for the use of the Anderson School buildings? Redbridge’s motives may be admirable but it should not be allowed to pursue its plans by destroying the Anderson School.

It is simply unacceptable that the NAS should be allowed to hand the Anderson School over to Redbridge. The NAS has openly told officials at the DFE that its intention in handing the school over to Redbridge is to secure the best financial return for the charity. We all appreciate that, as a charity, the NAS has an obligation to fulfil its charitable purposes and to maximise its financial resources, but which comes first? It surely cannot be right for the NAS to sacrifice the Anderson School by handing the buildings over to Redbridge simply to maximise its profits. Making money for the charity is surely a means to an end, not an end in itself. The NAS is not fulfilling its charitable purpose. It is letting down the academically high-achieving autistic children it ought to be serving.

To put it simply, if the plans of the NAS to enter into a contract with the London Borough of Redbridge are allowed to proceed, the buildings will still bear the name of the Anderson School, but the Anderson School will no longer exist. It will have been destroyed by the incompetence and the avarice of the NAS.

In a letter dated 6 April to my right hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest, the Minister’s colleague, Baroness Berridge, stated that the Department for Education was satisfied with the current plans of the NAS and that the NAS

“is now in a position to offer a lease to the successful party”.

That is simply not true. The NAS is not in a position to offer a lease to Redbridge because Redbridge cannot, and will not, comply with the terms of the section 106 agreement. Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council have refused to amend the section 106 agreement. They are adhering to the principle that planning permission was granted specifically for the purpose of educating a narrow cohort of autistic children. It was not granted for the purpose of educating special needs children in general.

The Minister’s colleague goes on to say in that letter that Redbridge is

“unable to operate any provision on the former Anderson site until the Section 106 agreement is amended”—

“until”, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister’s colleague did not say “unless”—she said “until”. The DFE has made the assumption that the NAS will be able to appeal against the decision of Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council not to amend the section 106 agreement. Such a stance is not only arrogant in the extreme; it is undemocratic.

Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council are democratically elected bodies that act in the best interest of their whole community. It is simply wrong for the NAS, the Minister’s Department and the London Borough of Redbridge to cast aside their concerns, to ignore the aims of their education policy and to override their decisions. The section 106 agreement was put in place only a few years ago for a very good

purpose. It should not be overturned simply to maximise the financial position of the NAS. It is scandalous that a newly built school has been left lying empty for a full academic year. It is appalling that the NAS plans would reduce the general capacity of special educational needs education in the Essex area by 78 school places. It is tragic that simply in order to maximise its own financial advantage the NAS wants to hand over the Anderson School to Redbridge Council.

Redbridge simply wants to use the buildings. It would completely destroy the ethos and the purpose of the Anderson School, and with it the hopes and dreams of the children it was built to benefit. I fully understand the limitations of the Minister's powers to take action in this matter, but I implore him to intervene in whatever way he can to break the impasse between the various organisations involved in this terribly difficult situation, and to help to restore to the autistic children for whom it was built the opportunity of a bright future, which was the vision of the Anderson Foundation.

7.25 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Hertfordshire (Mr Mohindra) on securing this important debate about the closure of the Anderson School in Chigwell, an independent school for young people with autism. I have listened very carefully to his powerful speech and will ensure that the very serious points that he makes are taken on board by the Department.

As my hon. Friend said, the Anderson School opened in 2017 and was approved for 55 pupils, aged between 11 and 19, whose special educational needs relate to autism spectrum disorder, but who are of broadly mainstream academic ability. The cost of the site and the building was funded by the Anderson Foundation and gifted to the National Autistic Society. At the Anderson School's first inspection in May 2018, Ofsted judged the school's overall effectiveness as requiring improvement, with two independent school standards relating to teaching and to leadership and management not being met. In accordance with the Department's procedure, the school submitted an action plan to the Department setting out how it was going to address the unmet independent school standards. That plan was not considered acceptable in July 2018, and subsequently a new plan was accepted in December 2018.

In October 2019, the Department commissioned an additional Ofsted inspection to assess progress against the agreed action plan. The school did not meet all the standards expected, with Ofsted reporting that the standards relating to welfare, health and safety of pupils, and leadership and management were not met. A further action plan was submitted, but was deemed not to be acceptable in January 2020. Ofsted undertook a final inspection of the school in March 2020, as my hon. Friend said, and found the school to be inadequate. At that stage, before further regulatory action could be taken, the National Autistic Society announced the closure of the school, effective from the end of the summer 2020 term.

Following a thorough consideration of all the complaints from parents that have been submitted to the Department, the Department concluded that in the main the complaints appear to have been investigated appropriately at local level. Essex County Council has shared with the Department the results of its investigations and most of the complaints received triggered no further action, as

they did not meet the appropriate thresholds. The conclusion was that two incidents were considered to have the potential to warrant referral to the Teaching Regulation Agency. That is consistent with Essex County Council's re-examination of the complaints.

The Department is satisfied that there is no evidence in the complaints that we have seen to suggest that the problems at Anderson School were systemic to the National Autistic Society's proprietorship rather than localised to the school itself. The National Autistic Society runs seven schools, four of which are independent. Of those, one is rated outstanding, five are rated good, and one is as yet unrated as it opened only in January 2020. Although the National Autistic Society owns the site, it will no longer be the education provider. It is in the process, as my hon. Friend said, of determining who is awarded the lease in line with its charitable obligations. The body that acquires the lease will have to go through all the standard relevant approval mechanisms before opening new education provisions.

I assure my hon. Friend that Department officials have been in regular contact with the National Autistic Society since the decision was taken to close the Anderson School and following representations from Essex County Council about the future of the site, although now that the school has closed the Department's role is legally very limited. It is for the National Autistic Society to award the lease in a way that is consistent with the law governing charities, planning laws, and agreements with the original provider of the site. In conversations with the National Autistic Society, officials have received assurances that it has sought the necessary technical and legal advice on the process for awarding a lease and has been assured that it was fully in line with charity law and guidance issued by the Charity Commission.

The Department for Education is the regulator of independent schools in England. The Department registers independent schools, it sets the independent schools standards that those schools must meet, and it acts when schools fail to meet those standards. Due diligence checks are carried out on the proposed proprietors of any school; as part of that process, Ofsted is automatically commissioned to inspect the school prior to its opening and to come to a judgment on whether the school is meeting the independent schools standards. That is a rigorous process to ensure that the school meets the statutory requirements set by the Department. All owners of registered independent schools must meet all the standards at all times.

Registered independent schools are inspected on a regular cycle by inspectors from Ofsted or the Independent Schools Inspectorate, and the Department can commission additional inspections—for example, when there is a serious complaint or notification of a serious incident at a school. If the Department considers that any of the standards are not being met by a school, it may issue a notice to the proprietor of the school requiring the production of an action plan. If the school does not submit an action plan, or if the plan is rejected or inadequately implemented, the Department can take enforcement action, which means either imposing a relevant restriction on the proprietor of the school, or removing the school from the register of independent schools. It is always our aim to safeguard the education and wellbeing of children, so where schools do not meet the standards they must improve quickly or face enforcement action, which may result in closure.

[Nick Gibb]

Although the Department does not have a claim on the school site or a role in determining which provider the National Autistic Society chooses to award the lease to, I can assure my hon. Friend that the Department is working closely with Essex County Council through new free school provision to ensure that there is suitable and sufficient special educational needs provision in Essex. That includes two proposed free schools specialising in meeting the needs of pupils with autism spectrum disorder—Chatten Free School in Whitham, opening in September 2021, and The Hawthorns in Chelmsford, which is working toward opening in 2022-23. A new independent special educational needs and disabilities

provision school opened in April 2021, The Tower School in Epping, which also offers additional places for children with autism spectrum disorder in Essex and the neighbouring area.

I thank my hon. Friend once again for calling this important Adjournment debate. As I said at the start of my response, I will ensure that his concerns and those of other right hon. and hon. Members are reflected on by the Department.

Question put and agreed to.

7.33 pm

House adjourned.

Members Eligible for a Proxy Vote

The following is the list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy:

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Afriye (Windsor) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Con)	Chris Elmore
Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Alistair Carmichael (rt. hon.) (Orkney and Shetland) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con)	Mr William Wragg
Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Courts (Witney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Daly (Bury North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con)	Ben Everitt
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP)	Hywel Williams
Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)	Wendy Chamberlain
Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson
John Glen (Salisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Green (Ashford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kate Griffiths (Burton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Grundy (Leigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP)	Hywel Williams
Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Heap (Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Howell (Henley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Johnston (Wantage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC)	Hywel Williams
Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Langan (High Peak) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson
Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alan Mak (Havant) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Owen Thompson
Damien Moore (Southport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jill Mortimer (Hartlepool) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson
Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Priti Patel (Witham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con)	Peter Aldous
Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Will Quince (Colchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson
Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dean Russell (Watford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)	Hywel Williams

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con)	Mark Harper
Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Warburton (Somerset and Frome) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Whittingdale (Malden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Williamson (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Written Statements

Tuesday 18 May 2021

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Public Consultation on the National Data Strategy and Data Sharing Code of Practice: Government Resp

The Minister for Media and Data (Mr John Whittingdale):

I am pleased to inform the House that the Government are today publishing our response to the public consultation on the UK national data strategy and laying the Information Commissioner's Office data sharing code of practice.

Government response to the public consultation on the national data strategy

The national data strategy, published in September 2020, set out a framework for action to maximise the power of responsible data use across the UK. It also launched a 13 week consultation which closed in December 2020. We received 282 unique responses from across the public sector, civil society, industry and academia, as well as from members of the general public. Consultation feedback has confirmed that our framework is fit for purpose. Many respondents also recognised the need to rebalance the narrative, moving away from thinking about data use primarily as a threat to be managed, and instead recognising data as an asset that, used responsibly, can deliver economic and public benefits across the UK.

The Government response to the consultation builds on the insights we received, and details how we will deliver across our priority areas of action in such a way that builds public trust and ensures that the opportunities from better data use work for everyone, everywhere. This includes setting out our plans to create a national data strategy forum which will ensure that a diverse range of perspectives continue to inform the strategy's implementation. The response also reflects on the crucial role of data in building back better after the covid-19 pandemic.

In the coming months, we will publish focused updates on progress in delivering specific missions and or actions within the national data strategy.

Data sharing code of practice

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is the UK's independent data protection regulator and has a statutory duty under the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) to produce a code of practice that provides practical guidance on data sharing. Today, the Government have laid the ICO's data sharing code in Parliament. Alongside the laying of the code, the ICO has launched a data sharing information hub on its website, where organisations and businesses can find clear guidance and practical tools on how to share data fairly, lawfully and transparently, while protecting people's personal information.

The Government are committed to working with the ICO to promote responsible data sharing which can have benefits for the economy and the delivery of public services. The national data strategy recognised that better use of data can help organisations of every kind

succeed—across the public, private and third sectors. Data can be a driver of scientific and technological innovation, and central to the delivery of a whole range of vital public services and societal goals, from tackling climate change to supporting the national health service.

A copy of each document will be placed in the Library of the House today.

[HCWS37]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Plans to Restore Nature

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):

The events of the last 12 months have led people to appreciate the difference that nature makes to our lives more than ever before. Restoring nature will be crucial as we seek to build back greener from this pandemic, and in what is a huge year for the environment we will use our COP26 and G7 presidencies to take a leading role on driving a global green recovery on the world stage.

As a core part of our commitment to leave the environment in a better state than we found it, and acting on the recommendations of the Dasgupta review, we are announcing today that we will be amending the Environment Bill to require a historic, new legally binding target on species abundance for 2030, aiming to halt the decline of nature in England. We hope that this world-leading measure will be the net zero equivalent for nature, spurring action of the scale required to address the biodiversity crisis.

We will develop this target alongside the longer-term legally binding targets we are already developing in the Environment Bill, and set the final target in secondary legislation following the agreement of global targets at the UN nature conference, the convention on biological diversity COP15 in autumn 2021. This amendment will be tabled at Lords Committee stage.

We should not underestimate the scale of the challenge ahead in halting the decline of nature. Over the last 50 years, much of the UK's wildlife-rich habitat has been lost or degraded, and many of our once common species are in long-term decline. We have also come to better understand the link between our own health, and economic prosperity, and that of the planet. The independent, global Dasgupta review on the economics of biodiversity, led by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta, has shown us that a healthy natural world, measured in its diversity of life, underpins so much of our economic prosperity and resilience.

To achieve our new target, alongside others in the Bill, we will also need measures that go beyond what is in the Bill.

We are also announcing today:

An England peat action plan to restore, sustainably manage and protect our peatlands. We will restore at least 35,000 hectares of peatland by 2025, investing £50 million through the nature for climate fund and phasing out the most damaging practices to our peatland.

An England trees action plan to better protect our existing trees and expand woodland coverage, aiming for 12% woodland cover by the middle of the century. Over £500 million of the £640 million nature for climate fund is dedicated to trees. Tree planting rates in England will treble by the end of this Parliament to benefit our local communities, nature and climate.

Species reintroduction measures to recover threatened species and continue to provide opportunities for successful reintroductions. We want to see a more nature rich Britain, with further action to bend the curve of species loss in this country.

If we are to deliver this ambitious new target and reverse the downward trend we have seen in recent decades, we need to change our approach. We must move the emphasis away from processes that simply moderated the pace of nature's decline, and instead put in place the governance regime that can deliver nature's recovery. We need to create space for the creative public policy thinking that can deliver results, rather than relying on change being set by litigation and case law.

I am therefore also announcing today that I will be tabling an amendment to the Environment Bill to provide for a power to refocus the habitats regulations to our domestic priorities. We want to ensure our legislation adequately supports our ambitions for nature, including our new world-leading targets, rather than remaining tied to legacy EU legislation. We have already set out some important measures in the Environment Bill to switch the focus to nature recovery. We have the requirement for environmental targets on wider areas, for example water quality; a requirement for an environment improvement plan; local nature recovery strategies to steer habitats delivered through biodiversity net gain; and Natural England are making progress with a more strategic approach to nature recovery through their support for delivering the nature recovery network.

We will take a measured approach to reform. We will also consult with the new Office for Environmental Protection, and work with conservation groups on any proposals we develop before any regulatory changes are made. In addition, later this year, I intend to bring forward a Green Paper setting out how we plan to deliver a regulatory framework that is fit for purpose in driving forward our domestic ambitions now that we have left the EU, including our objective of protecting 30 percent of terrestrial land by 2030. We need a revised approach to deliver this new species abundance target and better support iconic and much-loved native species like the hedgehog.

As announced in the Queen's Speech on 11 May, we will also be bringing forward amendments in the Lords to reduce the harm from storm overflows to our rivers, waterways and coastlines.

New duties will require Government to publish a plan to reduce sewage discharges from storm overflows by September 2022 and report to Parliament on the progress towards implementing the plan. Water companies and the Environment Agency will be required to publish data on storm overflow operations annually.

These new measures will complement the existing provisions in the Environment Bill which will tackle air, water and waste pollution, which are critical to meeting our goals of net zero emissions, stemming and reversing biodiversity loss and improving public health.

Work on implementing measures in the Environment Bill has continued since it was last in the Commons. We have appointed the first chair of the Office for

Environmental Protection, Dame Glenys Stacey. We have published a draft principles policy statement, started work on developing legally binding environmental targets, launched consultations on the deposit return schemes for drinks containers, and extended producer responsibility for packaging and consistent recycling collections.

The Environment Bill will have its final day of report and Third Reading in the Commons on 26 May, before moving to the Lords. We are aiming for Royal Assent in the autumn. In the year of COP26, the Environment Bill is at the core of delivering the Government manifesto commitment to deliver the most ambitious environmental programme of any country on earth and leave our environment in a better state than we found it.

[HCWS38]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Call for Input: Canada and Mexico Trade Deals

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): The call for input on future free trade agreements (FTAs) with Canada and Mexico will formally be launching as of today.

The UK has set its sights on the next generation of British-shaped trade deals to secure closer economic ties with major economies of today and tomorrow, with Canada currently being the ninth largest economy in the world, and Mexico forecast to become the seventh largest by 2050. These deals will secure more access for British goods and services, opening significant new opportunities for UK business by boosting trade with Canada and Mexico, already worth £22.8 billion and £5.1 billion respectively in 2019. They will cement the UK's position as a world leader in digital and services trade, and constituent key building blocks to UK membership of CPTPP as well as delivering benefits to the whole of the UK.

The UK signed trade continuity agreements (TCAs) with both Canada and Mexico before the end of the transition period and committed to start negotiating the new trade deals later this year. Building on the deals signed in 2020, which secured tariff-free exports on 98% and 88% of goods to Canada and Mexico respectively, this next generation of trade deals provides the opportunity to set new benchmarks in areas like digital trade, climate and women's economic empowerment, and cement the UK's position as world leader in digital and services trade.

The call for input will provide businesses, public sector bodies, individuals and other interested stakeholders with the opportunity to give valuable feedback and highlight their priorities for our future trading relationship with these two countries.

The feedback received from stakeholders will be crucial when shaping our mandate, and will inform detailed negotiations preparation, and policy positions. The Department for International Trade is committed to ensuring future FTAs and their provisions are informed by stakeholder needs and shaped by the demands of the British economy.

The UK is to begin negotiations for upgraded trade deals with Canada and Mexico this year focused on creating even greater opportunities for UK businesses. Our new negotiations will allow us to go further to boost trade with these economies. Canada was the UK's 15th largest export market in 2019, and according to IMF data, Mexico ranks as the 15th largest economy worldwide, with a market of over 130 million consumers, offering significant opportunities for UK businesses in industries including automotive manufacturing and food and drink.

Forging stronger trade links with Canada and Mexico will also support the UK's accession to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership (CPTPP), as they are both members. CPTPP is at the cutting edge of global trade and will remove barriers, raise standards and support jobs, putting the UK at the centre of an increasingly influential and modern trade network of 11 economies in the Indo-Pacific region with a combined GDP of almost £9 trillion in 2019. Joining will help open up a new horizon of opportunities for British businesses, particularly in services and digital and data provisions. Canada and Mexico also represent the second and fourth largest economies out of the CPTPP countries, which in total account for 13% of global GDP. This would increase to more than 16% if the UK were to join.

The UK and our partners in Canada and Mexico share a desire to launch negotiations later this year. The call for input will strive to support the goal of greater economic prosperity for businesses and it will ensure that their needs are heard. The Government are committed to transparency and will ensure that Parliament, the devolved Administrations, UK citizens and businesses have access to information on our trade negotiations.

The call for input can be accessed using the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/trade-with-canada-and-mexico-call-for-input>.

[HCWS35]

TRANSPORT

Transport for London Funding Deal

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

The Government and the Mayor of London have agreed to extend the current Transport for London (TfL) funding deal. The deal was due to expire on 18 May 2021 but this extension will continue to support the capital and the transport network until 28 May 2021 on the same terms as now. The extension will provide certainty while we finalise the terms of the next funding deal which will get TfL onto a more financially sustainable footing.

The extension comprises an additional funding payment of £65 million with a top-up grant available based on actual passenger revenues.

The Government have repeatedly shown that they are committed to supporting the running of essential services across the capital with over £3 billion emergency funding provided since the start of the pandemic. Support for London needs to be balanced with the national recovery and ensure fairness and value for money for the taxpayer. The Government will continue to work with TfL and the Mayor so TfL can be financially sustainable as soon as possible.

[HCWS36]

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 18 May 2021

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
JUSTICE	521	JUSTICE—continued	
Backlog of Court Cases	524	Reduction of Reoffending.....	533
Crime in Prisons	528	Sentencing Reform.....	521
Emergency Workers: Assaults	532	Sexual Assault: Naming of Victims.....	524
Legal Advice Deserts	523	Supreme Court Reform.....	527
Office of the Chief Coroner: Provision of Services	529	Topical Questions	536
Pet Theft: Maximum Sentence	531	UK Nationals in US Prisons.....	532
Prison Officers: Years of Experience	530	Violence against Women and Girls: Support for Victims.....	534
Probate	531		

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Tuesday 18 May 2021

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	43WS	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	44WS
Public Consultation on the National Data Strategy and Data Sharing Code of Practice: Government Resp	43WS	Plans to Restore Nature	44WS
EDUCATION	44WS	INTERNATIONAL TRADE	46WS
Post-16 Capacity Fund.....	44WS	Call for Input: Canada and Mexico Trade Deals....	46WS
		TRANSPORT	48WS
		Transport for London Funding Deal	48WS

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Tuesday 25 May 2021**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 18 May 2021

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 521] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Justice

Ministerial Code/Register of Ministers' Interests [Col. 543]
Answer to urgent question—(Penny Mordaunt)

10-point Plan: Six Months On [Col. 554]
Statement—(Kwasi Kwarteng)

Debate on the Address (Fifth Day) [Col. 566]
Debate adjourned

Petition [Col. 653]

Anderson School (Chigwell) [Col. 654]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 43WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
