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14 July 2021**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 14 July 2021

House of Commons

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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

COP26

The President of COP26 was asked—

Civil Society and Youth Groups

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): What steps he is taking to consult with (a) civil society and (b) youth groups in preparation for COP26. [902685]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): I have established a civil society and youth advisory council, which is the first of its kind at any COP. It is working with the UK presidency to deliver a successful summit. The co-chairs are youth climate activists, one from the global north and one from the global south. I also meet civil society and youth groups on my international visits, to ensure that their voices are heard.

Andy Carter: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. Does he agree that children in our schools can play a crucial part in helping us to get to net zero by becoming young climate leaders? In my constituency there are groups such as Warrington Youth Voice, which last month organised its first green schools conference, and pupils at Penketh Primary School have come together to take steps to reduce energy use in their homes. Will my right hon. Friend encourage Members of the House to reach out to schools in their constituencies, and build greater understanding of the work of COP26?

Alok Sharma: What an excellent question. I commend my hon. Friend for the work he is doing to encourage youth climate activists in his constituency, such as those in Warrington Youth Voice and at Penketh Primary School. As he knows, last month we sent a COP26 schools pack, designed to engage students with climate action, to schools across the UK. In May, MPs also received a UK engagement pack.

Limiting Global Temperature Rise

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): What steps he is taking to help ensure that COP26 outcomes commit to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C. [902686]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): We are pressing all countries to come forward with mid-century net-zero commitments, and aligned ambitious 2030 emissions reduction targets. We have seen some progress. When the UK took on the COP26 presidency, less than 30% of the global economy was covered by a net-zero emissions target, and that figure is now 70%.

Sarah Olney: The Government claim that the UK has reduced its emissions footprint by 42% since 1990, which is a commendable feat. That has been achieved in part by offshoring manufacturing and outsourcing many emissions to countries such as China that produce the goods we consume. If we factor in those emissions, the UK emissions reduction is possibly as little as 10% to 15%. Ahead of COP26, what steps will the Minister take to include the full scope of our emissions in the accounting, including those arising from UK consumption, supply chains, and international aviation and shipping?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Lady talks about aviation and shipping, and we have included those in the sixth carbon budget. The role of the UK COP presidency is to ensure climate action and ambition across the whole UK, and that is what we are working to deliver.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Keeping the 1.5°C limit alive is now, quite rightly, one of the Government's stated aims of COP26. Although we do not doubt the COP President's personal commitment to delivering on that objective, the Government as a whole are patently still not doing enough. If we are to markedly increase the global ambition for 2030 targets, forge a coalition with vulnerable nations to hold the major emitters to account, and mobilise the climate finance that is essential to unlocking any agreement, we need sustained engagement and focus from the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor, and we need it now. With just over 100 days until this critical summit, does the COP26 President recognise that if senior members of the Government do not raise their game quickly, there is a real risk of failure in Glasgow in November?

Alok Sharma: There is a concerted effort across the whole of Government to ensure that we press other countries to come forward with ambition. We are, of course, seen around the world as a leader on climate action, in terms of both the actions we have taken and the commitments we have made. The Prime Minister has regular dialogue with world leaders, as do the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary with their counterparts.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP) [V]: Current carbon budgets will see the world miss the 1.5°C target, with all the disastrous consequences that will have. The UK's portion of that carbon budget is up to 3 billion tonnes of CO₂ higher than is proportional to its population. France put in the effort for global improvement in the Paris agreement, but we have seen nothing comparable from the UK Government. When will we see that change? What conversations is the right hon. Gentleman having with his Cabinet colleagues about the immediate actions their Departments should be taking to reduce the UK's carbon contribution?

Alok Sharma: I respectfully disagree with the hon. Lady. Since 2000 the UK has decarbonised faster than any other G20 nation, and our national determined contribution of at least 68% reduction in emissions on a 1990 base year by 2030 is world leading, as is the commitment in our carbon budget. We are doing our bit but, of course, there is always room for all of us to do more.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): Has Britain lost her credibility when asking developing nations to pay to decarbonise, following the Government's affirmation yesterday of their cut to UK international aid spending?

Alok Sharma: I have seen at first hand, when I was Secretary of State for International Development and, indeed, in other roles, that UK support continues to transform millions of lives for the better across the world. The hon. Gentleman will know that we will continue to spend over £10 billion this year in aid, and of course we now have certainty that we will be returning to the 0.7% target.

Emerging Markets Exports: Energy and Renewables

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): What assessment he has made of the opportunities through COP26 for potential exports in energy and renewables to emerging markets. [R] [902687]

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): For COP26, we want clean power to be the most attractive option for new power generation for any country. This presents economic opportunities for every country choosing clean energy. The UK Government will showcase a variety of organisations and technologies at COP26 in the blue and green zones, including innovative energy solutions, green technologies and services that can help fight climate change and support resilience.

Richard Graham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the contracts for difference auction that is happening in November, shortly before COP26, is a wonderful opportunity to ensure that there is a separate pot for marine energy, which can give opportunities for some of our great new technologies around the coastline to shine? Does he also agree that COP26 provides an opportunity for us to showcase some of those technologies to visiting delegations from abroad, particularly Asia? Mr Speaker, you will be interested to hear that a British company is the second biggest investor in renewables in the Philippines and will be launching a new large fund on the London stock exchange this autumn to invest in further renewable opportunities in Asia.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Just to confirm, the next contracts for difference auction will open in December this year and will be our biggest yet, firmly charting our path towards net zero. Technologies such as wave and tidal stream projects are eligible to compete in pot 2 for CfD auctions, and we will publish specific allocation round parameters in advance of the auction. The Government continue to provide support to UK companies that are looking to export tidal technologies and other marine renewables abroad.

Member Engagement with COP26

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): What plans he has made for hon. Members to (a) engage with and (b) attend COP26. [902688]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): As I said in response to an earlier question, all Members of Parliament were sent a COP26 pack in May, which provides ideas for engagement on climate issues with their constituents. With regard to attendance at COP26, we will set out more details very shortly on how parliamentarians can register their interest to attend.

Elliot Colburn [V]: Reducing greenhouse emissions and tackling air pollution is a priority for many Carshalton and Wallington residents, not least because we have the Beddington incinerator in my constituency. In the spirit of engagement, I hope to host a local COP26 event later this year to discuss how we can work together to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. What steps is the COP26 President taking to ensure that the public can engage with COP26 and play their part in this important event?

Alok Sharma: I commend my hon. Friend for the work he is doing in hosting a local climate event in his constituency, and I would urge all hon. and right hon. Members to consider doing the same. We are today also launching the local authorities and mayors COP26 engagement pack. Of course, we want everyone to play their part in taking climate action; I have always said that we want this to be the most inclusive COP ever.

Ethics and Human Rights: Climate Change

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): What preparations he has made for discussion at COP26 of (a) ethics and (b) human rights matters relating to climate change. [902689]

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The UK recognises the serious and unequivocal threat that climate change poses to our planet, and that it can indeed undermine the enjoyment of human rights. The Paris agreement preamble states that respecting and promoting our human rights is fundamental to effective climate implementation. Therefore, human rights are a cross-cutting consideration in all climate action, so we will be working with all countries this year to achieve an ambitious, inclusive and shared outcome from COP26 to help safeguard human rights.

Steven Bonnar: I thank the Minister for that answer. Scotland was not only the first country in the world to declare a climate emergency, but the first in the world to establish a dedicated climate justice fund—a fund that was recently doubled by the SNP Scottish Government in Edinburgh. Will the UK Government, ahead of COP Glasgow, match Scotland's ambitions? Will this Government create such a fund, and will the Minister and the COP26 President ensure that the focus of COP26 is placed squarely on the rights of those who will be affected first and foremost by the climate emergency?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: As my right hon. Friend the COP26 President set out, the UK remains one of the largest donors in supporting a number of areas, including,

obviously, humanitarian assistance and humanitarian rights. I would be interested to hear more on the details of the climate justice fund to understand the premise of it, but the UK continues to have an absolutely clear commitment to that.

Geothermal Energy: Net Zero Target

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What recent assessment the Climate Action Implementation Cabinet Committee has made of the role of geothermal energy in the UK reaching net zero. [902690]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): The Committee that I chair has been working with Departments across Whitehall to develop our plans to deliver on our carbon budgets and, indeed, our net zero commitments. The Government consider geothermal energy a low-carbon technology that is within the scope of our new £270 million green heat network fund, which supports the commercialisation of low-carbon heat network projects and opened for applications earlier this month.

Steve Double: The COP President will know from his recent visit that Cornwall is leading the way in the development of geothermal energy in the UK with two wells being drilled and many more planned. However, the people developing this new technology need the Government to back it to ensure that we can realise its potential, and they need certainty to make their plans in the near future. Will he ensure that the Government come forward with a renewable heat incentive for geothermal as soon as possible?

Alok Sharma: May I say that I very much enjoyed my visit to Eden Geothermal with my hon. Friend? It was particularly pleasing to note that some of those working in the project had made the transition from the oil and gas sector owing to their transferable engineering skills. As I set out, the fund has been launched, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth will be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the issue further.

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con) [V]: [*Inaudible.*]

Mr Speaker: Philip Dunne has technical problems. Let us go to Alec Shelbrooke.

Upholding COP26 Commitments

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): What steps he plans to take to help ensure that all COP26 parties uphold the commitments of that conference. [902693]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): The UK presidency is focused on delivering a successful COP26 with ambitious outcomes across mitigation, adaptation and finance. We will use our presidency year to champion the outcome, maintaining close collaboration with our partners and, indeed, the COP27 presidency to make those commitments a reality.

Alec Shelbrooke: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the work he is doing. I urge him to put in place mechanisms that could quickly address issues that may blow the objectives off course, as has happened since Paris.

Alok Sharma: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. As well as pushing for net zero and 2030 emissions reduction targets, we are indeed asking countries to set out their long-term strategies to demonstrate how they will turn ambition into action. In addition, we want to resolve the outstanding issue of transparency in the Paris rulebook, which will allow for reporting by countries of progress on climate action.

Economic Recovery from Covid-19: Climate Action

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): What steps he is taking ahead of COP26 to help ensure that climate action supports the covid-19 pandemic economic recovery. [902695]

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking ahead of COP26 to promote (a) climate action and (b) a green recovery from the covid-19 pandemic. [902704]

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking ahead of COP26 to promote (a) climate action and (b) a green recovery from the covid-19 pandemic. [902713]

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking ahead of COP26 to promote (a) climate action and (b) a green recovery from the covid-19 pandemic. [902714]

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The Prime Minister's 10-point plan sets out our blueprint for a green industrial revolution. The plan commits to investments in green technologies and industries, and leverages billions of pounds of private sector investment to create and support up to 250,000 green jobs across the UK. It is a clear plan to build back greener from the covid pandemic. The Government will publish their net zero strategy before COP26.

Suzanne Webb: Two weeks ago, I went on a fantastic community litter pick with the fantastic Hannah Picken, who leads a local environmental group called Wild Earth Movement. Within an hour, we collected 244 kg of litter and waste—a quarter of a tonne in old terms, so it was pretty significant—the majority of which was plastic. Does my right hon. Friend agree that individuals need to do more and show personal responsibility for us to achieve the net zero carbon goal?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: My hon. Friend is leading by example. I commend Hannah and her local group, the Wild Earth Movement, for their impressive clean-up operation—but, of course, it is a depressing one to have to do. The challenge we have is to educate and encourage all our citizens to make this wonderful group's activities redundant by stopping plastic pollution. Through our Together for Our Planet campaign, we are building awareness and understanding of COP26 in every part of the UK to help educate our children and families on the behaviours to change so that we are all part of that positive impact on our carbon footprint.

Paul Blomfield [V]: The success of the UK presidency requires leadership at home. The Government have pledged to consider the Climate Change Committee's

recommendation for near-zero emission iron ore steel-making by 2035, but a plan for decarbonising steel production must be published before COP26. Hydrogen is among the emerging technologies offering solutions, and its use is progressing across the rest of Europe. The Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit recently reported on 23 pilot projects—planned or live—across several countries producing 10 million tonnes of clean steel annually by 2026. Are the Government considering hydrogen-based pilots as part of their plan for steel?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Gentleman will know that we will shortly publish our hydrogen strategy, which will set out in much more detail the commitment that the Government are going to make to that developing technology, and a £250 million fund will be available in due course for pilot projects to develop those skills.

Vicky Foxcroft [V]: I am often contacted by young constituents who care passionately about climate change and want to see Ministers taking bold action. The UK's credibility as COP president rests on climate action at home. The Government have set legally binding net zero targets but are currently off track to meet their fourth and fifth carbon budgets, which are calibrated for previous, more lenient targets. When does the Minister expect the UK to have its house in order so that I can let my constituents know that their words are not falling on deaf ears?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I would be thrilled for the hon. Lady to go back and say to her constituents that in putting carbon budget 6 into law, as I did just a few weeks ago, we are driving up not only the ambition, but the policy making, frameworks and business models that will help industry to decarbonise and us to change the way that we travel and live in our houses of the future to ensure that we are all part of the solution to meeting that net zero target by 2050.

Matt Western: Recent United Nations analysis makes it clear that the current climate pledges will achieve emission reductions of only 1% by the end of this critical decade, not the 45% required to stay below 1.5° C. What has the Minister done to pressure large emitters such as Australia, Japan, South Korea and Russia who have merely resubmitted old pledges or, in the case of Brazil, have backtracked even further, to step up and do their fair share?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The COP presidency has an incredibly important role in drawing everyone together and driving up ambition. As the COP26 President set out in answer to an earlier question, we have shifted the dial in terms of the ambition brought forward through nationally determined contributions by many countries, but there is much more to do and we are under no illusions that the challenges that we all face as a planet to meet that are yet to be resolved. We continue to work tirelessly as a team and across the globe to encourage more ambition.

Green Businesses

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the opportunities for green businesses at COP26. [902698]

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): Businesses have a key role in tackling climate change, which we will showcase in the UK managed spaces of COP26. Businesses were able to apply for the expression of interest process and will also be able to participate through other delegations and in the action zone organised by the UN and the high-level planet champions.

Mrs Murray: Cornwall is taking the lead in the emerging green economy, particularly looking at the use of local lithium to store electricity. Will my right hon. Friend promote Cornwall's great potential at the summit and advise businesses of any opportunities?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Local government has a key role to play in tackling climate change and meeting net zero targets, and we are keen to ensure that there is representation at the summit from cities and regions across the UK. My hon. Friend will know that, following the G7 in June, the Government have backed a major drive to make Cornwall the first net zero region in the UK. I am sure that she will be leading on getting the maximum impact for her constituents from the town deals for Penzance, St Ives and Camborne, worth £65 million, up to £1 million of innovation funding and energy efficiency, power generation and energy storage for Cornish businesses, and the opportunities for Cornwall to pilot the new e-bike support scheme.

Topical Questions

[902725] **Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): Last week, we set out our high-level two-week programme for COP26. The conference will open with a world leaders' summit followed by a range of themed days of activity, including on finance, energy, youth, nature, adaptation, gender, science, transport and the built environment. These days will also be an opportunity to showcase specific global action on tackling climate change. I look forward to welcoming parliamentarians to Glasgow and we will very shortly be inviting Members of both Houses to formally register their interest for attendance at COP26.

Harriett Baldwin: As the president-designate says, it is not just world leaders and Governments who are needed to make COP26 a success, but parliamentarians from around the world. As chair of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, we will be hosting events for parliamentarians around the world, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will encourage his officials to accredit as many parliamentarians from international delegations as possible.

Alok Sharma: Obviously we want to ensure that we have a physical event and that those who apply have an opportunity to try to get accredited. As I said, for parliamentarians in this and the other place, we will be opening a registration process shortly.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow COP26 President.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): The Copenhagen summit of 2009 was undone by deep mistrust of the developed world by developing countries. Rather than learning from that, rich countries are still failing to deliver on the promised \$100 billion of climate finance and the billions of vaccine doses still required by poorer countries. Yesterday, shamefully, the Prime Minister decided to press ahead with the cut in our aid spending. When the COP26 President went to see the PM yesterday, did he explain that COP26 is not some international photo opportunity, but a complex and fragile negotiation, and that the aid cut simply deepens mistrust, damages our moral standing and undermines our COP presidency?

Alok Sharma: The right hon. Gentleman raises two issues. On vaccines, he will know that we now have an offer open so that any accredited delegates who are not able to get vaccinated in their home country are able to receive vaccinations through the programme that we are setting up. Secondly, I can tell him that there is huge appreciation for the UK's leadership on climate action around the world. That is based on conversations that I have day in, day out with world leaders.

Edward Miliband: The COP26 President knows that world leaders and others are asking him why the UK is the only G7 country cutting aid spending in the year that we are hosting the COP. He knows that delivering support to developing countries is not just morally right, but essential to building a coalition to pressure the world's largest emitters.

The most significant of those emitters is China. To have a chance of keeping global warming to 1.5°, we need China to ensure that its emissions peak and start to decline by 2025 at the latest. Does the COP26 President agree? If so, can he tell us what the Prime Minister is doing to engage directly with China on the issue and persuade it to step up?

Alok Sharma: We are engaged with all big emitters; as the right hon. Gentleman knows, I am travelling around the globe talking to different countries. To come back to his point about aid spending, I just point out that this year we will spend more on aid as a percentage of our GNI than the US, Japan, Canada or Italy.

[902727] **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): In contrast to Kettering, which generates enough renewable electricity locally to power all 45,000 homes in the constituency, this week the Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China, reported that 52% of the world's urban greenhouse gas emissions come from just 25 megacities, 23 of which are in China. Will the COP26 President focus on that at COP26?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. That is precisely why, as part of our work, we are aiming to support countries to make a clean energy transition to solar, to wind power and to other renewables.

[902726] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Will the COP26 President join me in congratulating the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Dr Nik Johnson, on pressing ahead resolutely with the recommendations of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Commission on Climate, which was established by the

Mayor's predecessor and chaired by Baroness Brown? It is a fantastic example of what can be done locally in the run-up to COP26.

Alok Sharma: I congratulate all local areas and local leaders who are doing their bit on climate action. As I said, today we are launching the local authorities and Mayors engagement pack, which I hope local authorities and Mayors will use to encourage climate action across their areas.

[902729] **Nickie Aiken** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): Cleaning up our air, here and across the globe, is a major challenge for all of us. The conversations that I am having with local people and businesses in the Cities of London and Westminster make it clear that we have a key opportunity at COP26 for the UK to become a global leader in promoting cleaner, greener urban environments. With that in mind, will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will do all he can to accelerate action to tackle urban air pollution through collaboration between Governments, businesses and civil society?

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The UK is already leading the way on tackling air pollution. The Government are backing a £3.8 billion plan to clean up transport and tackle air pollution, investing in green transport and working with local authorities just like the City of Westminster. My hon. Friend will be keen to read the transport decarbonisation plan, which will be published later today and will set out the world's first "greenprint" for decarbonised transport and clean air.

[902728] **Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): What proportion of the billions of pounds of private sector investment and how many of the 250,000 highly skilled green jobs contained in the Prime Minister's 10-point green industrial revolution plan to level up across the UK will go to Wales?

Alok Sharma: We are supporting industrial clusters around the world, as the hon. Lady will know from the 10-point plan that the Prime Minister published at the end of last year, and we are seeing action across the country. She will know that the Government have recently funded some new offshore wind ports and we have seen the investment that is going into battery manufacturing for electric vehicles.

[902730] **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): There is real concern regarding the UK Government's accommodation for COP26, which is to be provided by MCI Group with extremely high costs and unreasonable terms and conditions. Will the President provide details of the MCI contract to the Committee that is scrutinising COP26, and can he assure us that delegations, many of which operate on very small budgets and are among the worst affected by climate change, will not be deterred from attending?

Alok Sharma: I would just point out to the hon. Gentleman that MCI has secured only about a third of the market availability for hotel rooms, and that there are alternative options for booking accommodation, which are still available. If he has specific issues, I would be happy to speak to him separately.

Mr Speaker: Before we come to Prime Minister's questions, I would like to point out that a British sign language interpretation of the proceedings is available to watch on parliamentlive.tv.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

[902745] **Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 14 July.

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): While Sunday's result may not have been the one we were all hoping for, I know that the whole House will want to congratulate Gareth Southgate and the England squad on their fantastic achievements over the last month. The nation is proud of each and every one of them.

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

Andy Slaughter: I second the Prime Minister's support for our outstanding England team and players, but it is perhaps a pity that it did not come sooner from him and the Home Secretary. We all know the importance of double vaccination, especially against the delta or Johnson variant of the virus, but in Hammersmith and Fulham, despite the hard work of our local NHS, council and volunteers, only 36% of adults have been double-jabbed, so will the Prime Minister think again before recklessly removing all barriers to infection and transmission on 19 January? Will he keep the regulations on mask wearing and, like the Mayor of London, keep fighting the virus until it is beat?

The Prime Minister: If we had followed the hon. Gentleman's precepts—he campaigned vehemently to stay in the European Union—we would not have achieved the fastest vaccine roll-out of any European country or vaccinated a higher proportion than any European population. That is the reality. As for his criticism of the road map, I respectfully point out to the hon. Gentleman that the month is July, not January.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): It should be obvious that the Cabinet is as inclusive as the English football team, and I think that some of these criticisms are misplaced. Mr Speaker, I welcome your words at the beginning of Tuesday's debate and the Prime Minister's first paragraph on the Treasury minute from Monday. Can we agree that a vote in this House does not amend an Act of Parliament passed by both Houses? Are we expecting a similar debate in another place? Can I suggest to the Prime Minister that, instead of leaping from 0.5% to 0.7% at some stage in the future, we step towards it, because a 40% increase in one year would be ludicrous? Perhaps the Chancellor could consider going to 0.55%, 0.6%, 0.65% and then 0.7%.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend very much for his opening point. On official development assistance, of course I can give him the reassurance that

we will continue to follow the law, and he will have heard clearly what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor had to say from this Dispatch Box and what I have said. We want to return to 0.7% as fast as we can, and when fiscal conditions allow.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I start by thanking the England football team for everything they have given this country over the last six weeks. I am so proud of this young, diverse and humble team and everything they represent. They are the very best of modern Britain and everything I know this country can be.

Does the Prime Minister think it was wrong to criticise the England team's decision to oppose racism by taking the knee as "gesture politics"?

The Prime Minister: I agree very much with what the right hon. and learned Gentleman says about the England team, and I repeat that I want to thank each and every one of them for what they did and the incredible campaign they ran during the Euro 2020 championship. They represent the very best of our country, and I repeat that I utterly condemn and abhor the racist outpourings that we saw on Sunday night.

Today we are taking practical steps to ensure that the football banning order regime is changed, so that if a person is guilty of racist online abuse of footballers, they will not be going to the match—no ifs, no buts, no exemptions and no excuses.

Keir Starmer: I am sorry, but that just will not wash. It rings hollow.

Let me remind the Prime Minister and the House. On 7 June, his spokesperson said:

"On taking the knee, specifically, the Prime Minister is more focused on action rather than gestures."

On 14 June, the Home Secretary said:

"I just don't support people participating in that type of gesture politics."

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Brendan Clarke-Smith), a Conservative MP, called it a "ridiculous empty gesture". There is no point pretending these things were not said.

The England footballer Tyrone Mings said—[*Interruption.*] I heard "a Labour party member" shouted out. Is that really the response? Is that it? Tyrone Mings said, and the House might want to listen:

"labelling our anti-racism message as 'Gesture Politics'"

served to "stoke the fire" of racism and hatred. Those are powerful words from someone who has been subjected to racist abuse. He is right, isn't he?

The Prime Minister: I reiterate our total support for our fantastic England team, and I support them in the way they showed solidarity with their friends who faced racism.

When the right hon. and learned Gentleman talks about the Home Secretary, let me remind him that she has faced racism and prejudice all her career of a kind that he can never imagine. She has taken practical steps to get black and minority officers into the police in record numbers, of which I am very proud. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear the Prime Minister. If his own side do not want to hear him, I am sure the Tea Room will accommodate them. It is very important to listen to what the Prime Minister has to say.

Keir Starmer: Let me be clear. I totally condemn all racism, including that directed at the Home Secretary, but she has got this wrong. The whole country knows it and the Prime Minister's own MPs know it. In the last few days, everybody has seen that England's black players have been the target of disgusting racist abuse following Sunday's match—disgusting.

This is really simple, either the Prime Minister is with the England players in their stand against racism or he can defend his own record, and that of his Ministers and some of his MPs, but he cannot have it both ways. Can he tell the House whether he now regrets failing to condemn those who booed England's players for standing up to racism? Yes or no.

The Prime Minister: We made it absolutely clear that no one should boo the England team. Following the racist abuse that our players sadly suffered on Sunday night and thereafter, we are now taking practical action. In addition to changing the football banning order regime, last night I met representatives of Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram and I made it absolutely clear to them that we will legislate to address this problem in the online harms Bill. Unless they get hate and racism off their platforms, they will face fines amounting to 10% of their global revenues. We all know they have the technology to do it.

Keir Starmer: The online harms Bill has been promised for three years. I am not sure a 15-minute chat at a garden party moves things forward that significantly. But I want to take the Prime Minister up on what he said about being absolutely clear, because here I have the headline, "Boris Johnson refuses to condemn fans booing England taking the knee". That is the story and that is the headline, from 6 June. That is absolutely clear, but it is not quite what the Prime Minister is implying today. The story goes on to quote the Prime Minister's spokesperson saying that the Prime Minister "fully respects the right of those who choose to...make their feelings known".

This is about booing; it says that he fully respects their rights. The Home Secretary said that booing was "a choice for them quite frankly."

So no condemnation there and no absolute clarity there. When senior Government Ministers and Conservative MPs defend the booing of an anti-racist message, who do they think they are defending, Prime Minister? And why are they defending it?

The Prime Minister: Nobody defends booing of the England side. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman continues to attack the Home Secretary—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear the Prime Minister. I want to know the answer, and I expect the Opposition to listen to the answer.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. We love and admire the England side and what they did. They represent the best of our country. Nobody defends booing the England side. But what the Home Secretary has been trying to do all her life is not just fight racism, but take practical steps to advance the cause of black and minority ethnic groups, which she has done successfully, notably in the police. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman is chucking this kind of thing around, may I

ask him now to retract this leaflet I have here that was produced by the Labour party during the Batley and Spen by-election, which was condemned by his own MPs as "dog-whistle racism"?

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister is not kidding anyone in this House, he is not kidding the public and he is not even kidding his own MPs. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), a Conservative MP, has said:

"The painful truth is that"

Tyrone Mings

"is completely right.

Very uncomfortable with the position we Conservatives are needlessly forcing ourselves into."

So, Prime Minister, behind you they don't believe you, and neither do we. We can all see what has happened here. The Government have been trying to stoke a culture war and they have realised that they are on the wrong side and now they hope that nobody has noticed. Why else would a Conservative MP boast that he is not watching his own team? Why else would another Conservative MP say that Marcus Rashford spends too much time "playing politics", when he is actually trying to feed children that the Government will not? And why will the Prime Minister refuse time and time again, even now, to condemn those who boo our players for standing up against racism? What is it that this England team symbolises that this Conservative party is so afraid of?

The Prime Minister: The House will judge for itself the quality of the question that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has just put. I think the whole House is united, including our distinguished Members from Scotland, in admiration of the England team—of every single member of that squad and what they did. We stick up for them, and what we are doing is taking practical steps to fight racism, changing the football banning order regime and fining the online companies. By the way, we will use more legislation if we have to, just as we used the threat of legislation to stop the European super league. We will get on with delivering for the people of this country. We will get on with vaccinating the people of this country, while the Opposition continue to vacillate. We will continue to immunise the people of this country, while the Opposition improvise and dart around. I do not want to engage in a political culture war of any kind; I want to get on with delivering for the people of this country—he simply wants to get on with dithering.

Keir Starmer: He does not want to engage in a culture war and point scoring—give me a break. Football is a game and racism is not, Prime Minister. That is why many of us have been involved in the charity Show Racism the Red Card for years. Far from giving racism the red card, the Prime Minister gave it the green light. I will tell you the worst kind of gesture politics, Mr Speaker: putting an England shirt on over a shirt and tie while not condemning those booing is the worst kind of gesture.

Finally, I want to ask the Prime Minister about the reported amnesty for crimes committed during the troubles in Northern Ireland. I worked in Northern Ireland for six years with the Policing Board and the police and I have prosecuted terrorists as the Director of Public Prosecutions, so I know how difficult and sensitive the issue is. But a blanket amnesty, including for terrorists, is plain wrong.

I was in Northern Ireland last week, and it is absolutely clear that the Government's amnesty is not supported by the political parties in Northern Ireland and it is not supported by victims' groups. Last Thursday, I spoke to victims of terrorism at the WAVE Trauma Centre in north Belfast; they have not even been properly consulted on the proposal. If things are to move forward in Northern Ireland, any discussion has to start with the victims. Politicians in London cannot simply draw a line under terrorism and other crimes and then force it on those most affected. *[Interruption.]* The Prime Minister looks up; let him look up and let him hear, because I want to quote Julie Hambleton. Her sister Maxine was among the 21 people killed by the IRA in the Birmingham pub bombings—that is Julie Hambleton, Prime Minister. She says:

"Tell me Prime Minister, if one of your loved ones was blown up beyond recognition, where you were only able to identify your son or daughter by their fingernails...would you be so quick to"

grant their murderers an amnesty and propose

"such obscene legislation"?

What does the Prime Minister have to say to Julie—she is listening—and other victims like her?

The Prime Minister: I think that the whole House will acknowledge the suffering of victims like Julie and their families. Of course, nothing I say or can do now can in any way mitigate her loss. That is clear. But it is also true that the people of Northern Ireland must, if we possibly can allow them to, move forwards now.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman will know that the proposals that are being introduced—the House will hear about them in more detail later from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—are measured, balanced and have a wide degree of support, if I may say so, from former Labour Prime Ministers and former Labour leaders who are of considerably more distinction than the right hon. and learned Gentleman. He will recall that it was under a Labour Administration that many terrorists were unfortunately given, effectively, an amnesty. They were allowed to escape the full consequences of their crimes, as he knows very well. That is the reality.

This is of course no consolation to people like Julie, but the sad fact remains that there are many members of the armed services who continue to face the threat of vexatious prosecutions well into their 70s and 80s and later. We are finally bringing forward a solution to this problem to enable the Province of Northern Ireland to draw a line under the troubles and to enable the people of Northern Ireland to move forward. Someone with greater statesmanship and clarity of vision would have seen that and given the proposals a fair wind.

[902751] **Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): The scandalous situation with the noxious gas emissions at Walleys Quarry landfill in my constituency continues. To date, there has been no apology from the operator, Red Industries, and no credible explanation for the odour that is blighting the lives and health of so many of my local residents. What assurances can the Prime Minister give me today that every effort will be made to speed up the works that have been mandated by the Environment Agency, that we will get a deadline for when we can expect the awful situation to be resolved, and that those responsible are held fully to account?

The Prime Minister: I yield to no one in my admiration for the Environment Agency, but in this case I thank my hon. Friend because it is not, in my view, sorting the problem out fast enough. I am fed up with this issue being raised with me. We must stop the stink, and I want the air around Walleys Quarry to be of alpine freshness before too long.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Let me begin by congratulating the England team on reaching the final, which was an incredible achievement, but the tragedy of the tournament was the undercurrent of racism that was ultimately targeted at three young men: Rashford, Sancho and Saka. Wherever there is racism, it falls on all of us to face it down and to call it out, and it is shameful that it took until last night for the Prime Minister to meet with the main social media companies and finally wake up to the fact that those who publish and promote vile racist online abuse need to be faced down and sanctioned. Can the Prime Minister tell us what sanctions he thinks would be appropriate for someone who publishes racist content—it is shocking even to have to say this out loud—describing Africans as “flag-waving piccaninnies” with “watermelon smiles”?

The Prime Minister: I have commented many times about the words that I have said in the past, and I think the House understands how we can take things out of context. *[Interruption.]* I do think people understand that. What they also understand is that there is a chance now to hold these internet companies to account and to make sure that they face fines running to 10% of their global income if they fail to take hate and racism off their platforms. I hope that the Scottish nationalist party will support that.

Ian Blackford: There is still no contrition, still no apology. The truth is that the Tory party does not sanction those who publish that kind of racist content; it promotes them to be Prime Minister. The legacy of this Prime Minister's dog whistling has followed him into No.10 Downing Street and it is now at the heart of this Tory Government. As the England international Tyrone Mings has so powerfully stated, this Government “don't get to stoke the fire...and then pretend to be disgusted”

when it happens. They do not get to condemn the racism of others, but deny the racism that they have even provoked. In March, this UK Government's own report on racism, the Sewell report, said that there was no “systemic problem” in the UK. I think the England men's football team would beg to differ.

After the shocking racism on show over the past week, does the Prime Minister still stand by his Government's belief that systemic racism is not a problem that exists in the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: I do think that racism is a problem in the United Kingdom, and I believe that it needs to be tackled and stamped out with some of the means that I have described this morning. When he attacks my party, I am afraid that he has the wrong target. This is a party that has not only had the first ever Muslim Secretary of State for Health and Social Care—and he is the former Chancellor, of course—but two female Prime Ministers. It has the most diverse Cabinet in the history of this country. It has the most diverse Government

in the history of this country. If you are a young person growing up in a black or ethnic minority group in this country, we are the party that represents hope and opportunity. That is the reality about the Conservative party today.

[902753] **Julie Marson** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): The UK is packed full of incredible innovation-led businesses capable of leading entire industries, not least in Hertford and Stortford, where we are at the heart of the innovation corridor. I know that this Government want to ensure the best possible access to venture funding over multiple rounds to catapult and scale up businesses full of potential into world-beating companies. Will the Prime Minister meet me to discuss how we can best make venture work for the scale-up community and transform some of our best ideas into some of the world's biggest businesses?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend, who knows a lot about the subject that she mentions. This is a fantastic opportunity for this country, because we do indeed produce a great many tech breakthroughs and we are very much looking at how to scale up fast, but we must not forget that, as I speak, there are three countries in the world that have scaled up tech breakthroughs to 100 unicorns worth more than a £1 billion. Only three countries have 100 unicorns. They are the United States of America, China and the United Kingdom.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Llefarydd.

For more than seven years, Plaid Cymru has been calling for the gargantuan HS2 railway to be treated as an England-only project, so that Wales gets our fair share. Not a single inch of track will be in Wales, but we are footing the bill. Today the Welsh Affairs Committee backed our call, calling the UK Government's categorisation of HS2 in relation to Wales "unfair and biased". Will the Prime Minister today right this wrong, respect the Welsh Affairs Committee and ensure that Wales, like Scotland, receives our fair share from HS2?

The Prime Minister: I normally have a great deal of respect and interest in what the right hon. Lady says, but in this case she has missed what the Government are doing for transport connectivity in Wales and to Wales—something about which I know she is as passionate as I am. Look at what we are doing in the Union connectivity review with the A55, the north Wales railway corridor into Liverpool and the M4. Never let it be forgotten that it was the Welsh Labour Government—not the right hon. Lady's fault, of course, because she is Plaid—who spent £144 million on a study and then did not even do the diversion.

[902754] **Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con) [V]: The circumstances of Jewish burials around the world are a sensitive and important issue to my constituents and, as such, to me. In January 1942, the Nazis built two concentration camps on British soil, on the island of Alderney. Conditions were appalling, with multiple deaths. However, there are just 397 recorded graves on Alderney, just 6.6% of a total population of 6,000 internees. In 1961, a British delegation undertook an inquiry into the atrocities that occurred on Alderney. Today I ask the Prime Minister to authorise the release of all documents and information residing in the archives into those

investigations, so that we know what happened to thousands of people on the island of Alderney during world war two. To quote Elie Wiesel,

"to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time."

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about the victims on Alderney. We must never forget those on the Channel Islands who suffered under occupation between 1940 and 1945. I am told that the documents in question have been transferred to the National Archives, but I will ensure that the relevant Minister meets my hon. Friend to discuss the matter further.

[902746] **Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): There are currently 800,000 students self-isolating, and even after the reforms to the bubbling system, the Government's failure to get the delta variant under control means that infections rising over the summer will mean that the autumn term in our schools will be very severely affected. If the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation says that it is safe and appropriate for adolescents to receive the vaccine, will the Prime Minister promise that every single adolescent will be offered the vaccine over the summer and parents given all the information they need to make an informed decision, so that schools can return and not continue to be affected by the bad policy making of this Government and their failure to get the delta variant under control?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman seems to want us to relax our rules on self-isolation that are protecting people from coronavirus. I do not think that is the right thing to do at this time. He also calls for us to go against the JCVI. The point he raises is a matter for the JCVI.

[902755] **Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): With the economy rebounding and a great many job vacancies currently available, does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a tremendous opportunity emerging now to build a stronger British labour market post Brexit and post covid, and that we need to help employers create jobs with better pay, more security, and more opportunities for skills and career progression? Is that not one of the keys to levelling up and ending the blight of in-work poverty?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I know how much my right hon. Friend cares about this matter. This is not only one of the reasons why we are rolling out our massive plan for jobs, but why I am proud that under this Government we have increased the national living wage by a record amount, to £8.91 per hour.

[902747] **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP) [V]: The communities of Leslie, Markinch, Pitteuchar, Thornton, Woodside and East Wemyss in my constituency are all either losing or have already lost their post offices since 2019. In addition, constituents in Coatdown of Balgonie, Windygates, Cadham, Methil, Buckhaven and Methilhill have all had the disruption of temporary closures or relocations, and the post office at Glenwood is currently closed until further notice. Given that the Post Office is 100% owned by the Prime Minister's Government, what exactly does it take for him to admit that the current trading model for the Post Office is not working for the people who rely on its services?

The Prime Minister: The treatment of the postmasters and sub-postmasters in the recent computer malfunction was, I am afraid, appalling, and I have made that clear. When it comes to protecting and supporting post offices, particularly rural post offices, which I think is what the hon. Gentleman was driving at, this Government will do everything they can to protect them.

[902757] **Angela Richardson** (Guildford) (Con) [V]: Too much noise, too much air pollution and too much time wasted sitting in traffic is impacting productivity. The A3 as it narrows through Guildford has been a cause of frustration for decades. According to Highways England, there are no more sticking plasters, which is why I am calling for the A3 to be tunnelled under Guildford. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as we build back better after the pandemic, investment in major road infrastructure solutions will be an important part of delivering on the levelling-up agenda across the whole country?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. I know the stretch of road that she refers to very well, as I am sure many Members across this House do. I will not be able to click my fingers and say that we can tunnel under Guildford; all I can say, in all candour, is that we will certainly look at it. But hon. Members should be in no doubt that we are spending record sums—£27 billion on improving England's strategic roads following £640 billion for the biggest, best-ever package of infrastructure investment in this country.

[902748] **Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC) [V]: Many people are aghast at the potential consequences of trashing English covid regulations in a triumphalist prime ministerial crash attack. Wales's regulations, to be announced today, are expected to take a cautious and measured approach. Will the Prime Minister make it clear that those visiting Wales this summer must stick to Welsh laws and that on covid regulations he can only speak for England?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course. I think that people should stick to the rules and the guidance wherever they are, and the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to talk about a cautious and measured approach.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): The Prime Minister will have seen that two recently published Government-commissioned reports, mine on competition policy and that of the Taskforce on Innovation, Growth and Regulatory Reform, both make the same two recommendations to inject fresh energy into our better regulation regime so that we can deliver our Brexit ambition of replacing ponderous EU regulations with simpler, digital and less burdensome UK equivalents without reducing quality standards in the process. Will he take this opportunity to unleash a big post-Brexit better regulation dividend by declaring his enthusiastic support for a strong new one-in-two-out regime with no loopholes or exceptions, right here today?

The Prime Minister: Yes. It is obvious that the UK has a massive amount to gain not just from my hon. Friend's report, which I much enjoyed, as I told him—I thought it was excellent—but from the bigger report from the taskforce on reducing regulation. I thank them for that, and he and the taskforce will be seeing a lot more in the next few weeks.

[902750] **John Nicolson** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP) [V]: Yesterday, at the Prime Minister's instigation, 333 Conservative Members of this House, including some of its wealthiest, voted to deprive some of the world's poorest children of clean water, while education for girls programmes that we guaranteed will be slashed, and polio eradication schemes too. Most people go into politics to make the world a better place, but the Prime Minister seems to be an exception. As he reads of the anguish his decision has caused, and as the father of a young child, does he not feel the merest hint of shame?

The Prime Minister: I think the people of this entire country should be immensely proud of what the UK is doing abroad, whether it is educating millions of girls, with an increase in support for female education, helping countries around the world to tackle climate change with £11.6 billion of investment, or helping refugees in Yemen, Syria or Ethiopia with £900 million. We are spending £10 billion a year on overseas aid alone, to say nothing of what we are doing with vaccines. The whole country should be immensely proud of what the UK is doing in spite of this pandemic.

Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con) [V]: Mr Speaker, I am sure you will know the Green Man festival, an incredibly popular international music event which takes place in Crickhowell in my constituency. The festival organisers have gone to great lengths to ensure that the event is covid-secure, but the Welsh Government refuse to give them the green light to go ahead as a test event, unlike similar events in England. So will my right hon. Friend help us by giving the Green Man festival his full support, and encourage the Welsh Government to get behind the festival at long last?

The Prime Minister: Well, I have not been invited to attend the Green Man festival, but it sounds great. My hon. Friend is obviously a big fan. I will do what I can to pass her message along. I thank her for campaigning for Wales and for the Green Man festival.

[902752] **Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): My constituent Jacqui Davies was diagnosed in April with a type of blood cancer that prevents her immune system from developing antibodies against covid. Jacqui wants to live as normal a life as possible, and to do everyday things like going shopping, but she is terrified and she thinks that the rapid lifting of restrictions on Monday is putting her at risk. With the delta variant about to spike due to the Government's decision to lift restrictions, particularly the requirement to wear masks in public places, what is the Prime Minister's message to people in Jacqui's situation? Will he rethink the reckless gamble of lifting all these restrictions on Monday? And yes, Jacqui did support staying in the EU.

The Prime Minister: My message—I am sorry, obviously, for the condition that Jacqui suffers, and I think that the Labour party obviously needs to work out whether it is in favour of going ahead with step 4 or not, because that is not at all clear from what the hon. Gentleman has said, or what the Leader of the Opposition has said. They do not have a clue. But what I can say to the hon. Gentleman, and to Jacqui, is that we expect and recommend

everybody to wear a face covering in a confined space where they are meeting people they do not normally meet, and that is quite right.

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): Last week I met the Reading Agency, which is about to launch its annual summer reading challenge and hopes to reach 1 million primary school children this year. What a great excuse to go to one of our brilliant libraries and take part in the big covid education catch-up. With that in mind, will my right hon. Friend join me in encouraging every child across the nation to take part in the summer reading challenge? Pick up a book and read back better!

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. She is quite right; there could not be a better campaign for the summer. We have put £1.9 million of support into the reading scheme that she mentions. But of course there is £200 million going into the holiday activities fund, and

there could not be a better, more useful, happier way of occupying your time on holiday than reading a good book.

Mr Speaker: Can I just gently say to all leaders that in the end I have had to cut off quite a few Back Benchers because of the amount of time that has been taken up at the beginning? Can we think about those as well? It is so important that they get their questions heard.

Peter Kyle: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: There will be no points of order now. I am now suspending the House for a few minutes, to enable the necessary arrangements for the next item of business to be made.

12.38 pm

Sitting suspended.

Racist Abuse on Social Media

12.44 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make a statement on the prevalence of racist abuse on social media.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. I will take a moment to reflect on the extraordinary success of the England football team in this tournament, knowing as we do the background to the urgent question. That team played their hearts out for us, and they won through to their first international final for 55 years. They did so with enormous skill, with sportsmanship and with dignity. They brought our country together and they united us in joy. It is therefore a great shame that the success and achievements of every member of that team have been overshadowed by the racism of online trolls.

In Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister just reinforced our collective condemnation of racism online and offline. Individuals who commit racist offences should face the full force of law, and we already have robust legislation in place to deal with online hate. Governments around the world are grappling with how we collectively tame the wild west of the internet. We are leading the world in tackling online harms through the introduction of the online safety Bill, which will put in place measures to tackle illegal and legal but harmful abuse, including racist abuse.

If major platforms do not meet their own standards to keep people safe and address abuse quickly and effectively, they could face enforcement action. Let one message ring loud and clear to those companies: there is no reason for companies to wait until the regime is fully running to take action against this abhorrent abuse. Indeed, I suspect that such delays will serve to stiffen the resolve of the Government and of this House.

In addition, we have asked the Law Commission to conduct a wide-ranging review into hate crime, including offensive online communications. Let us put that in context: in 2019-20, the police recorded more than 76,000 race hate crimes. Increases in police-recorded hate crime in recent years have been driven by improvements in crime recording and better identification of what constitutes a hate crime. Although statistics can help us track trends, we must always remember that behind the numbers are real people who are often left traumatised and shaken by their experiences. There is nothing so damaging and corrosive as the impact that racism has both on victims and on our communities more widely.

I would like to conclude this statement with the words of our England manager Gareth Southgate:

"We have been a beacon of light in bringing people together... the national team stands for everybody and so that togetherness has to continue. We have shown the power our country has when it does come together".

Let us all live up to those words.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am grateful for that response, but the reaction of the Government has lacked urgency and completely failed to understand the scale of the revulsion that exists as a result of the events of recent days. The England men's football players have been a

credit to the country on and off the pitch. When they took the knee to stand against racism, that was not gesture politics. They spoke courageously to a desire for change across our country. The failure of the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary to condemn those who were booing the team while they took the knee was shameful, and frankly makes their later protestations of support for the team no more than empty words. The Home Secretary has not even bothered to turn up to answer this urgent question today.

The racist abuse to which Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka have been subjected is disgraceful. Such behaviour has been too common on social media for too long. Social media platforms have had more than long enough to act. The Home Secretary said to me on Monday that "legislation will be absolutely pivotal", but the Government have dragged their feet bringing the online harms Bill forward. Worse still, the Bill as proposed will not address what we have seen in the past couple of days—allowing social media companies to set their own terms and conditions will not be enough.

Will the Government therefore commit to including criminal sanctions for senior executives in the Bill? In addition, will the Minister tell us exactly when the Government will be acceding to the demand from Opposition Members to extend football banning orders to offences that take place online, as was promised by the Prime Minister in Prime Minister's questions?

Finally, will the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary finally show some leadership, and apologise for siding with those who are booing and not with the brave England players?

Victoria Atkins: If I may, I will just explain to the House where the Home Secretary is today. She is at this very moment hosting a long-standing meeting with charities on the frontline of tackling violence against women and girls and with the survivors of those crimes, so I hope the House will instead put up with me answering this urgent question. However, I know that the Home Secretary would reject many, indeed all, of the allegations that the right hon. Gentleman has just made about her conduct. She has been relentless—relentless—in pursuing social media companies to ensure that they take much tougher stances, as we all expect, not just on racism online, but on child sex exploitation, terrorism and other offences. So I do not accept his accusations across the Dispatch Box.

On the online safety Bill, this is a landmark piece of legislation. The Government have been very careful to ensure that the Bill receives the scrutiny of the House, and that is why we are taking the confident step, I would say, of opening up the draft Bill to pre-legislative scrutiny. We do not do that for every Bill, but we want to get this Bill right. The House will remember that we did exactly the same with the Domestic Abuse Bill, and the Bill was made all the better for it. I am delighted that Labour has now, I understand, provided the names of its Committee members, so that the pre-legislative scrutiny can take place at pace. However, I underline the message that this House, but also the public, are watching the behaviours of online companies very carefully, and any company would be very wise to set out what it plans to do in relation to meeting the expectations of this place and of the public when it comes to conducting their systems in a way that is clear and that prevents the sorts of abuse we have seen this weekend.

On football banning orders, again the right hon. Gentleman will have heard what the Prime Minister said very clearly at PMQs about the work the Government are conducting in relation to football banning orders. It is complex because we know, for example, that some of the trolls who have targeted some members of the team over the weekend are overseas, but we very much want to work with football clubs and others to ensure that these orders have the powers that we all want them to have. As I have said throughout—and this is the golden thread that runs throughout our work on tackling online crimes—what is illegal offline is illegal online, and that is the principle we will be adopting throughout the online safety Bill.

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for her statement and for calling out some of the vile racist abuse that our brilliant players have had to face. On Sunday night, the Centre for Countering Digital Hate identified and reported 105 Instagram accounts that racially abused members of the England football team. As of this morning, only six of them have been taken down, so while we are getting warm words from some of these social media companies, that appears to be all we are getting from them at present. Can my hon. Friend therefore confirm that the online safety Bill will be brought forward with speed, and that those who post this abuse online will be held to proper account?

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend highlights some of the very practical responses that social media companies can take right now; they do not need to wait for the online safety Bill. I read with some dismay and anger a report in the *i* paper today about how Instagram had applied its own rules—community rules—in relation to offensive emojis and indeed highly offensive words that were sent to players, but the social media companies themselves have to explain how exactly their community rules accord with the expectations and indeed the law of our country. May I, however, just make the point again that we are not alone in this? This is a challenge facing every democratic society in the world, and it is by working together, as we are doing with our voluntary principles on tackling terrorism and child sexual exploitation, that we are going to be able to make real progress against these companies and against this hatred.

Mr Speaker: I now call the SNP spokesperson, Stuart C. McDonald.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) [V]: The disgusting online racism faced by England players is unfortunately overshadowing a fantastic tournament and a fantastic performance by an England team that has lately attracted admiration and perhaps even a little bit of envy.

Yes, we urgently need stronger online regulation. Content must be taken down faster, and platforms must no longer be allowed to support racist content through shamefully lax rules. We also need a debate on how we identify and punish those peddling this hate. Does the Minister agree that social media regulation is not a silver bullet, that online racism reflects offline racism, and that the Government need to take tackling racism, including structural and institutional racism, more seriously?

Whatever our disagreements, no one could say that the previous Prime Minister did not take tackling racism incredibly seriously. Why do we struggle to say the same about the current Prime Minister? Is it not because on his watch too many in his party have spent more time downplaying racism than tackling it, and more time ridiculing anti-racism campaigners than going after those who actually peddle racism? So yes, we will support action to clamp down on online platforms, but will the Minister support a change of attitude in her party?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I can assure him that had Scotland reached the same dizzy heights as England, I would have been cheering them on with great passion and strength of feeling, so I am pleased that he was able to concede some support for the England team.

As for the hon. Gentleman's wider question about racism and hate speech across society, he is right to acknowledge that this is a matter for us all to tackle. As a member of the Home Affairs Committee, he will be aware of the work that the Government are doing to tackle hate speech and hate crimes. Of course, "hate crimes" is a very broad term: it includes not only racism but hatred towards disabled people, hatred towards transgender people, and so on. That is why we have asked the Law Commission to look at online crimes to ensure that the position is up to date and meets our expectations.

However, there is a wider message on racism more generally. I have been overwhelmed by the public's response to those trolls over the weekend—by, for example, the way they responded to what happened to the mural in Withington: how angry they were that some individual had defaced it, and how positive their reaction has been. I think that that is what we need to reflect on and act on. Indeed, that is why I quoted our team's manager. I think he has summed up where the public are and where we are on this, and I think it is by working together that we will tackle some of these hateful attitudes.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): I know that the Home Secretary herself has been at the receiving end of terrible racist abuse. Does the Minister agree that fighting racism online and in any other form is a priority for her and for the Government? Does she also agree that that fight will be most effective when racism and anti-racism campaigns are fully understood by everyone, and that what really matters is meaningful action to tackle the scourge of racism?

Victoria Atkins: Very much so. The Home Secretary has been targeted, along with other Members on both sides of the House, and it seems that, sadly, women in particular—women of colour—are targeted by online trolls.

There are many, many people in our society who have to deal with this racism, not just online but, I am afraid, offline. I think that part of our national conversation should be about how each of us can show our complete support for the campaigns to combat racism, and how we can all ensure that we are doing everything we can, both individually and as a country, to tackle racist behaviour. I know that the Home Secretary feels very strongly about this, and indeed she has been particularly strong in her communications with tech companies throughout the two years for which she has been in

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office; but I also know that this is a feeling shared by many in the House, and, as I say, I am very conscious that there are others in this place who are victims as well.

Mr Speaker: Let us now go to the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, Yvette Cooper.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) [V]: On the Instagram profiles of England heroes this lunch time, there are still racist posts, including blatantly racist words and emojis, that have been up for more than 24 hours. I have challenged Instagram on this from the Home Affairs Committee repeatedly over the last few days. It told me this morning that using some of those emojis as racist slurs is against its rules, yet inexplicably, they are still up, and it is still taking Instagram days to remove these posts. Speed matters.

Can the Minister tell me what the Online Safety Bill is actually going to do to take action on this speed issue and to penalise companies for not moving fast enough? At the moment it looks as though that action will not happen. That is unacceptable. Keyboard cowards are being given a megaphone by these social media companies, and it has to stop.

Victoria Atkins: I completely agree with the right hon. Lady, the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee. I do not think these tech companies quite understand the anger and frustration of everyone involved in trying to scrutinise and hold them to account when they come back at us with, “It doesn’t meet our community rules.” Words such as the words I suspect she is thinking about, the emojis, the language—that is unacceptable in any civilised society, and that includes online fora as well as offline. The Bill is a real opportunity for the Government to lay the law down but also, as I say, for parliamentarians across the House to make their views known. I have long urged the companies to listen carefully to Members of Parliament, and I would urge them again to do so, because if they do not listen, we will act.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): As someone who represents one of the most diverse constituencies in the entire country, may I put on the record how abhorrent racism is, in any form? Does my hon. Friend agree that many of these online trolls hide behind the cloak of anonymity? Can she confirm that the police can still prosecute anonymous postings, and will she consider whether we should outlaw such online posting? I think that people would take more personal responsibility if it were in their own name.

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend alights upon a very important point, but also one that will require the scrutiny and debate of this House. While we know that many, many cowards hide behind anonymous accounts, there are people who use their anonymity legitimately—victims of domestic abuse, for example, and indeed whistleblowers in very restrictive regimes overseas. I know that this place, when we come to scrutinise the Bill, will weigh those arguments up very carefully, but again, I have great sympathy with my hon. Friend’s viewpoint that if people are able to hide behind these accounts anonymously, of course that makes it much

more difficult for the police to trace them. Again, we need to think through collectively where we are prepared to draw the boundaries in the wild west of the internet.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): The Minister gave the usual Tory platitudes. Yes, she condemned the horrific racism our England stars have faced, but what did she think about the Prime Minister when he was describing black people as “piccaninnies” with “watermelon smiles”, when he used newspaper columns to mock Muslim women as “letterboxes” and “bank robbers”, when he refused to condemn the booing of England players taking the knee, and when his Home Secretary derided that anti-racist message as “gesture politics”? Is it not the case, like England star Tyrone Mings has said, that the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister were stoking the fire of racism and giving the green light to racism, and only now, when the consequences are clear, are they feigning outrage?

Victoria Atkins: I had hoped that we would be able to conduct this debate in a measured and collective way. I do not genuinely think the hon. Lady is accusing either the Prime Minister of this country or, indeed, the Home Secretary of racism. That would be a truly extraordinary allegation to make. I hope that, at some point, we will be able to work together to tackle racism. That is what we all want to do. That is what the work of this Government is directed towards. I hope that we can lower the tone a little bit and understand that in—[*Interruption.*] Again, the hon. Lady is trying to shout at me. In tackling these horrific instances of racism, we need to work collectively together, and shouting at me across the Dispatch Box is not going to help with that.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con) [V]: Does my hon. Friend agree that the incidents of racism on social media over the past few days show why the approach taken in the draft Online Safety Bill is right? We need an independent regulator that will hold companies to account. Those companies have failed to take down this abuse, even though it is against their platform policies, and they have failed to take it down when people have complained about it. Worse than that, their own recommendation tools were actually promoting the content on Sunday night. This has to stop, but it will only stop once there is independent regulation of these companies.

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in describing that Bill as necessary and required. I think that in 10 or 15 years’ time we will look back on this era of the internet, and with the regulations we will be in a much better place in terms of people accessing social media in a positive, healthy way, rather than having to put up with the hatred we have seen in some quarters. In the Bill, as part of imposing that duty of care, we propose fines for the companies concerned of up to £18 million or—importantly—up to 10% of qualifying annual turnover. I suspect that the second figure may be the one that helps to concentrate minds.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind) [V]: Is not the issue that the Government have refused to take any action towards ending social media discrimination of any kind? That, in turn, has fanned the flames of divisiveness and hate in our communities that we are

currently witnessing, as my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana) pointed out. The Amnesty International report on “Toxic Twitter” pointed out that black women are 84% more likely to experience racist abuse online than anyone else. What real steps will the Minister take, urgently, to ensure that no one—and I mean absolutely no one—is able to post racist abuse online?

Victoria Atkins: I suspect I am not the only person who feels a little astonished that it is this right hon. Member who chose to ask that question about taking immediate action to tackle racism. I remind the House of the findings of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission under his watch—Labour has

“unlawfully discriminated against, harassed or victimised people because they are Jewish.”

I am also reminded that a Jewish female MP had to have police protection at the right hon. Gentleman’s party conference, because of fears for her own safety. I will listen to many people about tackling racism and I will work with pretty much anyone, but I will take a long spoon with which to sup with this particular Member.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con) [V]: It is popular to blame mutant algorithms for many things, but social media giants could use them quickly and effectively to shut down accounts that are spouting racist bile. Will my hon. Friend assure me that the Government are prepared to take action against platforms such as Instagram, which have been painfully slow to respond to the horrific racist abuse targeted at black players since Sunday?

Victoria Atkins: My right hon. Friend alights on an important point. This power is already within the reach of internet companies. Those companies seem to think that their community rules somehow take precedence over the laws of our country, and I imagine that is the same across other countries in the world. The message to those tech companies is this: please listen to the public’s outrage at some of the posts festering on your platforms, and deal with them. It is simply not acceptable to expect players, or victims of such abuse, to deal with it themselves. The tech companies have the algorithms and no doubt the powers to intervene, and they should use them now.

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab) [V]: My question is a similar one. The racist abuse targeted at black footballers has been absolutely abhorrent. The tech giants could have stopped it, but they chose not to because it suits their business model. In October 2020, Mark Zuckerberg decided, literally on a whim, to remove holocaust denial from his Facebook, and he did that. In February 2021, after a public outcry, Instagram made a U-turn, changed its policy and started to regulate some direct messages of racial abuse.

Does the Minister agree that it is not the powers or the capability of the tech giants that is lacking, but the will? Everybody knew that the Wembley final could result in a torrent of abuse, yet the online platforms chose not to plan, not to monitor and not to act. Does she further agree that if we are to turn empty rhetoric into action, it is not enough to fine the companies, but the Government must legislate to hold the senior executives to personal account? They should be personally liable for failing to remove harmful content from their platforms.

Victoria Atkins: I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Lady and mindful of her own experiences with abuse, online and offline. I agree that of course these powers exist already, so one can only conclude that in the cases highlighted in this Chamber and in newspapers, the businesses concerned do not wish to remove those items; I have no doubt that if I am wrong, they will correct me.

There must be a will there. I very much hope that a former Member of this House—one Sir Nick Clegg, who, as we know, advises Facebook at a very senior level in California—is advising Facebook as to the powers of this place and the anger that Members across the Chamber feel. It seems to me that responding to these concerns makes not just good moral sense, but good business sense.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): The abuse that we saw after England’s heroic final Euro game is beyond disgusting and has no place in any world, let alone the modern world. I know that my hon. Friend will agree that it is not beyond the ingenuity of social media platforms to deploy their vast coding expertise to develop artificial intelligence and algorithmic solutions to rapidly remove disgusting, abusive racist posts while still being able to protect appropriate freedom of speech. Sadly, there is more than enough training data for them to use.

Victoria Atkins: Very much so. My challenge to these tech companies is, “Look: you have some of the brightest brains in the world. You recruit from the top universities. You pay—I imagine—handsomely. Use those brilliant brains to do some good and to stop this abuse on your platforms.”

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The whole England team have been remarkable in opposing racism and championing justice and equality for all. Sadly, they have not had the full support of this Government. It is up to all of us with a public platform, including the Home Secretary, to personally confront racism in all its forms and give our full support to those who are working against it. The Home Secretary is not here today, so I cannot ask her personally, but will the Minister add her support to the petition to ban racists for life from all football matches in England, which now has more than 1 million signatories?

Victoria Atkins: I do not know whether the hon. Lady was in the Chamber at the beginning of this urgent question when I explained that the Home Secretary is hosting a meeting—a long-standing meeting—with charities that work with survivors of violence against women and girls. I hope that the House will understand.

On the hon. Lady’s general allegations, I am minded to point out that the Home Secretary herself receives extraordinary levels of online hatred. Some of the things that she—and, in fairness, others across this House—have to deal with are eye-watering. I urge hon. Members to join together with us in tackling this racism.

On the petition, the hon. Lady may have missed the Prime Minister’s answer at Prime Minister’s questions. We are going even better than the petition, because we are looking urgently at football banning orders to ensure that people who express these racist views are stopped from going to our matches entirely.

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): I believe this great and united nation is one of the most tolerant and anti-discrimination nations I know, and that what we have witnessed is orchestrated hate crime by the minority and trolls. Does the Minister agree that we need tougher punishments for racially driven violence, intimidation and abuse on social media? The biggest issue I see is with the social media companies, which have been very slow to remove abuse from their platforms.

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend has worked assiduously not just on online hatred directed on racist grounds, but on other categories of people affected on social media, including women. I hope she will work tirelessly with the Government on our forthcoming Online Safety Bill to ensure not only that these companies do what they should do and clear out their own backyard, but that we work together to tackle the horrific attitudes that underline this abuse.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab) [V]: Minister, we live in an era when online abuse is becoming normalised. The disgusting comments directed at our footballers on social media have in many cases been illegal, and the perpetrators must be brought to justice. But in other cases the abuse has been technically legal, yet remains extremely harmful and distressing. Warm words and veiled threats are clearly not enough. Will she therefore commit today to ensuring that legal but harmful content will be adequately addressed in the Online Safety Bill, to improving the Bill to ensure that social media companies' terms and conditions meet a minimum standard, and to ensuring that those standards are enforced so that harmful content is swiftly removed from their platforms?

Victoria Atkins: Yes, I am very happy to confirm that of course we are looking at legal but harmful material. Let me draw the House's attention to the fact that the Online Safety Bill is a really significant piece of legislation but there will be other vehicles for legislating on these sorts of crimes, including not only the victims Bill but the Law Commission's work on online hate law more generally. It is really important that we get this right. The law has probably struggled to keep up to date with some of these developing advances in technology and we have to make sure it is future-proofed to cover these terrible crimes.

Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con) [V]: Since Sunday's final, everyone I have spoken to in my constituency, everywhere I have been, has expressed nothing but pride in our England team. Racist abuse online has inspired an outpouring of support and solidarity. By contrast, figures released by Twitter in 2020 show that the company responded to less than 50% of all requests for information from law enforcement in the UK. Alongside support for campaigns such as Kick It Out, does my hon. Friend agree that such social media platforms must seriously raise their game or face serious repercussions?

Victoria Atkins: I completely agree with my hon. Friend, and I am delighted to hear that the football team have received such support in her constituency—I suspect that that is the experience of us all. The racist attitudes that have been displayed by a small number of people and trolls, some of which we know originate

from overseas, are very much in the minority. The overwhelming majority of us are incredibly proud of our great team.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and my position as co-chair of the all-party group on showing racism the red card. Show Racism the Red Card does fantastic work in tackling racist abuse, online and elsewhere, but the Home Office, in its wisdom, cut its funding to zero 18 months ago. Show Racism the Red Card still gets funding from the Scottish and Welsh Governments, so will the Minister meet me, parliamentary colleagues and Show Racism the Red Card so that we can discuss its funding, to help to tackle this scourge in our society?

Victoria Atkins: I am very happy to do that. I should point out that a huge programme of work continues, including the online crime hub run by the police, which we help to fund. Campaigns that help to tackle racism are clearly in our country's interests, so I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss those issues further.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): Sunday night should have been a celebration of achievement. Instead, we woke up the next morning with racism aimed at three men simply doing their job. That is not acceptable. We know that social media is at the centre of the storm and has a growing influence across our lives, from bullying and racism to my interest, which is in body image. Does my hon. Friend agree that social media campaigns and companies have a duty and responsibility to work proactively with Government and the police to better our society?

Victoria Atkins: I most certainly do agree. In fairness, as the House would expect, I should say that we do a lot of work with online companies across a great range of subjects. Indeed, only yesterday I met business leaders, including tech leaders, to discuss how we can create opportunities for our hardest-to-reach young people who are at risk of serious violence. I am grateful to them for those activities, but the message is coming out loud and clear not just in this country but across the world that somehow we must tame the wild west of the internet so that these more hateful practices are not dominating our national headlines and taking away from the great achievements of our England team.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]: Racist abuse online is not just abhorrent; it normalises racist views offline and desensitises people to them. The true spirit of Greater Manchester is in the scenes that the Minister mentioned of the community placing messages of support and love on the defaced Marcus Rashford mural, not the graffiti of some pea-brained moron. As a Man City fan, I say that United's Rashford is among the best of us. I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to extending football banning orders to cover online abuse, for which Labour has been calling for some time. Given the urgency, when and how will that happen?

Victoria Atkins: I do not have a timeframe to hand, but I will happily write to the hon. Gentleman on that. May I thank him, as a Man City fan and a Member of Parliament for one of the greatest cities on the planet, for highlighting the great humour and support that the people of Withington have shown?

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): We all know that social media companies have the tools and powers to prevent online hate, yet it is still happening day in, day out. The incidents following Sunday evening have shone a light on this disgusting abuse. If social media companies will not act on their own, what actions will the Government take to ensure that finally we put a full stop to online hate?

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend has identified the opportunity for the Government, and indeed the House, in the Online Safety Bill. The powers-that-be in the tech companies are no doubt watching the debate closely, and I assume they have got the message loud and clear from all parts of the House about our expectations on their next moves.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for coming to the House this afternoon. Racist incidents online do not exist in a vacuum; they exist in a world where, according to the YMCA, 95% of young black British children have witnessed racism in education. They exist in a world where, according to the Runnymede Trust, racism in the UK is systematic in our health system, in the criminal justice system, in employment and even in politics, which I know all too well. I want every young black and minority ethnic person watching today to know that they have a place in this society and they can reach the height that I did from a council estate in Brixton. I will continue to do my bit to ensure that we speak out against racism.

This racism also exists in a world where so-called spectators even want to boo their own team—disgraceful! Social media companies need to take a lot more action, but, until they feel the full weight of the law, they will not understand that. Will the Minister confirm whether the Government will introduce criminal sanctions against social media executives in the Online Harms Bill?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments; she spoke with such passion, and she is right. Every time she and other Members of this House stand up to speak on behalf of their constituents, they are role models. I am delighted that this House is more diverse than it has ever been, although it needs to be even more diverse. I am also very proud of the fact that the Government are more diverse than they have ever been. The fact that two of the great offices of state are filled by people who happen to be of ethnic minority heritage is a real credit to our country and to how one can achieve what one wants with hard work and effort.

On the hon. Lady's question relating to executives, that is something we are looking at in the Bill. There are measures in it that have been set out to deal with executives. Of course, I welcome her and any other Members' input to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that the Bill is meeting the expectations of all.

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): Some of these vile abusers are totally open, but the cloak of anonymity does embolden others. It also opens the door for hostile actors, with the divisive exploitation that can sometimes follow. As the Minister said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan), anonymity is important in some contexts, including, for example, for survivors of domestic abuse, but it does not follow that it is therefore required in all

contexts. If someone is communicating online in their own identity, should they not be able to say that they want to hear from and be commented on only by other people who are using their own identity? Will the Government please look at that again in the Online Safety Bill?

Victoria Atkins: That is an extremely interesting point, and I promise I will look into it.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Like thousands of other Welsh fans, I stand with Marcus Rashford and others, including many Welsh players, against the vile racist abuse they have received. Tory Home Secretaries have wasted years through their inaction on this issue. In 2016, I introduced my Criminal Offences (Misuse of Digital Technologies and Services) (Consolidation) Bill, which included tackling racist abuse online, to make the current fragmented law workable in the 21st century. Five years on, we are still waiting for action. I have a specific question: will the Online Safety Bill provide clarity on what constitutes illegal racist hate speech against groups of people as well as offences against individuals?

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Lady knows that we have asked the Law Commission to look into the laws relating to malicious online communications. I declare my interest as a former prosecuting counsel. This is a horribly complex area of law, and as technology develops with, for example, deep fake images and so on, it becomes more complex. That is precisely why we asked the Law Commission to look into it. In terms of the hon. Lady's other challenges, the Bill is going to be scrutinised at length by the House, so she will no doubt have the opportunity put her views forward. I want to get the message out that the Online Safety Bill needs to be considered carefully, because we very much want it to be a piece of legislation that stands the test of time. I cannot really think of another country in the world that has entered into such an ambitious project to try to bring some of these corners of the internet into the light so that we do not see these sorts of practices online.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): Much of the online racist abuse against England's footballers is thought to have originated from overseas social media accounts. What steps are she and her Department taking with counterparts in other countries to ensure that there is a concerted international effort to stamp out these appalling attacks so that there is no hiding place?

Victoria Atkins: I think my hon. Friend is referring to the early analysis by the Premier League. I hope he will be reassured by the fact that we are looking into this with some urgency. Given that it is a global football competition, it is perhaps no leap of the imagination to suppose that some of this abuse may have come from overseas, and we want to look at that carefully. This also underlines the point that the internet is available across the world and that we have to act collectively with other nation states in order to bring these trolls to heel. We are already doing that through the Five Eyes and through the voluntary principles that we have won agreement on in relation to child sexual exploitation and tackling terrorism.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP) [V]: I join the Minister and others in their congratulations and tributes to the England football team, and in their

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condemnation of the abuse suffered by the three black players. In a couple of months' time, David, in the form of Northern Ireland, will take on Goliath, in the form of Italy, in World cup qualifying. We will endeavour to build on the national pride and endeavour we have seen in the past few weeks.

On the online safety Bill, will the Minister reassert, as she has said several times, that if the providers do not act, they will suffer grievous financial hardship and we will hit them where it hurts, in their corporate pockets?

Victoria Atkins: I am pleased to join the hon. Gentleman's support for Northern Ireland. I am sure Italy will pose no problem for Northern Ireland, and I wish Northern Ireland all the greatest of success.

On the serious subject of our work to tackle the online hatred we saw again this weekend, the online safety Bill is a landmark piece of legislation and I look forward to working with the House on its passage.

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con) [V]: Racism, racist bullying and any form of bullying is completely unacceptable, and I hope my hon. Friend uses all her powers to stamp down on such behaviour. On divisiveness in our society, it appears it has become about whether or not people take the knee. Does she agree that the single biggest cause of divisiveness is the lack of tolerance and respect from both sides of the argument, equally? It does not matter whether someone chooses to take the knee. What matters is that they have tolerance and respect for those who choose to and, equally, for those who choose not to.

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend has defined what it is to live in a free country. We abide by the principles of free speech, within the genuine and legitimate confines of legislation such as hate crime legislation. We have a wonderfully diverse football team with enormous talent and enormous skills. Just as they have acted with tolerance, respect and humility in the face of the nation's joy and adoration, we should extend that to each other and treat each other with tolerance and respect.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab) [V]: We all know that racist abuse is not confined to social media. On 3 July, *The Sunday Times* ran an article stating that Raheem Sterling's success in the Euros was being celebrated on the "violent Jamaica streets" where he grew up. This sort of ignorant and tasteless commentary only feeds the stereotype that black people and black populations or countries are dangerous. Will the Minister today condemn the disgusting attitudes that have been propelled by the tabloids and broadsheets for decades? What will she do about it?

Victoria Atkins: I have not seen that report, but my memory of Raheem Sterling is the story he told of growing up in the shadow of the Wembley arch and imagining himself playing under that arch—instead of being outside the stadium, being inside the stadium. Of course, he has done exactly that.

That shows that in this country there is the opportunity and the chance, if you have the talents of Mr Sterling and others, to succeed. I very much hope that is the

message that comes out of our debate both this afternoon and more generally in relation to the horrendous hate crimes we saw over the weekend.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): Does the Minister agree that this should be a matter where both sides of the House and all parties come together to ensure we put an end to racist abuse once and for all? Will she highlight how, through the online safety Bill, this will actually happen?

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. By working together, we are so much stronger. Today we have seen that there is great unity of intent and will across the House to ensure that those who express racist views are held to account and brought to justice, and that each part of society plays its part, including online companies.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): Does the Minister think her colleagues' refusal to condemn the booing of players for taking the knee, their dismissal of taking the knee as "gesture politics", No. 10's denial of institutional racism in the UK or the Government's three-year delay to legislation that would crack down on online abuse could have given space to a culture or hostile environment that sees the racist abuse of England players as acceptable? Does the Minister regret that denial of the problem and the failure to act?

Victoria Atkins: I am going to temper the hon. Lady's remarks with some facts. The Home Secretary did not say that she supported football fans booing England players for taking the knee. The Prime Minister was clear in saying that the public should be cheering our team, not booing them. We have to be very careful with how we handle the facts; we are presenting our plans for the future to help to eradicate racism and our plans for taming the internet, and that is how we will achieve things. A little bit of back and forth at the Dispatch Box is welcome and part of our rich tapestry of democracy, but I do hope that the hon. Lady will stick to facts next time.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I draw the Minister's attention to the paradox identified by Sunder Katwala, the director of British Future: there are far fewer overt racists in Britain today than there were 20 or 30 years ago, which is a very good thing, and there are far fewer racist attitudes in Britain, but because of social media and the fact that everyone is always online, individuals from black and ethnic minority communities experience far more racism on a day-to-day basis than they did then. That is why fixing this needs to be a public policy priority and why people at Twitter and Facebook need to step up. They need to stop people who are banned opening new accounts, and they need to address the algorithms that promote that material, and in that way we can rebuild community cohesion.

Victoria Atkins: We all acknowledge the echo chamber that social media provides, and the fact that being available online across the world perhaps enables just a single person to have far more volume added to their voice than would be the case if they were known, as they usually are, to be sitting in their bedroom rather pathetically tapping away on their laptop or phone. We must build resilience among our young people in

schools to prepare them to understand that torrents of abuse like this may represent only a tiny number of people, and very much build on education and the cultural attitudes that we are seeking to address through relationships, health and sex education in schools to ensure that people understand the principles of tolerance and kindness in being able to debate without hatred. There are many ways of tackling racism. I look forward to debating them in the months and years to come, but we do not need to take chunks out of one another while we are debating.

Mr Speaker: I am now suspending the House for a few minutes to enable the necessary arrangements to be made for the next business.

1.37 pm

Sitting suspended.

Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past

1.42 pm

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State, I wish to make a short statement about the sub judice resolution. I have been advised that there are active legal proceedings on the legality of the Northern Ireland protocol and active legal proceedings and open inquests in relation to historic troubles-related deaths. I am exercising the discretion given to the Chair in respect of the resolution on matters of sub judice to allow full reference to the challenge to the Northern Ireland protocol as it concerns issues of national importance. Further, I am exercising that discretion to allow limited reference to active legal proceedings and open inquests in relation to the historic troubles-related deaths. However, references to these cases should be limited to the context and to the events which led to the cases but not to the detail of cases themselves, nor the names of those involved in them. All hon. Members should, however, be mindful of the matters that may be the subject of future legal proceedings and should exercise caution in making reference to individual cases.

I also wish to say something further about the actions yesterday of the hon. Member for Foyle (Colum Eastwood) in naming somebody apparently subject to an anonymity order. As Members of this House, we enjoy freedom of speech. “Erskine May” states that

“a Member may state whatever they think fit in debate”

and that

“the Member is protected by parliamentary privilege from any action for defamation, as well as from any other question or molestation. This freedom extends to statements which, if made out of Parliament, would breach injunctions, although this has been deprecated by the Speaker.”

Freedom of speech must, however, be used responsibly. It is a grave step to use privilege to breach a court order. As the Joint Committee on Privacy and Injunctions made clear:

“privilege places a significant responsibility on parliamentarians to exercise it in the public interest. The presumption should be that court orders are respected in Parliament and that when a Member does not comply with one he or she can demonstrate that it is in the public interest.”

It is for others to judge whether the action of the hon. Member for Foyle was indeed in the public interest. However, the hon. Member broke no rules of order, as his comments were made while the House was considering the Armed Forces Bill and the sub judice rule does not apply when legislation is in question.

Finally, before I call the Secretary of State, I have to deprecate the fact that, once again, a statement appears to have been extensively briefed to the media before being made to the House. That is not acceptable. That is not the way that we want to do business. I have to say that I have had a number of texts and emails on this from Members who take a very keen interest in this and who are very supportive of this issue. They are, quite rightly, disappointed that it seems more important that newspapers are the ones to carry this, not this House.

Once again, let me say—and I say it to all Secretaries of State and all Departments—that this House must hear that statement first. It should not be briefed to the newspaper 24 hours before, so, please, look and listen. If not, it will be much more difficult, as we will grant urgent questions every day to bring that Department to

[Mr Speaker]

this Dispatch Box. Please, let us work together and let us respect Members of this House, who are, quite rightly, very concerned and want to make sure that they are involved in the statement first. I now call the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

1.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): Thank you, Mr Speaker. My apologies to you and to the House. I accept the comments that you have made. I just say in my defence and in that of colleagues who have been working on this issue for the past 18 months or so that we have been having wide engagement on a range of issues that inform the statement that I am going to make. This is the first time anybody will hear or have seen this statement, apart from the advance copies that we gave to colleagues earlier as per the normal protocol, as it has always been done, not to the press. It has been important in the past few weeks and months, and will be important in the weeks ahead, to have that wide engagement with people around the issues that we are talking about, because of the complexity and sensitivity of the matter.

I would like to make a statement now about the way forward in addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's past.

The troubles saw a terrible, extensive period of violence that claimed the lives of some 3,500 people, left up to 40,000 people injured, and caused untold damage to all aspects of society in Northern Ireland. The Belfast/Good Friday agreement in 1998 sought to move Northern Ireland forward, setting a bold and visionary path that would guide all the people of Northern Ireland towards a shared, stable, peaceful and prosperous future.

It is wonderful to mark, in this centenary year, just how far Northern Ireland has come. While Northern Ireland is undoubtedly today a fantastic place in which to live, work and visit, the unresolved legacy of the troubles remains. It continues to impact and permeate society in Northern Ireland. The past is a constant shadow over those who directly experienced the horrors of those times, and also over those who did not but who now live with the trauma of previous generations.

It is clear that the current system for dealing with the legacy of the troubles is not working. It is now a difficult and painful truth that the focus on criminal investigations is increasingly unlikely to deliver successful criminal justice outcomes, but all the while it continues to divide communities and it fails to obtain answers for a majority of victims and families. That is borne out in the figure. The Police Service of Northern Ireland are currently considering almost 1,200 cases, which represents just a fraction of the 3,500 deaths and wider cases. These would take over 20 years to investigate. More than two thirds of troubles-related deaths occurred over 40 years ago, and it is increasingly difficult for the courts to provide families with the answers they are seeking. If we fail to act now to address, acknowledge and account for the legacy of the troubles properly, we will be condemning current and future generations to yet further division, preventing reconciliation at both the individual and societal level.

That is why I am today laying before the House, and publishing, a paper that proposes a series of measures to address the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland.

These proposals are being considered as part of an ongoing and an important engagement process, which I announced alongside the Irish Government at the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference last month. As set out in the framework, which we published at the same time, that engagement process is committed to involving not just the UK and Irish Governments and the Northern Ireland parties, but those directly affected by the troubles, and experts and Members and Committees of this House and the other place. The objective of this engagement is to deal with legacy issues in a way that supports information recovery and reconciliation, complies fully with international human rights obligations and responds to the needs of individual victims and survivors, as well as society as a whole.

This is a hugely difficult and complex issue, and many have strongly held and divergent views on how to move forward, but I hope we can all agree that this is an issue that is of the utmost importance to the people of Northern Ireland and beyond. It is critical that all involved continue to engage in a spirit of collaboration in order to deliver practical solutions on this most sensitive of issues. This Government reaffirm their commitment to intensive engagement in that spirit, and we are committed to introducing legislation by the end of the autumn.

The measures set out in the paper will include three key proposals. First, a new independent body, that will focus on the recovery and provision of information about troubles-related deaths and most serious injuries. That body will be focused on helping families to find out the truth of what has happened to their loved ones. When families do not want the past raked over again, they would be able to make that clear. For those families that want to get answers, the body will have the full powers to seek access to information and find out what happened.

Secondly, a package of measures will also include a major oral history initiative, consistent with what was included in the Stormont House agreement. That initiative would create opportunities for people from all backgrounds to share their experiences and perspectives related to the troubles and, crucially, to learn about those of others. Balance and sensitivity would be of central importance and a concerted effort would be made to engage with those whose voices may not have been heard previously.

Thirdly there will be a statute of limitations, to apply equally to all troubles-related incidents. We know that the prospect of the end of criminal prosecutions will be difficult for some to accept, and this is not a position that we take lightly, but we have come to the view that it is the best and only way to facilitate an effective information retrieval and provision process, and the best way to help Northern Ireland move further along the road to reconciliation. It is a painful recognition of the very reality of where we are.

As I say, these issues are complex and they are sensitive. That is why they remain unresolved, 23 years after the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. We also understand the importance of the Stormont House agreement, and remain committed to its key principles, which this paper will outline and cover. In particular, we acknowledge that any proposal that moves away from criminal justice outcomes would be a very significant step that will be extremely difficult for some families to accept.

The Belfast/Good Friday agreement was a bold step—one to address the past—and there have been other bold steps, such as the decommissioning of weapons and the limiting of sentences, all those years ago, to two years. However, it is increasingly clear to us that the ongoing retributive criminal justice processes are far from helping, and are in fact impeding the successful delivery of information recovery, mediation and reconciliation that could provide a sense of restorative justice for many more families than is currently the case.

The Government are committed to doing all in their power to ensure that families from across the United Kingdom do not continue to be let down by a process that leads only to pain, suffering and disappointment for the vast majority. As part of that, we will deliver on our commitment to veterans who served in Northern Ireland. We will provide certainty for former members of the security forces, many of whom remained fearful of the prospect of being the subject of ongoing investigations that will hang over them for years to come, even though the vast majority acted in accordance with the law, and often at great personal risk.

We are also unequivocal in our commitment to delivering for victims and survivors. Time is crucial, and as it moves on we risk the very real possibility that we will lose any chance to get the vital information that families want and need. They have waited long enough and a focus on information would offer the best chance of giving more families some sense of justice through acknowledgment, accountability and restorative means. We need to progress our understanding of the complexity of the troubles and in doing so seek to reconcile society with the past as we go on to look forward together.

This Government are determined to address all aspects of Northern Ireland's troubled past. We know from our recent history, particularly with the implementation of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, that we can achieve more when we are bold and move forward together. I want us all to continue to engage on the shape and the detail of the proposals as we work to address this issue, which is of the utmost importance to the people of Northern Ireland and beyond.

Finally, I draw the attention of the House to a quote from Margaret Fairless Barber. I came across it when reading the report by Lord Eames and Denis Bradley into Northern Ireland's past and I think it is worth repeating today in the House:

"To look backwards for a while is to refresh the eye, to restore it, and to render it more fit for its prime function of looking forward."

I commend this statement to the House.

1.55 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement, but share your frustration, Mr Speaker, that the Government have repeatedly chosen to brief newspapers rather than to respect this House, and more importantly the victims whom these proposals concern.

In debates about Northern Ireland's past here in Great Britain, it is all too easy to forget the victims of the conflict—people such as Brian Service, who was just 35 years old when he was shot in the head by loyalist paramilitaries in a random sectarian attack just weeks before the Good Friday agreement. After his death, his mother said she felt:

"It was as if he never really existed as a person and that his life and death did not matter."

The deep pain of that conflict was the proximity of the violence and the absence of justice. More than 3,000 people lost their lives and tens of thousands were injured—in a place of fewer than 2 million people. Society and the peace process in general remain so fragile precisely because the pain runs so deep. It is why any proposal to deal with legacy must have victims and the communities of Northern Ireland at its heart, and that requires real care from the Secretary of State. It is therefore deeply regrettable that his approach has already seen trust among victims reach rock bottom.

Victims have been treated appallingly over the last 18 months: promises made torn up; gaslighted by the Secretary of State at this Dispatch Box. It is little wonder that many have greeted today's proposals with deep scepticism and question whether this is more an exercise in shoring up narrow party support than in delivering the reconciliation that the communities in Northern Ireland crave.

We must not forget that this Government gave victims their word. Just 18 months ago, they promised to legislate on the Stormont House agreement in New Decade, New Approach. These proposals are a seismic departure from that promise. If the goal is reconciliation, why would the Secretary of State begin by taking a sledgehammer to promises made by his own Government? I am afraid that to dress this up as truth and reconciliation is deeply disingenuous. As they stand, these proposals will deliver neither.

We cannot impose reconciliation and the truth will never out with an amnesty in place—because at the heart of these proposals is an amnesty in all but name, which is profoundly offensive to many. No wonder the five main political parties in Northern Ireland have objected to the proposals, as have victims' groups right across the spectrum, including South East Fermanagh Foundation, WAVE and Relatives for Justice. Crimes committed in the United Kingdom, the vast majority of which relate to republican and loyalist murder, closed for good; no justice for the Bloody Sunday families whose cases remain live; no justice for the 21 innocent people murdered by IRA bombs on a November night in Birmingham in 1974—the deadliest act of terror in Britain until 7/7. Their families have said today that such an amnesty would be abhorrent.

As veterans of the Ulster Defence Regiment I met in Cookstown told me, "We have nothing to hide. We were there to protect the rule of law. If we broke it, use it against us. If we didn't, defend us with it." Ministers today appear to have concluded that the rule of law no longer applies—an amnesty for the republican and loyalist terrorists who tortured, maimed, disappeared and murdered men, women and children.

Addressing the toxic legacy of the past in this way—through unilateral imposition by Westminster without the support of any political party in Northern Ireland—is foolish and unsustainable. A way forward has to be found—one done with people, not to them, which genuinely prioritises reconciliation and upholds the rule of law. It is striking that the Secretary of State made scant reference to the Government's obligations under article 2 to conduct effective investigations. If his proposals are not legal, they will be tied up in the courts for many years to come.

[*Louise Haigh*]

The work of Operation Kenova is demonstrating that even now, many years on, important new evidence can be retrieved. The case for a comprehensive legacy process, as outlined in Stormont House, through investigations with full police powers, remains strong and compelling. It is totally wrong to abandon it.

The Secretary of State's deliberations concern the most shattering moments; the midnight hour of some of the darkest days seen on these islands. They concern whether families for whom the violence was so intimate will have the chance to come to terms with what happened to their loved ones. I urge him to ask himself whether society's interests are truly served by an amnesty, or whether it is his own party's interests that he is serving.

This is the last chance for many victims to find the truth. The Secretary of State's decision could be the last word. On this issue, more than any other, those most affected by the dark legacy of the past must come first.

Brandon Lewis: We are committed to addressing the unresolved legacy of Northern Ireland's past so that communities can reconcile and heal. That is what the Command Paper we will publish today sets out. I suggest the hon. Lady has a look at it; she will see that some of the issues she raised are the issues we have been talking to people about and cover in that Command Paper. As I said, we are determined that anything we do is article 2 compliant.

The hon. Lady referred to Operation Kenova, which has done excellent work with victims of families to get to the bottom of the truth. In the four or five years that has been functioning, there have been no prosecutions, but there is a model in Operation Kenova about how these things can work, which gives us a clear indication of how to get to information as we move forward. That is the kind of process that it would be constructive for us to look at and deal with.

On Stormont House, it is increasingly clear—I was frank about this in my opening remarks—that any approach to dealing with the legacy of the past that focuses on criminal investigations will be unlikely to deliver the outcomes that people hope for. There comes a point when we in this House need to be honest with people about the very painful and difficult reality of where we are today, as recent cases have shown us. That is probably why the previous Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland made the comment that some of those things were simply unworkable. We are also clear that we will never accept any moral equivalence between those who upheld the law in Northern Ireland, who served their country, and those on all sides who sought to destroy it.

Let me gently say to hon. Lady that she stood there and talked about engagement, but some of the people she criticised me for not engaging with we engaged with just last week, as part of a wide range of engagement over the past 18 months that will continue. The paper is part of the tools that are ongoing and will continue in the weeks ahead.

In the light of not hearing from the hon. Lady a single thing about what the Labour party would propose as a way forward, I will finish, as I did in my opening statement, with a quote: “Instead of releasing the sort

of politics that can ensure the success of the Good Friday agreement, the party is an obstacle to progressive political development.” That is a quote today from Boyd Black, the secretary of the Labour party in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): The Belfast/Good Friday agreement enabled peace to come to Northern Ireland and opened up the prospect of a much brighter future for that part of the United Kingdom, but does my right hon. Friend agree that young people today and future generations will be able to enjoy that brighter future only if Northern Ireland can find a path to reconciliation and if it is able to address—and, crucially, move on from—the legacy of the past?

Brandon Lewis: Yes. My right hon. Friend, who I know has had a great interest in Northern Ireland for many years, is absolutely right. It cannot be right that, 23 years on from the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, still only some 7% of children in Northern Ireland are able to enjoy integrated education. If we want to see society move forward, we need to be clear and honest with ourselves that there is much more work to do on that. She is absolutely right that we need to end the intergenerational trauma that we are seeing and find a way to help Northern Ireland move forward so that the next generation and today's younger generation can look forward, while always understanding where we have come from and what has happened.

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): May I associate myself with your remarks before the statement, Mr Speaker, about the unfortunate way in which this information has entered the public domain? I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement, but we should not be reading these things on the BBC and RTÉ websites before we can discuss them in the House.

I acknowledge the untidy and imperfect nature of some of the compromises that have had to be made over the decades, first to achieve peace in Northern Ireland and then to maintain it. However, whatever merits in principle there might be in proposals surrounding aspects of truth, reconciliation and ensuring that the hidden truths of the troubles can at last be told while it is still possible, there remain huge concerns about the apparent lack of formal consultation and engagement on them.

Does the Secretary of State understand the huge concern, unease and upset that these proposals for a statute of limitations will cause, not just across Northern Ireland, but right across these islands? Will he acknowledge that unease and commit to engaging with victims' groups and political leaders to discuss the way forward? Will he also think again about that statute of limitations and find a way to ensure, whatever final proposals he brings forward to the House, that where independent prosecutors consider that there is a sufficiency of evidence and a likelihood of successful conviction and, importantly, where they independently judge that it is in the public interest to bring forward a prosecution, they will still be able to do so?

Brandon Lewis: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman about making sure that we are able to get to the truth and get to information. Nobody in this House ever wants to see again a situation like the Ballymurphy case, where the families have had to wait 50 years to get

to the truth. We have to find a better way forward. The current system is failing everybody, so to do nothing simply is not an option that will deliver for people in Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

We do want to engage. We have been engaging, and not just over the past 18 months. Even last week, my officials and I engaged with victims' groups on these very issues. In the weeks ahead, with the Command Paper for people to read through and engage with, that engagement will continue, including with the political parties and our partners in the Irish Government.

Mr Speaker: Let us go to the Chair of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con) [V]: My right hon. Friend should be commended for trying once again, as others have done, to resolve legacy. As we do so, can we resolve not to use the language—I know that he has not done so—of drawing a line and closing a chapter? For those who suffer still, that is something unreachable. We need to show the utmost sensitivity on that point.

The work of Operation Kenova has commanded cross-community support. Where do that model and approach fit into my right hon. Friend's thinking as he tries to pursue truth and reconciliation? How will he evolve these plans, working in concert with the Irish Government, to ensure and maximise buy-in for a joint approach? Is there a George Mitchell-like figure hovering in the wings who could be deployed to help and to act as an honest broker as we try to resolve this all-too-long issue?

Brandon Lewis: I appreciate the comments of the Chairman of the Select Committee. There is a lot of work to do with our partners, not just victims and veterans—who of course are also often victims of the troubles themselves in a wider sense, and in some cases directly—but the parties in Northern Ireland and also the Irish Government. There are still a range of cases that I know exist, which the First Minister of Northern Ireland wrote to the Taoiseach about not that long ago. That is why we are looking at how we can work together on information recovery to ensure that we find a way that gets to the truth and to information that we have not yet been able to secure in a process that works for families and victims. I do think Operation Kenova is a very good example of showing how we can get to the truth and can get information in a format we have not had before. We need to accept the difficult reality that, over the last five years, it has not yet seen any successful prosecutions, but the model of how it has worked—worked with victims and with families—is an important part of the discussions to have about information recovery.

I share with my hon. Friend the view that this is never about ignoring what has happened. We should not do that, and it would be wrong to do that. We have to be conscious of our past to be able to understand and learn more about where we can go for our future, and that has to be the aim for people, including the young generation of people, in Northern Ireland.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I know this is a difficult issue, and the Secretary of State is not the first to attempt to address these matters. I think we all have to take responsibility for the failure since 1998 to deal effectively with this matter.

On this day, 14 July, in 1984 two of my comrades in the Ulster Defence Regiment, Private Norman McKinley and Corporal Heather Kerrigan, were murdered by the IRA in a landmine explosion near Castlederg. I think also today of even Members of this House who lost their lives during the troubles—people such as Airey Neave, murdered in the precincts of this House, for which no one has been brought to justice; and the Rev. Robert Bradford, the Member for Belfast South, murdered in his advice centre, for which no one has been brought to justice.

Like the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), I want to take the path to reconciliation, but I cannot believe that the path to reconciliation is made easier when we sacrifice justice. The victims have to be at the centre of this, and I would urge the Secretary of State, in taking forward his proposals, to listen to their voices. This must be a victim-centred process; it cannot be at their expense.

I want Northern Ireland to move forward. I want the young generation to see a Northern Ireland that is looking to the future, not living in the past, but upholding the rule of law, after all that we have been through in Northern Ireland, is important. Justice is important and, yes, truth is important as well, but I think the Secretary of State needs now to reassure the victims that they will be part of the discussion of these proposals and that their quest for justice will not be ignored.

Brandon Lewis: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: victims must be a huge and important part of this process. We have been engaged with organisations such as the WAVE Trauma Centre, and I met the South East Fermanagh Foundation myself just last week. Their stories, and those of others whom I have met and talked to, are moving and in some cases, as he and many in this House will know, harrowing. He is right to talk about Members of this House, and members of my party have obviously been victims. I noticed Lord Tebbit's powerful comments this morning about his views.

It is right that we have victims in our mind. As the right hon. Gentleman rightly outlines, we often forget that many of those who served are also victims and close to victims, which is why taking the thoughtful approach he outlines is absolutely right. It is right that there is a point at which we need to be honest with people and deal with the very painful reality of where we are and what is achievable for people. This is about acknowledging the reality of where we are with retributive justice following the sentencing Act that followed the Belfast/Good Friday agreement—the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998—and actually looking at restorative justice and reconciliation as a way forward, and at how we facilitate getting the information we need to reach accountability, truth and reconciliation. We think, after so many years of looking at this, that it is the right way forward, but I look forward to having that discussion and debate with him and with others.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): For many families who lost loved ones during the troubles, the chances of achieving a criminal justice outcome are vanishingly small, which is leading, understandably, to pain, suffering and disappointment. Despite that, however, for many of them the proposal to apply a statute of limitations will be extremely difficult to accept. So will my right hon. Friend assure me that he is working with communities on all sides to ensure that everybody's voice is heard?

Brandon Lewis: Yes, I can absolutely give that assurance. We have been doing so over the past 18 months, and with wider civic society as well. We were certainly doing so in the intensive talks that began after the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference on 24 June. That process effectively started the week before last and will continue for the next few weeks, so we will certainly be doing that.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP): In October 1990, Patsy Gillespie was abducted from his home by the IRA. His family were told he would be back soon, while being held at gunpoint. Patsy was then chained to the driver's seat of a van filled with explosives and forced at gunpoint to drive that van to a nearby Army base. The IRA then remotely detonated the bomb, killing Patsy and five soldiers. Will the Secretary of State come with me and explain to his widow Kathleen why he wants to protect his killers from prosecution and even investigation?

Brandon Lewis: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman tends in this House, as we saw yesterday, to use emotive comments for soundbites, often for his own social media outlet. To use somebody's harrowing experience and loss in that way says much about him. I would happily meet any victims to talk to them about the experience they have been through and why we need to be honest with them about what is achievable and how we help Northern Ireland to move forward in a positive way, rather than continuing to use harrowing experiences like that for political ends in the way he has done in the past 24 hours.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I particularly welcome your opening statement, Mr Speaker, about the way in which this information came out today.

Many years ago, I was called to serve in Northern Ireland. I did not ask to go and it was a terrible thought that I had to carry a rifle amongst members and citizens of the United Kingdom. I, like many others, lost a friend. Robert Nairac was captured, taken prisoner, tortured and murdered, and his body has never been found. His parents died never knowing where he was or what happened to him. The Good Friday agreement, with its associations, and also the letters of comfort that followed have meant pretty much that many of us have now accepted, sadly, that we will never really know the truth about what happened to that brave man. I simply say today that this process, which is four years in the making—I do upbraid the Secretary of State for not having brought forward legislation at least giving us an idea of what the Government are planning—will not be beloved of anybody, but I do recognise, sincerely, that if we are to move forward we will all have to make some kind of sacrifice. My only concern is that the vexatious pursuit of soldiers who served, like many of us did, because that is what their country called them to do, should end and they themselves be seen as victims.

Brandon Lewis: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point. As he will appreciate, I know about the Robert Nairac case, which is a very good example of where we have not been able to get to information. That is why it is important to try to work with our partners, with the Irish Government and potentially the United States as well on how we can find a way forward that delivers information in a way that we have just not been able to

do so far, and what allows us to step forward and do that. As I say, I think these proposals give us the basis for doing that.

My right hon. Friend also makes a very powerful point, which I absolutely accept, about legislation. He, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) and others in this House have, for a very long time, made the case for needing to move this issue forward, and I absolutely accept that they want to see that delivered as quickly as possible. He makes a very strong, powerful point that I support; I alluded to it earlier and it is worth making again. Those who served their country with honour, to protect life and to protect their country, are victims as well and have just as important a voice in this as anybody else in looking at how we move things forward for the people of Northern Ireland.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance) [V]: These shameful proposals are an insult to all victims and indeed to many veterans who served honourably. They do not draw a line but rather cross the line of justice and the rule of law. It is staggering that the Government are contemplating an amnesty, including for IRA and loyalist terrorists, in order to address this false narrative of vexatious investigations into veterans. There is near universal disapproval of these proposals in Northern Ireland. Can the Secretary of State give an assurance that he will not seek to impose these one-sided proposals over the heads of local parties in Northern Ireland and of victims' groups across the spectrum?

Brandon Lewis: I just say to the hon. Gentleman, as I said earlier, that there is a very important difference here. This is a statute of limitations. We are not pardoning terrorists for the heinous crimes that they committed. We are very clear as a Government that we will never accept any moral equivalence between those who upheld the law and served their country and the citizens of Northern Ireland, and those on all sides who sought to destroy it. I absolutely want to find a way to work through this with people in Northern Ireland—parties, civic society, representatives of the victims groups and victims themselves—to find a way forward. I ask him to look carefully at what we are talking about and engage positively on how we are looking to deal with information recovery in a way that means we can get to the truth, and with truth comes accountability. The way in the past 23 years has failed everybody. There has to be a better way of doing this and there is a duty on all of us to find it.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con) [V]: Having served on three operational tours, I have some knowledge of the Province and more about the ongoing witch hunt of our veterans. Of course, I welcome any move to try to end this injustice, but I am afraid that I do not believe that former terrorists, on both sides of the sectarian divide, will now participate in a truth recovery process, if I have understood my right hon. Friend correctly. This is not South Africa. Does he agree that it is time for the long-awaited and frequently discussed and promised Bill, not further discussions?

Brandon Lewis: As I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), I do recognise the desire of colleagues to see legislation and they will see legislation before the

end of the autumn. I would have liked to bring legislation forward earlier, but it is important that we are working with our partners, not just the Irish Government, as I have outlined, but interested parties and political parties in Northern Ireland, to find a way forward if we can. This paper is intended to inform those discussions in the next few weeks so that we can find a mutual way forward. I recognise my hon. Friend's point about who will and will not come forward with the information, but one challenge of the situation at the moment is that information is not coming forward. If we do not find a way of doing something different, we are, sadly, in a position where, because of time, that information will no longer be with us. We believe it is time to do something bold and different to find a way forward that can get to the truth, as far as we can, to get answers for families who have waited for far too long, as well as to help Northern Ireland to move forward.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Secretary of State's statement today is a quite remarkable achievement. I have followed Northern Ireland politics all my adult life and I can think of very few occasions when Secretaries of State in this place have been able to unite all five parties in Northern Ireland, but he today has achieved exactly that. They are, however, all united in telling him that on the question of an amnesty he is wrong. He stands at the Dispatch Box today and says that he makes no moral equivalence between those who broke the law and those who upheld it. Why then is he offering them all legal equivalence?

Brandon Lewis: I am sure people would have asked our predecessors those sort of questions with the equivalence that came from the Belfast/Good Friday agreement under the Labour Government at the time of that agreement and the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 that followed it. That is the reality of where we are. As I have said, there is a difficult, painful reality of where we are and the situation we are in: the reality of not seeing prosecutions and painfully being honest with victims about what is achievable. In the conversations that Operation Kenova and I have had, people have talked, as we have seen in the past 24 hours, about wanting to get to the truth, get to information and get an understanding in many cases of what actually happened. The current system is not working and we need to find a different way forward to do something that can make a difference to get to the truth. That is what we want to achieve with a proper, genuine, delivering information recovery process.

Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con) [V]: Can the Secretary of State confirm that today is but one part of a process that seeks to get buy-in from both parties and people across the political spectrum in Northern Ireland, and engender hope for both current and future generations?

Brandon Lewis: Yes, absolutely. I do not underestimate, and I do appreciate, as I said in my opening remarks, the fact that this is a very difficult, sensitive and complex situation. I appreciate that we are asking people to take a very big step. That is why we want to engage intensively over the weeks ahead, but we are being very honest with people: we need to do something different. The status quo has failed and we need to find a different way forward. I hope we will be able to do that in the weeks ahead, before we legislate in the autumn.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab) [V]: Can the Secretary of State honestly think of any circumstance where he would say to the families of victims of murder anywhere else in the United Kingdom—including Northern Ireland, under different circumstances—that an amnesty was the way to bring them reconciliation and peace? If not, how does he say to the families of victims of the troubles that this is the correct way forward? Far from this practically meaning that we will move towards reconciliation, if he carries on with it, he will set up another wave of intercommunal unhappiness. That cannot be the way forward.

Brandon Lewis: Where I agree with the hon. Gentleman is on the desire to end the intergenerational challenge and trauma that we are seeing, with families and people now with us who were simply not alive at the time of the troubles and have no recollection of just how dreadful a situation that was for Northern Ireland. We need to stop this intergenerational issue.

I will say in direct answer to the hon. Gentleman's question that the troubles represent a uniquely troubled time in our history. The Good Friday/Belfast agreement itself acknowledged that. In focusing on a shared future for Northern Ireland, we sometimes need to make difficult decisions in relation to the past, as his colleagues did and as our colleagues did back at the time of the Belfast agreement. We are in a different situation in Northern Ireland with the troubles from most other crimes because of the sentencing Act that followed the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. We need to be honest about that and deal with the reality of where we are, however difficult that may be.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I have had the privilege of working closely alongside the Secretary of State on legacy for much of the past six months, and I believe he is on to something. This is difficult work and it involves compromise, so I am slightly baffled by some of the negativity that I have encountered, both today and previously, with regard to the statute. I think that we in Westminster have a responsibility to get behind my right hon. Friend. Does he agree that his emerging statute will not just unpick and end this unpalatable cycle of vexatious behaviour, but help to create a strategic environment in Northern Ireland whereby truth, reconciliation and alternative forms of dispute resolution can flourish, for the benefit of future peace and stability?

Brandon Lewis: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and the experience that he has shared with our Department over the last period. He has huge experience of serving in the armed forces and in Northern Ireland, and of the reality on the ground. Our intention is absolutely as he outlined. He is absolutely right that the focus has to be to find a way, ultimately, to ensure that families in Northern Ireland—those families who want it—can get to the truth and that, as a wider society in Northern Ireland, we can share and understand what happened and find a way to look forward to the future positively.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House to make his statement. Let me put on the record that the Democratic Unionist party does not support an amnesty for terrorist killers at all. Can the Secretary of State understand why legacy issues leave a bitter taste in the mouth of so many in the

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Province, who have seen hundreds of millions spent on inquiry after inquiry to ostensibly further the republican agenda to rewrite history to make their abhorrent atrocities seem acceptable? There can be no equivalence whatsoever between the soldier and the police officer who served our country, and those cowardly terrorists who hid behind masks and terrorised under the cover of darkness. We find, honestly, any such attempt at equivalence deeply offensive.

Brandon Lewis: I absolutely understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes with clarity and passion, as I know he has done before. Obviously, as I said, the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and the sentencing Act that followed it created an equivalence legally, in the sense of how we deal legally with the troubles of the past, certainly in terms of sentencing. That is the reality we are dealing with.

That is why I make the point that there is absolutely no question that we would ever accept a moral equivalence between those who served their country, protected life and put themselves at risk—clearly, many suffered injury and loss of life as well, hence I agree that many of those who served are victims too—and those terrorists who put Northern Ireland through, as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) rightly outlined, a dark and dreadful period of the troubles that prevented it from moving forward in an economic way, which we are still seeing the fallout from today.

That is why, some 23 years on from the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, we need to be honest about the difficult reality of that, what it means and what we need to do to take that big step to look at how we free society—the young of today and tomorrow—to move forward in a positive way, but never forgetting the past and what happened.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I say to the Secretary of State more in sorrow than in anger that, after four years of promising to do something about this, after two general election manifestos, after endless promises at the Dispatch Box, not just from him but from the Prime Minister, and after he privately assured the veterans' support group many weeks ago that we would see the Second Reading of a Bill by the summer recess, what do we have today? A consultation document.

The Secretary of State has promised to introduce legislation by the end of the autumn. That means First Reading by Christmas. It will undoubtedly be a controversial Bill, so we will be lucky to get it on to the statute book by next summer. That means that our veterans, many of whom are in the autumn of their lives and many are in ill health, will have to undergo the sword of Damocles for at least another year. I say to our procrastinating Secretary of State: you are the boy who cried wolf once too often. After four years, where is your Bill, Brandon?

Brandon Lewis: My right hon. Friend has highlighted the seriousness with which we are taking our engagement. He is quite right that, as I said in the statement, I would have liked to have brought legislation to the House before the summer recess. I committed back in January or February to update the House on where we were

before the summer recess, which I am doing. I would have liked to have had a Bill's Second Reading before the summer recess, but the reality is that the Irish Government have agreed to come into talks with us, which we agreed formally on 24 June. That is a very important and positive step. It is important that we work together on that with the parties in Northern Ireland and with wider civic society, victims' groups and veterans' groups as well. That we have put off taking forward legislation highlights our credentials in wanting to engage and find a way forward for people and with people in Northern Ireland.

I absolutely accept my right hon. Friend's point about how long it is taking. He has shown dogged determination over a very long period to deliver for veterans in Northern Ireland as well as more widely. I am determined that we will end the cycle of investigations for veterans, which—he is right—has gone on for far too long. I have heard his quote about me a couple of times now, and I will have to take it on the chin until I can prove otherwise by bringing forward legislation that ensures that we can end the cycle of investigations that is treating our veterans unfairly and serving nobody. The system in Northern Ireland is not getting to the truth and not getting to information, and therefore it is not allowing that society to move forward and reconcile. All of that must come together as a package. We are determined to do that in partnership with people and to do that at speed.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP) [V]: Is it the case that vexatious complaints are only half the story and that, as of today, if trials are proposed as the outcome of inquests or the Kenova investigation, they are now redundant? Will the Secretary of State confirm whether live cases against people such as Rita O'Hare, John Downey and Owen Carron will cease to exist? Will those people get off scot-free? What is the true outcome of the proposals?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Gentleman has highlighted some of the challenges in how we deal with such issues and move forward in this difficult reality. As we work through some of the details in the weeks ahead, we will talk to victims' groups, political parties and people such as him to take things on board to ensure that, when we do legislate, we can help Northern Ireland move forward and have everything dealt with in a genuinely holistic way so that if we say we will end the unfair cycle of investigations that is serving nobody, we can do so properly.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Margaret Valente was just 30 years old when, in 1980, her husband was abducted by the Provisional IRA and held captive for three days before being murdered. Ten years later, her son-in-law was brutally murdered by the Ulster Volunteer Force. To this day, she has no idea whether there was a thorough investigation into either murder. How can the Secretary of State stand there and say that the response to this staggering failure of justice for Margaret and hundreds like her must be to close the book altogether and cruelly deny her any chance of finding the truth about what happened to her loved ones? Would Conservative Ministers be so insensitive about coming up with such ludicrous legislation if a member of their own family had been such a victim?

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: We lost two people in this House.

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) has just demonstrated that he has paid no real attention to what we have been talking about, and is clearly not up to speed with what we have been discussing with parties, victims groups and veterans in relation to these proposals. I suggest that he has a look at the Command Paper, because quite the opposite is true. The very fact that those victims have not been able to get to the truth is the issue with which we need to deal, and it is why the information recovery part of this is so important. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman looks carefully at the Command Paper and also looks at what I said in my opening statement, which he should have done before standing up and making a comment that was so far from the truth that it almost did not bear answering.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that these proposals are practically identical to those presented by the Defence Committee in its report of April 2017? Does he accept that the time will never come when there will be agreement between all parties, and that it is up to the Government to decide what they are going to do and do it? Does he accept that the vexatious pursuit of soldiers cannot be stopped without a statute of limitations, and that a statute of limitations to conform with international law cannot be selective? Finally, does he accept that a truth recovery mechanism fulfils the requirement of international law for a proper inquiry, and that that is the only way in which people will be likely to reveal what happened—when they no longer have to fear prosecution, which would in any case almost certainly fail?

Brandon Lewis: My right hon. Friend has huge expertise and experience in these matters. The Select Committee report is indeed very clear, and goes into great detail about how this can work. My right hon. Friend is also absolutely right—which should surprise none of us—in his understanding of why the information recovery, truth and reconciliation part of this is so important. Not only is it the means for us to move Northern Ireland forward, but—here I return to what I said at the beginning of my statement—it is the means to ensure that what we do is compliant with human rights and article 2. To that end, we need to ensure that the information recovery mechanism is very clear, very focused and able to deliver, and, as we know from examples such as Operation Kenova, that can be done.

I thank my right hon. Friend for the expertise and advice that he has been able to provide, in the Committee's report and subsequently. What he has said is absolutely right.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I will now suspend the House for a few minutes so that arrangements can be made for the next item of business.

2.38 pm

Sitting suspended.

Transport Decarbonisation

2.42 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): Transport decarbonisation is a dull way of describing something much more exciting and far-reaching, because transport is not just about how we get around. It is much more fundamental, as it shapes our towns and cities and our countryside.

Today we are publishing our transport decarbonisation plan, the first in the world, a comprehensive yet urgent strategy to end transport's contribution to climate change within the next three decades, showing global leadership as we prepare to host COP26 in November.

It is not about stopping people doing things; it is about doing the same things differently. We still want to fly on holiday, but it will be in more efficient aircraft using sustainable fuel. We will still drive our cars on improved roads, but increasingly with zero emissions. And we will still have new development and additional housing, for example, but through more careful planning we will not be forced into high-carbon lifestyles.

We know the world is running out of time to tackle climate change. Unless we take decisive and radical action now, it will soon be too late to prevent catastrophic damage to our planet, which will also threaten our security and our prosperity. At the same time, terms such as “decarbonisation” and “net zero” seem abstract to many people. This plan argues that transport is not just how people get around but it influences our living standards and, in fact, our whole quality of life.

Transport can shape all these things, for good or for bad. Bad is traffic congestion and pollution, which also contribute to climate change. Indeed, transport is now the single biggest contributor to UK greenhouse gas emissions. Decarbonisation is not a technocratic process; it is how we fix some of that harm. It is how we make sure that transport shapes the country and the economy in ways that are good. It is about taking filth out of the air and creating better places. It is about a second industrial revolution, creating hundreds of thousands of green jobs in places that were the cradle of the first.

Driving all this will be the consumer making greener travel choices informed by better data. The Government will work with industry to meet our carbon budgets and to keep this green transport revolution on track.

What is exciting about the plan is that for the first time we have an opportunity to decarbonise transport without curtailing our freedoms. It will not stop us driving, commuting to work or going on holiday, but we will be using zero-emission cars, motorcycles and trucks. We will be travelling in zero-emission trains, ferries, buses and coaches. We will be cycling and walking much more, and we will be flying in more efficient aircraft, using sustainable aviation fuels.

I accept that, even a few years ago, the vision that we are setting out today would have seemed over-ambitious, but such is the progress that we are making in this country in technology and engineering, in building momentum for the net zero challenge ahead, and in showing real political leadership for the biggest challenge in our lifetime that we can now commit to a bold strategy to help wean transport off fossil fuels and reach net zero in under 30 years. We have already

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announced that the sale of new cars and vans powered solely by petrol or diesel will cease in 2030, and that all cars and vans will be fully zero emission at the tailpipe by 2035—a commitment that would not have been deliverable while we were a member of the EU, because our own type of proof of framework would have breached the single market had we tried.

To underpin these phase-out dates, today we have published our 2035 delivery plan, which sets out the investment and measures from Government to deliver mass ownership of zero-emission cars and vans. We have published a Green Paper, one of 10 documents that sit alongside the transport decarbonisation plan, which shows our new road-vehicle CO₂ emissions regulatory framework, which will be ambitious in decarbonising road transport and tailored to the UK's needs. This could include a zero-emission mandate for manufacturers, so that they sell an ever-increasing proportion of zero-emission vehicles before they can sell any others.

The decarbonisation plan goes further still. With a commitment to consult on a world-leading pledge to phase out sales of all new non-zero emission road vehicles, from motorcycles to heavy goods vehicles. We believe that that should be from 2040 at the latest, and it is a massive step towards cleaning up road transport altogether. By doing so, we will remove the source of more than 90% of our total domestic transport emissions. We will go further, creating a net zero rail network by 2050 and replacing all our diesel-only trains by 2040 with super-clean technologies such as hydrogen. Hundreds of electric buses are already operating in many UK cities, but soon that will be thousands, which will benefit not just urban areas but the whole country. Remote and rural areas that have not always been best served by such changes in the past will see the benefits this time.

Completely clean buses will form the backbone of our local public transport system, and we will continue to work with industry to roll out a national electric vehicle charging network as I announced at the Dispatch Box. Nearly 25,000 public charging devices have already been installed, including more chargers for every 100 miles of major, key strategic road than any country in Europe. That will include smart vehicle charging to reduce energy bills when demand for electricity in the system is at its lowest. Something that will also benefit will be the Government's fleet of 40,000 vehicles, which we aim to make fully electric by 2027.

We will consult on phasing out sales of new, non-zero-emission-capable domestic ships too, and we will be a hub for green air travel. Today, we have launched a consultation that sets out how we will deliver net zero aviation by 2050, working with the Jet Zero Council with a target to achieve zero-emission transatlantic flight within our generation. If that seems more like science fiction, it is interesting to know that we have already flown the world's first zero-carbon hydrogen aircraft at Cranfield airport in Bedfordshire. It took a 20 minute flight—another world-first for Britain.

We will support and incentivise green development by aligning billions of pounds of infrastructure investment with our net zero programme. This includes the billions we are investing to build a thriving electric supply chain, to secure gigafactories here in the UK, to create more efficient aviation engines, lighter planes and sustainable

fuels and to develop clean freight transport. Just as green transport will not stop us travelling, it will not hold back industry either. In fact, it will open up unparalleled opportunities for new jobs and enterprise. In recent weeks alone, we have seen both Nissan and Vauxhall commit to massive investments in electric vehicles and battery production in Sunderland and Ellesmere Port. This is the modern-day equivalent of the early investment in our railway 200 years ago or, indeed, in our fledgling motor industry a century later. What we are seeing here is the start of a second greener industrial revolution, which, just like the first, will be driven by transport, but this time delivering triple the benefits: for our economy, for jobs and for the future of our planet.

But we cannot simply rely on technology. Nor can we believe that zero-emission vehicles will solve all our problems, because they will not, especially in meeting our medium-term targets for the 2030s. The pandemic has provided a chance to rethink how we travel and how we do public transport. In fact, we have already seen a 46% increase in the number of road miles being cycled last year, the biggest increase since the second world war. Cycling increased more in a single year than in the previous 20 years put together. With £2 billion of new funding, more than 300 cycling and walking schemes are being delivered, and many more are on the way. We have also pledged £3 billion to revolutionise local buses in England outside London, with London-style cheap flat fares and integrated ticketing. And of course we are creating Great British Railways, to bring the railway network back together and make it easier for people to travel by train. We want to make public transport, cycling and walking the natural first choice for all who can use them.

The year 2050 may seem like a long way into the future, but it is just 29 years away. That is why the pace of change will be unparalleled, and why this new decarbonisation plan is a landmark in the evolution of the way we do transport in this country. We are the first country in the world to do this, taking a firm leadership position as we host COP26 later this year in Glasgow and going from being part of the climate change problem to a major part of the solution. That is the transformation we must deliver by 2050, and that is the transformation we will achieve with this transport decarbonisation plan. I am placing a copy of the plan in the Library of the House, and I commend this statement to the House.

2.52 pm

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me advance sight of his statement. We have not yet had the joy of reading the plan, although I look forward to seeing it later in the Library when I get pointed towards the fiction section, as with most of the strategies produced by the Government recently.

We are, I hope, coming through the covid-19 pandemic, but we cannot forget that we are still in this climate emergency, and nor can we miss the opportunity to kick-start a new green economy built on decent, well-paid, highly skilled jobs. With transport now the largest contributor to UK emissions, this should have been the chance for Ministers to set out an ambitious plan that would really lead the way, ahead of COP26—not warm words or reannouncements but a real plan to support aviation, maritime, rail, freight and local public transport alongside active travel.

This climate emergency required urgent action many years ago, but after a decade in office, I am afraid this Government have been found wanting. In the time they have been in office, the number of petrol and diesel vans has rocketed by 1 million. That means more polluting vans on our roads, and much of that increase can be attributed to last-mile courier delivery vehicles. The Government have been silent on an approach to dealing with that. Under these plans, the Government will treat the likes of Amazon, which has boomed during the pandemic, no differently from the self-employed builder who will take their van at the start of the job and often leave it parked outside the house until the job is finished. There will be no differentiation at all between those different uses.

Today the average age of a van on the road is the oldest since records began. Nearly 1 million vehicles on the road are more than 13 years old, yet there is no van scrappage scheme, let alone one for cars. All we have on offer is that the Government have committed to do what they should be doing already, which is to electrify the entire fleet of Government cars and vans by 2027, but how can we trust them to deliver on that promise when their Department for Transport has managed to fully electrify just 2% of its fleet? There is nothing to support backing Britain in the future and the economy by making and buying more vehicles here, as championed by the shadow Chancellor, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves).

The Secretary of State knows that smart electric vehicle charging points are important, but he also knows that there is a woeful lack of them across the country. The Government must be ambitious, but they must also genuinely make sure that the investment reaches all parts of the country. Westminster has 390 charging points per 100,000 population, compared with just 5.1 per 100,000 for people in Wigan. There are more charging points in London than in the whole of the north of England and the whole of the midlands combined, so the investment is not being levelled out in an equal way. Where is the plan to accelerate that and to make sure that every part of the country gets its fair share? Although the Secretary of State mentions the zero-emission vehicle mandate, it is only nodded to. There is no strong commitment and no firm plan in place to achieve that.

Aside from the environmental emergency, there is also a clear health emergency. Forty thousand people a year die from air pollution-related illnesses, so we must be leaders in modal shift away from private cars and ambitious on investment in active travel, yet the Government have overseen a reduction of thousands of bus routes. At the same time, ticket prices have rocketed on buses and trains. The Government have not delivered even a single one of the 4,000 green buses that they have repeatedly promised, and even if they were to deliver on that promise, it is a drop in the ocean and would not address the remaining 20,000 buses that will not be replaced under that scheme.

Beyond the bus, the Secretary of State talks about long-promised money for cycling, but when will that money be spent? Will we be here next year hearing the same re-announcement? Unless would-be cyclists feel safe, they will not make that shift. The Government's own survey reported that 66% of those who responded said that the roads were too dangerous for them to consider cycling on.

Moving on to aviation, the Secretary of State wants to get to net zero international aviation emissions by 2050 and 2040 for domestic flights. Why, then, is his Department planning to cut air passenger duty on those same flights rather than having a targeted sectoral deal to have very firm commitments to decarbonisation built in? As usual, we will get more Jet Zero Council consultations and more meetings will come through the pipeline, but where is the action?

The list goes on and on and on, including the failure to deliver on a genuinely flexible season ticket to get commuters back on our trains. Instead, we see a £1 billion cut from Network Rail's infrastructure budget and, at the same time, fares for passengers are increasing all the time.

We were promised an ambitious plan to lead the world ahead of COP26. If that was the test, I am afraid the Government have failed.

Grant Shapps: I am afraid that we have been here before a couple of times of late, and I understand the difficulty for the hon. Gentleman. He freely acknowledges that he has not actually seen or read this document, yet he has a stream of criticism for what is inside it, which I find extraordinary. Rather than taking in what I thought was a quite detailed statement, so that he could hear all the various different points, instead he read from the pre-ordained script, which claimed that none of the things that we were doing was really happening.

Let me remind the House, therefore, what has actually happened. The hon. Gentleman says he does not think we have been moving fast enough. Let us just check the record. While Labour was in power, it delivered 63 miles of electrified track. In just the last three years, under this Government, we have done 700 miles. He points to a lack of charging, although I announced at the Dispatch Box a couple of weeks ago—and I commented on this in my speech—that there are 25,000 public chargers.

I should also say that there are a couple of hundred thousand private chargers on top of that. I am sorry to hear that Wigan's Labour council does not have enough charging points; I will ensure that I contact the council this afternoon, on the hon. Gentleman's behalf, to make sure that it applies for the grants that are available so that we can sort that out for residents in Labour Wigan forthwith.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned zero emission vehicle mandates; I am pleased that it sounds as though there is some agreement on them. The decarbonisation plan discusses mandates and we have launched a consultation today. I hope the hon. Gentleman will agree that we cannot simply spring something as important as a zero emission mandate on the entire sector; we have to consult the sector first, so that consultation is being launched today.

Another nine consultations, technical documents or outcomes from consultations are being launched today alongside the plan, which I again invite the hon. Gentleman to read. I accept that he will not have done so at this time, but I think he will find that a lot of his concerns and criticisms are covered. For example, he asked where the 4,000 buses are; I have some good news for him, and it is not just that when one comes along there are three: there are 900 buses in production right now, and 50 are already on the road.¹ That puts us easily on track to

1. [Official Report, 20 July 2021, Vol. 699, c. 5MC.]

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meet our target to have 4,000 in production by the end of this Parliament. That is good news for the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Jet Zero Council, and he is absolutely right. I make no apology for the Government meeting with academia and the sector. We have had our third main Jet Zero Council meeting and there have been dozens of sub-meetings of the technical working groups. What I hear is that the Opposition do not understand. Thanks to our Jet Zero Council work, we have already flown the world's first hydrogen aircraft in this country. But it is not good enough for them; they still think we are not doing anything. I have some good news for the hon. Gentleman: that aircraft is being upsized to a 19 or 20-seater aircraft that will be flown shortly, so he will not have to wait long for more news on that front, along with the electrification of aircraft with the likes of Rolls-Royce and others.

I heard what the hon. Gentleman had to say about increasing rail usage, particularly coming out of the pandemic—it is a carbon-friendly way to travel—and I heard his party's previous criticisms of the flexible season ticket. His stats, I am sure inadvertently, are completely dodgy. They failed to take into account the fact that anybody travelling two or three days a week would be at least 20% better off by comparison than if they bought a regular ticket or indeed a season ticket. I saw the hon. Gentleman's YouTube video on the subject—I invite Members to watch it—and will write to him to explain chapter and verse why he was misquoting stats and information. I am pleased he reminded me of that because it gives me the opportunity to write back to him. For the purposes of clarity, I will ensure that I publish that letter for the whole House so that Members are able to judge the stats for themselves.

Lastly—I know that a lot of Members wish to speak—we are very proud of the transport decarbonisation plan, and I have mentioned the nine or 10 documents that back it up. An incredible level of detail has gone into that work. I ask: where is Labour's plan? Where are its detailed plans? Where is the technical analysis? Labour has not read our plan and does not have one of its own, but all I ever hear is that Labour is still up for criticising ours.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP) [V]: When I was told that the Secretary of State had sent the final draft plan back because it was not ambitious enough, I harboured hopes that it might well be a serious plan to match the seriousness of our times. It would certainly require investment on a scale to which the Chancellor would not naturally be disposed. Sadly, though, from zero emission cars and buses to rail, maritime, active travel and aviation, the lack of ambition—certainly relative to Scotland—stands out.

Scotland aims to cut car use by 20% by 2030, and we will spend 10% of the transport capital budget on active travel. For the cars that remain, we have twice as many rapid charging points per head, with 60% of them free to use—a proportion three times higher than England's 20%. Meanwhile, the UK Government have halved the plug-in car grant. Why will the Secretary of State not match Scotland's ambition on car use? How does he think he will meet his EV targets with poor charging

infrastructure and by reducing incentives, and without a scrappage scheme, while a substantial price gap between petrol and diesel cars and zero emission cars remains?

The pledge for 4,000 new buses represents only a 10th of the English fleet. Even now that the ZEBRA—zero emission buses regional area—scheme is finally in place, progress is glacial. By contrast, Scotland plans to remove half its diesel fleet by 2023 and has the equivalent of more than 2,700 buses already on order. Will the Secretary of State confirm when the 4,000 buses will actually be delivered under the current scheme and when the next scheme will begin?

The Secretary of State aims to decarbonise rail in England by 2050, which is 15 years after Scotland aims to do that. Scotland has legged away in a programme of rolling electrification. The Transport Committee recommended a similar programme for England, so will the right hon. Gentleman commit to such a programme matching Scotland's pace? If so, when will the first schemes be announced?

For decarbonising the maritime sector there is only lip service, but I will try to end with consensus on aviation—something we agree is difficult, and in which hydrogen, alongside sustainable aviation fuels, will play a leading role. Again, Scotland leads the way, with Government investment in decarbonisation programmes and plans for electric and hydrogen test flights, working with partners such as ZeroAvia and Loganair. That is part of our ambition to make the highlands and islands the world's first zero emission aviation region by 2040. We have a leading position in hydrogen aviation technology, but we must increase investment to ensure we stay that way.

Grant Shapps: I am always keen to work across the House, wherever we agree, including on that last point about aviation and, indeed, the number of car chargers in Scotland. That is all good, but I cannot understand why the hon. Gentleman is talking about the success of the car charger roll-out while also being anti-car and saying that he does not want people to use a car, or even electric vehicles that are green. I do not understand how he can be proud of both points at the same time.

My main point is that he comes to the Chamber quite often, either remotely or in person, and he sings the praises of the Scottish Government. I therefore thought I would check the facts for the clarity of the House, and time and again, the SNP Government have missed their own statutory target for reducing emissions. That was not for one or two years; it is now for the third year in a row.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): I warmly welcome the strategy outlined by my right hon. Friend. Will he reassure rural constituents such as mine in North Devon, where there are fewer buses and longer journeys for even basic amenities, that they will not be left behind?

Grant Shapps: Yes indeed, and the bus strategy included £3 billion to do a number of things, including getting to a London-style service for other parts of England, and the rural bus strategy. We are currently trialling that in 17 different areas, and my hon. Friend's area will benefit from the outcome of that work. Her work in championing the bus network for her constituents is welcome, and it will pay dividends.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): The Restoring Your Railway fund and the £3 billion bus back better strategy are both vital to levelling up in Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke, following decades of local bus and rail decline. Does my right hon. Friend agree that by reopening the Stoke to Leek line, providing access for upgrades at Longport railway station, and ensuring that Stoke-on-Trent secures a major piece of funding to improve our services and roadside infrastructure, we can reduce emissions in our fantastic city?

Grant Shapps: Nobody—perhaps apart from the other two Stoke MPs—does as much to promote the interests of everybody in Stoke as my hon. Friend, and the Stoke to Leek line is something to be passionate about. I know he has put in a bid to the Restoring Your Railway fund, which will come to a conclusion this summer. I wish him every success in that competition so that we can make active travel as well as railway lines the first choice for everybody in his city.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): I looked for a copy of the plan online this morning, but alas I was unable to find it. I see it now, but it is tantalisingly out of reach. I do not know whether to believe what I saw in the press release this morning about the Government's commitment to achieve net zero aviation in this country by 2040. I saw no mention of that in the statement, but if that is the Government's commitment—as I say, I do not know—it is not clear that developments in aviation will help us to reach a net zero aviation industry by 2040. I have been speaking to businesses that are doing incredible work on hydrogen aviation, and I am excited about the possibilities. However, if we are aiming for 2040 net zero aviation, there must be a combination of technological development and flight reduction; otherwise, it will not be possible. On that basis, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that reducing flights will form part of the plan—if it is a plan—to get the country to net zero aviation emissions by 2040, and will he therefore act decisively to stop expansion at Heathrow?

Grant Shapps: These are good questions. I just point out that the written statement was circulated to the House at 7 am this morning. It does indeed confirm that the plan is for domestic aviation to reach net zero by 2040. The hon. Lady rightly asks a list of questions about whether that is possible. I point out to the House that, with transport itself accounting for perhaps 27% to 30% of total CO₂ emissions, roads account for 90% of that 27% and the aviation sector 1.2%, which is a small sliver, but a very difficult bit to decarbonise. Therefore, the answer to her question is emphatically yes, because I have been working with the Jet Zero Council over these recent months. We will, for example, have planes for VIPs returning from COP26 with the offer of sustainable aviation fuel to take them home. That is in 2021. We have until 2040 to develop some of the other great plans, including hydrogen and battery technology. So, yes, I am confident that we can get there and it is very much included in the plan.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's shiny new plan. I, too, hold a shiny new plan from the midlands engine: a 10-point plan for green growth released this month. Point 2 is about net zero transport. I am proud that, as a midlands MP, the

midlands has an automotive industry that employs 293,000 people and 16 of the world's top 20 automotive suppliers. Will he meet me and people from the midlands engine to discuss how Bosworth, Leicestershire and, indeed, the country could benefit from both our plans?

Grant Shapps: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work that he has been doing with the midlands engine, and I thank him for welcoming the plan as well. I think it would be a great idea if we were to meet up with the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), to discuss exactly that.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I thought the Secretary of State must have been reading Labour's manifesto, in which we set out a comprehensive, sustainable transport plan.

I want to ask about the infrastructure that this Government are building, because we need good infrastructure to see that modal shift and to ensure that transport is not polluting our urban centres in particular. May I ask the Secretary of State why London North Eastern Railway and Network Rail are building 1,297 new car parking spaces in the centre of York? Moreover, on the York Central site, which is owned by Network Rail, a further 2,600 parking spaces are being built, which will suck congestion and pollution into the heart of my city. Will he meet with me to discuss this matter?

Grant Shapps: I hesitate to mention this, because I do not want to embarrass the hon. Lady, but she talks about our reading from Labour's manifesto, and I can assure her that that is not the case. It was, of course, an “utterly unachievable” manifesto when it came to net zero. Those are not my words, but the words of the GMB union at the time.

We are not anti-car. I cannot get this across enough. We are investing £27.4 billion in building roads. We believe that not just cars but buses and bicycles require roads to get around. We want those roads to be of good quality. We want to reduce the congestion and therefore reduce the environmental damage as well. Quite simply, we are not anti-car. I know that York will have many different attributes, next to that fabulous York National Railway Museum, which I enjoy visiting so much. Who knows, one day York might be home to Great British Railways.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State for today's announcement. Does he agree that it is the work of business that is providing the solution to these problems, from the fabulous endeavour and effort going into the Jet Zero Council to Electric Avenue, at that former fount of petrol heads that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), visited last week to see the new array of electric vehicles that are coming. Finally, does the Secretary of State also agree that it is such a great shame that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) is not in her place today to hear about the fabulous solutions to these problems?

Grant Shapps: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work as the UK's net zero business champion, promoting all these causes. He is absolutely right—I have not been to Goodwin, but yesterday I went to Bedford to see a

[Grant Shapps]

Formula E car, which is an electric racing car. The technology is moving in about 18 months from the cars to, for example, the Nissan Leaf that I stood next to. It really is a tremendous transfer of technology from one to the other. I think that all his work in encouraging us along, working hard to push for the jet zero, the net zero, the car zero, is doing a fantastic job and holding us on the road to zero.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): The Secretary of State is certainly in Duracell bunny mode today. I share the concern of the shadow Transport Minister about the lack of focus in making transport vehicles in Britain. The Minister talked of new buses, but will the hydrogen-powered buses come from Northern Ireland and the electric-powered ones from Scotland and Leeds, or will the British taxpayer once again be subsidising jobs in China and Europe? That is quite apart from trains, cars, vans and trucks. The Government are a massive customer, so will he use that buying power to boost British industry and support British workers?

Grant Shapps: This Duracell bunny says yes.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, but in this day and age it is wholly unsustainable for Shrewsbury to be serviced by diesel trains, and at the last general election I promised many young people that I would campaign for the electrification of the line between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton. He will be pleased to know that all the MPs between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton support that vital investment. We are getting great support from Midlands Connect; Mr Paul Butters and others are being very helpful. The electrification of the line would not only massively reduce journey times between Shrewsbury and our regional capital of Birmingham, but massively reduce carbon emissions. So will the Secretary of State join me and support our campaign to ensure that that vital link between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton is finally electrified?

Grant Shapps: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his doughty campaign for the electrification of the line from Shrewsbury to Wolverhampton. I know that he has met the Rail Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), to discuss this subject and I look forward to seeing further progress. I mentioned that we had done 700 miles of electrification in just three years—over 1,100 since we came to power—and I hope that it is coming to him soon.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind) [V]: As the Secretary of State outlined in his statement, electric vehicles will be key to decarbonisation. What steps is he taking to address concerns about the vulnerability of charging networks to attacks by hackers?

Grant Shapps: That is an excellent question. I have been speaking to the energy infrastructure, not only to make sure that it is secure against hackers, but also that we are able to ensure provision, as the number of people buying electric cars continues to increase. It is worth mentioning that one in seven people who bought a car this year bought a car with a plug on the end of it,

effectively, so electric vehicles are being used in ever-greater numbers. The question of electricity security, and all our infrastructure security, is also wrapped up in the good work that happens throughout government, and I will ensure that I press the hon. Gentleman's point home as we have those further discussions as well.

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): I, too, warmly welcome the statement and I look forward to digging in to the plan later. May I pick up on a point around HGVs, because they are incredibly polluting? I have many constituents who live alongside the M25 and the M3, where that is an issue, and they warmly welcome the consultation process in terms of trying to decarbonise HGVs and buses and stop that pollution.

Sustainability has to be sustainable, so I can see why there is a need for consultation to ensure that it works and that we do this properly, but as a result of the consultation, will my right hon. Friend really try to push forward as quickly as possible in getting diesel, getting HGVs, off the roads, decarbonising them and making a huge difference to my constituents, for whom that cannot come soon enough?

Grant Shapps: A small but important sub-clause to my announcement that we will be consulting to outlaw the sale of diesel HGVs by 2040 is that by 2035—five years earlier—we will already have done that for lorries up to 26 tonnes. A 26-tonner is a very considerable size of lorry, so my hon. Friend's prayers may well be answered much sooner than he fears.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Poor air quality caused by congestion causes health problems and costs lives. This is a particular problem for my constituents in the village of Galgate, which has the A6 running down the middle of it. Will the Secretary of State look favourably on plans to reconfigure junction 33 of the M6 to create a bypass for the village? Regardless of that, there will still be buses running through the village. I note that the Secretary of State said that some zero-emission buses were in production, but does he admit that his target of 4,000 is unambitious, when that represents only about one tenth of the English fleet?

Grant Shapps: The hon. Lady will be pleased to hear that, if anything, we are ahead of schedule on the bus target, with 900 already on their way—in production—so I hope that we can go even further.¹ Our £3 billion bus strategy is by far and away the largest for generations, and I look forward to it helping her constituents. I will certainly mention her point about junction 33 of the A6 to the Roads Minister and ask her to come back to the hon. Lady.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con) [V]: I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Decarbonising our roads will be greatly assisted if we transfer more freight to rail. What progress is being made on delivering an east-west rail freight corridor from the Humber ports across to Liverpool and the west coast ports? As well as being a boost to the economy of my constituency, that would result in a massive reduction in HGV movements on the M62, resulting in less congestion and the accompanying pollution.

Grant Shapps: I am very excited about the opportunities to take traffic from ports and put it on to rail. It is

1. [Official Report, 20 July 2021, Vol. 699, c. 5MC.]

known as intermodal, because it requires the delivery of gauge capacity enhancements in order to make that flow. We are spending a lot of time on getting containers, biomass and the like to operate on the trans-Pennine routes, principally between the west and east coast ports of Liverpool, Immingham and Hull, and Tees inland terminal. We are working very hard on exactly my hon. Friend's suggestion, as we recognise that it can take a lot of traffic off the roads.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Key to the successful decarbonisation of transportation will, of course, be the availability of sustainable fuels. In that regard, in Aberdeen the Scottish Government and the local authority have put their money where their mouth is and backed Scotland's first commercial at-scale hydrogen production and distribution facility. Sadly, the UK Government have not committed a single penny towards the Aberdeen hydrogen hub. In that regard and in good faith, can I ask the Secretary of State whether he will review that decision—with a view, of course, to opening the cheque book and backing Aberdeen's renewable future?

Grant Shapps: I am pleased to say that we have in many senses backed this, because we are of course ensuring that the consequential from all our decisions, including decisions on the decarbonisation of transport, are made in such a way that the Government in Scotland are able to benefit from them. As I mentioned earlier, it is very good to work closely together on these things. Perhaps in that spirit, I can ask the hon. Gentleman to press the Scottish Government to ensure that they reach their statutory requirements to deliver carbon cuts over the next few years as well.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that to tackle climate change, we need to decarbonise—not demonise—cars, vans and taxis? With that in mind, will he talk to the Mayor of London about dismantling some of the schemes that have unjustifiably removed access to those vehicles to so many of the streets of central London?

Grant Shapps: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right about our stance. We are not against the car. We want people to have access to cars; indeed, in rural areas they are often the only way for people to get around, although obviously we want to improve bus services and the rest of it. We intend to carry on investment to make sure that cars can run without damaging people's health and the environment. That makes sense.

I am afraid that too often the Mayor of London gets the wrong end of the stick with all this. He seems to spend his time working out new ways to introduce boundary taxes and the like to try to charge people who are not his constituents for the cost of running his administration in London. It is not on.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The Secretary of State probably will not know that I am very much involved in the Optimised Waste Logistics group and the Westminster Commission for Road Air Quality, but does he know, as I do from consultation with the industry, that the people in it think the report is not ambitious enough? Since the report was leaked, or came out, they have had a good idea what is in it, but

they want to move much faster. The technology is there, especially for heavy goods vehicles, which are 4% of the wheels on the road but 25% of the pollution. The industry is saying to Ministers, "We can do it faster." Hydrogen technology is far more advanced than the Secretary of State has been saying today. If he gives industry the nod and the incentives, it can deliver much better targets than 2030 or 2040.

Grant Shapps: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for this agenda and his work on logistics and clean air. As far as I am aware, this is already the world's most ambitious plan to decarbonise the transport economy. He will be pleased to hear that I will say more about experimentation with things like hydrogen trucks and electrifying trucks, not just with internal batteries but potentially with overhead wires.

I hope he will agree that rather than coming here today to spring an announcement on the HGV sector, it is absolutely right that we make it clear we have a plan and that we then consult on it. That is why Logistics UK, which is far and away the largest haulier logistics representative organisation in the UK, has said that the plan gives

"confidence and clarity on the steps...on the pathway to net zero".

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Will he go further on what we will do to ensure a sustainable maritime fleet, for example by ensuring that around our coastal communities there is opportunity for plug-in processes for boats and ships, particularly for fishing around our coastal waters? In the long-term, will he look at alternative fuels that can power the long-distance fleets?

Grant Shapps: That is very much at the forefront of our mind; I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and for welcoming the statement. We already have plans in place to challenge stakeholders to agree a course to zero in maritime by 2050. The UK has a very rich maritime history. The International Maritime Organisation is based in London, although it is a UN organisation, and we have been working closely with it on developing the shipping route to zero. We look forward to a lot more developments in the area, and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend on them.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab) [V]: We know that the aviation industry has had a very difficult year and that the best way to build back better is to ensure investment into building planes that are greener, cleaner and quieter. Does the Secretary of State agree that for a future that benefits public health, his Department must prioritise reducing noise pollution from major flight paths? It is a real concern for many of my constituents, who live under two flight paths. Will he meet me to look at the issue?

Grant Shapps: I absolutely agree that reducing noise pollution is critical. We are doing it in several ways. We have just passed legislation that redesigns airspace management and enables aircraft to take off on a steeper climb and come down on a steeper descent, which will help to reduce the noise footprint.

[Grant Shapps]

The hon. Lady is also right that as we decarbonise, we will have engines that are not necessarily jet engines, which are notoriously noisy. New technologies are leading to much quieter aircraft. I look forward to working with her and her constituents on the issue. I am very happy to set up a meeting for her with the aviation Minister—the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts), who is an expert in the area—to discuss the matter further.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con) [V]: I strongly welcome the range of measures being taken to decarbonise transport. However, in the highly rural areas of my constituency, in some cases there is simply no practical alternative to car use. While the cost of electric vehicles remains prohibitive for many, and as yet there is no infrastructure for charging points locally, many constituents are concerned that they may end up being financially penalised despite having no alternative. What assurances can my right hon. Friend provide that my constituents' needs and finances have been fully taken into account as we work towards finding solutions for the decarbonisation of transport?

Grant Shapps: Reassuringly for my hon. Friend, £1.8 billion is the answer: £582 million for plug-in vehicle grants towards her constituents' needs and £1.3 billion for the roll-out of that charging infrastructure. Often, we seem to have this discussion in abstract, because we do not acknowledge that there are a couple of hundred thousand people charging their vehicles from home, as we get to the point where there are more charging locations than petrol stations. Our job is to ensure that there is sufficient on-street parking and charging locations.

We have some fantastic technology, including wireless technology, which we are trialling, to ensure that cars can charge up even as they drive, and certainly as they are parked. I also point my hon. Friend to the national bus strategy, which could assist in her area. Where buses have not run before, we would like to get them running regularly enough that people have further alternatives.

Point of Order

3.31 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance on a matter relating to another Member of Parliament, sadly, whom I have of course notified, and of which I gave you prior notice.

I understand that, following the end of a six-week suspension ordered by the independent expert panel for harassment of staff, a Member has now returned to the estate, as is that Member's right. Taking a safeguarding approach, I am concerned that we have taken every possible step to prevent and manage any possible risk. As you may know, I have some expertise in this area. Unfortunately, one of the best predictors of future risk is past behaviour. I would therefore like to know, on behalf of colleagues and staff who have raised this matter with me, in the interests of safeguarding, what risk assessment has been done of the return of that Member to the estate? Have experts been consulted? Is there is a risk management plan in place, and what guidance has been provided to staff to reassure them?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order and for having given me notice that she intended to raise it. I am pleased that she confirmed that she has notified the Member to whom she refers. Although it is not appropriate for me to comment on individual cases on the Floor of the House, I can confirm that the hon. Member's suspension, as agreed by the House, has now come to an end. In those circumstances, the Chair has no authority to prevent a Member from attending the estate.

The hon. Lady raised concerns about safety and security of other Members and of people who work on the estate; of course, the safety and security of everyone who works here is of paramount importance to Mr Speaker and, indeed, to all of us. The House will be aware that the independent complaints and grievance scheme is in place and is designed to ensure that everyone working here feels supported and safe. The ICGS helpline is able to offer guidance and support to anyone who has witnessed or experienced bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct. There are also other forms of support for staff in the House, including the employee assistance programme. I am specifically mentioning all these matters because it is probably the case that many people who work on the estate are not aware of the support and advice available to them, and of the care that we all take about how they go about their everyday lives while in employment here.

If anybody does feel unsafe, they should speak to their manager, contact the helpline or consider using some of the other sources of support that are available. Everybody who works here should feel safe. I sincerely hope that these messages will be taken seriously. Of course, most experienced Members of Parliament are always very happy when those who work for them or in proximity to them come to them for advice or guidance on matters about which they might be concerned.

I appreciate that the hon. Lady was making a very specific point, and I have explained that the point she raised specifically is not a matter for the Chair, but it is a matter for the Chair and, indeed, for all of us to have

responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of everybody who serves this place. I hope I have been able to give her some reassurance.

I will now suspend the House for two minutes while arrangements are made for the next item of business.

3.36 pm

Sitting suspended.

Planning and Local Representation

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

3.38 pm

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab) [V]: I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to give people who have made representations about development plans the right to participate in associated examination hearings; to require public consultation on development proposals; to grant local authorities power to apply local design standards for permitted development and to refuse permitted development proposals that would be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of an individual or community; to make planning permission for major housing schemes subject to associated works starting within two years; and for connected purposes.

I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

It is a privilege to introduce my first ten-minute rule motion on such an important issue, which is affecting so many of my constituents in Luton South and so many people across the country. We need a bold plan to tackle the housing crisis, but the Government's planning White Paper will restrict local communities' ability to shape their own area, allow for the creation of poor-quality housing through permitted development rights and allow developers to sit on planning permissions rather than build desperately needed, truly affordable housing. It amounts to nothing more than a developer's charter that restricts communities while benefiting wealthy developers. This Bill would ensure that local communities' right to participate in the planning process at a local level and on individual applications is protected.

This measure is vital, as the Government's White Paper intends to create a zonal approach to local plans, weakening local authorities' and communities' detailed oversight of the planning process. That represents a shift away from public engagement and scrutiny of individual planning decisions on applications to engagement only at the overarching local plan stage, which greatly restricts, and in many cases removes, the rights of local councillors, local resident associations and local residents to shape or object to a particular planning application in their area. It seems as though the Government's solution to speeding up planning is to remove the rights of local people and councillors to have a say in the planning process, rather than tackling other obstacles. The Government's plan to remove the voice of local communities has been opposed by a wide range of groups, from the Local Government Association to Civic Voice and the Town and Country Planning Association.

The delivery of new, truly affordable homes must be pursued through a locally led planning system with public participation at its heart. Indeed, just last night Luton Borough Council unanimously passed a motion that emphasised that planning works best when developers work with the local community and called on the Government to protect the right of communities to object to individual planning applications. I would point out that even councillors from the Government's party supported that motion. The Select Committee on Housing, Communities and Local Government, of which I am a member, also recommended in "The future of the planning system in England" report:

"All individuals must still be able to comment and influence upon all individual planning proposals."

[Rachel Hopkins]

This Bill would reflect Luton Borough Council's motion and the Select Committee's recommendation by legislating to ensure that people have the right to participate in development plans and associated examination hearings.

The Government also intend to end the statutory planning notice requirement to inform local people through notices in local papers, on community noticeboards, and on lampposts and, potentially, through hard copies of documents, in favour of using just technology. The Select Committee heard about how local people want to continue to be able to comment on specific local planning applications and that the proposal to drop the legal requirement to publish planning notices in local newspapers and the like would create a "postcode lottery" as to where that opportunity continues. That would undermine local democracy, by creating barriers for those who do not have digital access, such as the elderly or those on low incomes. Instead, the Select Committee recommended retaining "existing statutory notices" for all local authorities, alongside using technology, to make the planning process as accessible as possible.

This Bill would also expand the right to participate to include permitted development, which currently does not allow for objections from residents, and also seeks to allow local planning authorities to set local design standards for when an application is made for prior approval through the permitted development process. Constituents have also contacted me to raise their frustrations at how local planning authorities do not have sufficient power to oppose planning applications. The Select Committee has heard that permitted development rights

"weaken local authorities' ability to shape places; and diminish community engagement in the planning process."

A report the Government commissioned on the impact of permitted development homes concluded that

"permitted development conversions do seem to create worse-quality residential environments than planning permission conversions in relation to a number of factors widely linked to the health, well-being and quality of life of future occupiers."

Many Members from across the House will also have heard horror stories of where permitted development rights have allowed the creation of poor-quality housing in their constituency. One such example is at Unity House in Luton, an office building converted through permitted development rights which houses families with children alongside a four-lane inner ring road. This permitted conversion brought more people into an area that is within an air quality management zone because of traffic congestion. It was allowed to happen because permitted development rights bypass necessary planning permission and air quality regulations. When the Government's own former housing adviser Ben Clifford warned that the changes to permitted development risk creating the "slums of the future" I had to agree.

This Bill allows local planning authorities to refuse prior approval if the development would be to the detriment of the health and wellbeing of an individual or the wider community, therefore preventing poor-quality homes that are in inappropriate locations or that lack adequate community infrastructure, such as shops, schools and parks.

I have seen in Luton children having to play football in the middle of the pedestrian area in the town centre as a consequence of a higher density of housing being

created in former commercial premises in the town centre under PDR without any consideration of local amenities. The children in my town deserve so much better.

Last year Labour formally opposed the Government's changes to PDR which allowed for additional storeys to be placed on existing developments such as flats and houses. It is clear that the measures in this Bill are needed to prevent the creation of homes through PDR, further damaging people's, including children's, health and wellbeing. The housing crisis will not be addressed through PDR's creation of poor-quality housing and will certainly not be addressed while developers sit on planning permissions. The failure to ensure that sites with planning permission have been built on is a key driver behind the Government's poor record on house building.

According to analysis by the Local Government Association, more than 1.1 million homes granted planning permission in England in the past decade are yet to be built. As the LGA also said, local plans are not holding up the building of new housing, with more than 1 million homes on land earmarked for development by councils yet to be brought forward by developers for planning permission. Currently the requirement is for the development to begin within three years of permission being granted. This allows developers to land-bank, which means holding land and selling it in the future when its value rises. We need to incentivise developers to build. That is why the Bill would ensure that planning permission for major housing schemes will be granted only on the condition that development begins within two years of planning permission being granted.

This Bill safeguards the interests of my constituents and many of the organisations that are deeply concerned about the Government's planning proposals. It lays the foundation for a planning system that allows local people to shape their place and deliver good-quality homes that promote health and wellbeing.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 219, Noes 0.

Division No. 54]

[3.47 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
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 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
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 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
 Morden, Jessica
 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
 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
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 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
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wilson, Munira
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Winter, Beth
 Wragg, Mr William
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Taiwo Owatemi and
 Mary Glindon

NOES

Tellers for the Noes:

Ms Marie Rimmer and
 Gill Furniss

Question accordingly agreed to.

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.

Ordered,

That Rachel Hopkins, Andrew Gwynne, Kim Johnson, Debbie Abrahams, Navendu Mishra, Liz Twist, Rachael Maskell, Kate Osborne, Ian Byrne, Sarah Owen, Barbara Keeley and Peter Dowd present the Bill.

Rachel Hopkins accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October, and to be printed (Bill 149).

Health and Care Bill

Second Reading

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

The reasoned amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition has been selected.

3.59 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Sajid Javid): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The covid-19 pandemic has tested our country like never before, and nowhere more has this been seen than in our health and care system. Everyone delivering health and social care in this country has risen to meet these tests in remarkable new ways. We have seen bold new ways of working, of overcoming bureaucracy and of people working seamlessly across traditional boundaries. New teams were forged, new technologies adopted and new approaches found.

There is no greater example of this than the extraordinary success of our vaccine roll-out, where health and care colleagues have been able to draw on the collective scale and strengths of our Union to deliver one vaccination programme for the whole of the United Kingdom. Today, I can confirm to the House that two thirds of adults have received both jabs against covid-19 one week earlier than planned. It is a remarkable achievement. Everyone working in the NHS and social care can be proud of what they have achieved, and we are all in this House very proud of them.

As we look to the post-pandemic world, we know there is still no shortage of challenges ahead—an ageing population, an increase in people with multiple health conditions and, of course, the chance to embrace the full potential of data and technology.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sajid Javid: I will.

Jim Shannon: It is just, Secretary of State, because you mentioned the issue I wanted to bring up about people getting older. I spoke to your colleague, the Minister for Health, yesterday and I am appreciative of that—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member really must not refer directly to the Secretary of State; it is through the Chair.

Jim Shannon: Recent statistics show that over 40,000 people under 65 in the UK have dementia, and many more have not been diagnosed as of yet. It would seem that these figures are not addressed in the Health and Care Bill, so can I ask the Secretary of State what more will be done to offer support to those suffering with dementia and Alzheimer's in the UK through this social services care Bill?

Sajid Javid: I am pleased that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman as he raises a very important issue. In this Bill, as I will come to, one of the central themes is integration. When I come to that, I hope he will see how that integration between NHS and social care will help to deliver a better service for those with dementia.

Everything I refer to—these challenges—are all in addition to the challenges of the pandemic that of course we still face and the elective backlog that we know is going to get worse before it gets better. Meeting the future with confidence relies on learning lessons from the pandemic—what worked and what did not work—and building on a decade of innovation in health and care.

Sometimes the best intentions of the past cannot stop what is right for the future. Bureaucracy can still make sensible decision making harder, silos can stifle work across boundaries and sometimes legislation can get in the way. We have seen how unnecessary rules have meant contracts have needed to be retendered even where high-quality services are being delivered, we have seen the complicated workarounds needed to help the NHS and local government to work together, and we have seen the uncertainty about how to share data across the health and care system. People working in health and social care want the very best for people in their care. That is what they have shown time and again, not least in the way they have embraced integration and innovation to save lives through this pandemic. They want to hold on to the remarkable spirit of integration and innovation, but they want to let go of everything that is holding them back and we want to help them to do it.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): On that point of bureaucracy, I recently saw the apotheosis of the NHS, where an Anglican church had draped an altar with a flag saying, “O Praise the NHS”. So when we have a new Secretary of State, can we have a really hard-hitting attitude to NHS bureaucracy? We all praise our doctors and nurses, but the fact is that, like any other bureaucracy, it is prone to underperformance, waste and incompetence. There is no harm, as long as we preserve the principle of being free at the point of delivery, in having innovative private sector solutions.

Sajid Javid: I hear what my right hon. Friend has said and I think that, as I progress through my opening remarks, he will like what I have to say about integration and cutting bureaucracy.

All these things that I refer to and all these changes we want to make are exactly what this Health and Care Bill will do. I want to thank the thousands of hard-working staff who, through two years of consultation and engagement, have come forward and told us what they think works and what they think needs to change. In the words of Lord Stevens, chief executive of the NHS, the overwhelming majority of these proposals are changes that the health service has asked for. The Bill supports improvements that are already under way in the NHS. It builds on the recommendations of the NHS's own long-term plan. It is a product of the NHS, it is for the NHS, and it is supported by the NHS.

I am grateful to all the organisations that have helped to shape these important proposals—everyone from the NHS Confederation to the Local Government Association. I have spent many of my early days in this job talking to them, and they have all told me the same thing, which is that they are ready to take forward the reforms. I want to continue to work with them and to listen to their specific concerns, just as much as I want to listen to the concerns raised by hon. Members across the House and by Members in the other place.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD) *rose*—

Sajid Javid: With that, I want to listen to this particular hon. Member.

Munira Wilson: The Secretary of State referred to Lord Stevens and what the NHS has asked for in trying to get rid of things that stand in its way. Something that it has not asked for is a massive power grab by the Secretary of State, which is in the Bill and will lead to political interference in day-to-day operational and reconfiguration decisions, which may not always be in the best interests of patients. Why does he think that that is a sensible way forward and something that the NHS wants?

Sajid Javid: Clinical decisions should always be made by those with clinical expertise—I think everyone in the House would agree on that—and that should be independent of any outside interference. The Bill does nothing to alter that. What it does is recognise that the NHS is one of the public's top priorities. We spend over £140 billion of taxpayers' money on the NHS, and it is right that there is proper accountability for that spending to Ministers and therefore to the House. I think that most people would welcome that.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State has talked about people he has consulted, so would he confirm that he has consulted the trade unions, particularly on schedule 2, which says that integrated care boards may appoint employees to address remuneration, pensions and terms and conditions. Can he confirm that that is a departure from Agenda for Change terms?

Sajid Javid: There have been wide-ranging consultations on the Bill, as I mentioned, which have taken place over the past two years. While I cannot say specifically which trade union or which particular organisation has been spoken to, as I was not in the Department at the time, I know that the conversations have been wide ranging.

The Bill is not the limit of our ambitions on the nation's health. We are also transforming public health; we are bringing the Mental Health Act into the 21st century; and, by the end of this year, we will set out plans putting adult social care on a sustainable footing for the future.

We are also ambitious for our workforce. I have commissioned Health Education England to refresh its strategic framework for health and social care workforce planning. HEE will work in partnership across the sector and gather views from the widest possible range of stakeholders to help us to shape a workforce with the right skills, the right knowledge and the right values for the year ahead.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): My right hon. Friend has set out his plans to introduce a plan for social care by the end of the year, and I know that he is looking for a cross-party solution. In a joint inquiry by two Select Committees—the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee and the Health and Social Care Committee—one of the recommendations was a system with a German-style social care premium. Would that potentially feature in

his recommendations, and does he agree that that is a much fairer system than a Dilnot-style system that incentivises people to spend their assets or move them somewhere where they cannot be touched?

Sajid Javid: First, my hon. Friend is right to say that it would be great if all or most Members of this House, and certainly the different parties, could agree on a new system. I look forward to speaking to all hon. Members about what a future social care system could look like. In terms of the detail, I am afraid that he is just going to have to wait a moment longer, but I agree that the work by the Select Committees will, of course, inform our decisions.

I turn in a little more detail to the measures and themes that are captured in the Bill. The first is more integration. We know that different parts of the system want to work together to deliver joined-up services, and we know that, when they do that, it works. We have seen that with the non-statutory integrated care systems in the past few years. They have united hospitals and brought together communities, GPs, mental health services, local authority care and public health, and it works. We recognise that there are limits on how far this can go under the current law, so this Bill will build on the progress of integrated care systems by creating integrated care boards and integrated care partnerships as statutory bodies. England's 42 ICSs will draw on the expertise of people who know their areas best. They will be able to create joint budgets to shape how we care for people and how we promote a healthy lifestyle. With respect to the specific geographies of the ICSs themselves, as I have said elsewhere, I am willing to listen.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): In passing, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment? I also very much welcome part 4 of the Bill, which introduces the health services safety investigations body. This is a great innovation that was promoted by the Public Administration Committee and scrutinised by the Joint Committee that I chair. Can I just reinforce the points that I know he is now receiving from NHS England with a warning about changing the boundaries of the integrated care systems that are already operating? In Suffolk and north-east Essex, we have a very high-functioning de facto integrated care system operating already. Please will he not change it?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend has raised an important point, and this may be on the minds of other hon. Members as well. It is important to point out that several factors will be helpful in fostering stronger partnerships between the NHS and local authorities, including the alignment of boundaries. Earlier this year, the former Secretary of State asked NHS England to conduct a boundary review of integrated care systems, to understand the best way forward and the best alignment where local authorities currently have to work with more than one ICS. I have met my hon. Friend and other hon. Members, and I know that hon. Members may have made representations to my predecessor. I have been informed of those, and where the information might not be remembered easily, I am sure we can get hold of some video evidence. *[Laughter.]* I want to thank all hon. Members for their input into this, and I stress that no final decisions have yet been made on the boundary review.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sajid Javid: If it is on this issue, yes I will.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Just a reminder that interventions need to be short and to the point, because there is a lot of pressure on time in this debate.

Tim Farron: My point is about boundaries. Lancashire and south Cumbria have a perfectly reasonable boundary, but does the Secretary of State agree that there is concern that, because most rural communities are attached to bigger, more populated urban ones, that can lead to an imbalance in decisions? One of the proposals that our community faces is that the Preston and Lancaster hospitals could be replaced by a single super-hospital somewhere in the middle. HIP2—the health infrastructure plan 2—is a good thing, but that would be very bad thing, because it would mean that people in south Cumbria could have a two-hour round trip just to get to A&E. Will he intervene and ensure that any proposals under HIP2 that undermine access to healthcare in rural communities are taken off the table?

Sajid Javid: I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said. As I have said, no final decisions have been made, but if he would like a meeting with a Health Minister, we can arrange that so that the matter can be discussed further.

I am also very grateful to another of my predecessors, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), first for his leadership of the Health Committee, whose valuable report and recommendations we have taken on board, and secondly for his tireless dedication to the cause of patient safety, which sees its culmination in the Bill's creation of the Health Services Safety Investigations Body. We must continue, in his words, that quiet revolution in patient safety. I have asked my officials to consider whether the Care Quality Commission could look broadly across the integrated care systems in reviewing the way in which local authorities and providers of health, public health and social care services are working together to deliver safe, high-quality integrated care to the public.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The Secretary of State talks of patient safety. May I ask him why the Bill contains none of Sir Bruce Keogh's recommendations on the cosmetic surgery industry, which are now 10 years old? In response to questions that I have asked, Ministers keep saying that the recommendations are going to be implemented. Could this not be an opportunity to improve patient safety in that area?

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Gentleman has raised an important matter. There are issues surrounding the cosmetic surgery industry, and I know that he has spoken eloquently about them in the House before. I do not necessarily agree that this Bill has to be the vehicle for any change, but if he wishes to discuss the matter further, I should be happy to meet him in due course, because it is important and it does require a fresh look.

Whenever the NHS is subject to change, it is tempting for some, who should actually know better, to claim that it is the beginning of the end of public provision.

We know that that is complete nonsense, and they know it is nonsense, but they say it anyway. So let me be very clear: our integrated care boards will be made up of public sector bodies and those with a social purpose. They will not be driven by any private interests, and will constantly make use of the most innovative potential of non-NHS bodies.

The spirit of this Bill is about holding on to what is best about the NHS and removing what is holding it back. That is something that we all want, and I am looking forward to a mature debate—[*Laughter.*] Perhaps that is too much to ask in this Chamber with this Opposition Front Bench, but I hope for, and I think the public expect, a mature debate on the Bill and on how we can achieve these sensible changes together.

In that spirit, the second theme of the Bill is cutting bureaucracy. As we have been tested during these past months, we have looked at the rules and regulations through new eyes. It has become increasingly clear which of them are the cornerstone of safe, high-quality care, and which are stifling innovation and damaging morale. It is that second group of rules and regulations that the Bill strips away, removing the existing procurement regime and improving the way in which healthcare services are arranged. Yes, this is about how we deliver better value for the taxpayer, but fundamentally it is about how we can free up NHS colleagues to deliver better care. We know that patients are better served when experts are free to innovate unencumbered by unnecessary bureaucratic processes. That is why the Bill will repeal section 75 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, giving the NHS the flexibility for which it has been asking. I know that this is a point of agreement with the Labour party—

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): We said it 10 years ago.

Sajid Javid: The Labour party said it not just 10 years ago but in 2015, 2017 and 2019—in all those manifestos—so I am sure that its members agree with this direction. [*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. If Members want to intervene, let me say to them that the Secretary of State has been very generous in giving way, but just shouting at him is not working.

Sajid Javid: They are excited, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I understand that. Let me excite them much more.

The third theme of the Bill is greater accountability. We have never seen so clearly as we have in the past 16 months how critical the health of our constituents is for the House. The Government of the day always work hand in hand with the NHS to deliver that priority. That is what people would expect from a responsible Government. People also rightly expect there to be clear lines of accountability for how this priority is delivered. Accountability is the foundation of our democracy, and on that I hope we all agree.

On the nation's greatest priority, our health, this Bill sets out clear lines of accountability to the people we all serve. The Bill simplifies what has been a complex structure, bringing the three different bodies that oversee the NHS into just one, as NHS England. NHS England will continue to have clinical day-to-day operational

independence, but it is right that the NHS must be accountable to Ministers, and Ministers must be accountable to Parliament, where we are all accountable to the people we serve.

Naturally, that accountability will extend to these integrated care systems. The right hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) is on the record, in an interview with the *Health Service Journal* in December 2019, as saying that he agrees with the principle of the legislative changes that had been put forward by the NHS for “democratically accountable” ICSs. He cannot have any objection to this point. We will see what he has to say from the Dispatch Box.

I hope we can all agree that this is a sensible and pragmatic step. Let me quote once more:

“We will reinstate the powers of the Secretary of State for Health to have overall responsibility for the NHS.”

Those are not my words but the words of the 2017 Labour manifesto. I look forward to working with the shadow Health Secretary on this and other aspects of the Bill, and I urge him to set aside petty party politics and point scoring and do what the NHS wants him to do, which is to back this Bill.

Before I finish my opening remarks, I turn to the reasoned amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition and other Opposition Members. What is claimed by the reasoned amendment is entirely wrong. This is exactly the right time for these reforms. The response to covid-19 has quickened the pace of collaboration across health and social care, showing what we can do when we all work together, when we adopt new technology and when we set aside bureaucratic rules. The pandemic has also brought home the importance of preventing ill health in the first place. The Bill lays the framework to achieve all that.

More than that, this Bill is what the NHS has been asking for. It builds on the NHS’s long-term plan and the work the NHS has already started to do voluntarily. We have invested record sums in the NHS, both before and, of course, during this pandemic, and we will continue to do so.

The systems are telling us that they are ready, that they want us to go ahead with this Bill. They do not want to see any delay, which is why this is important work for all of us. Hopefully Parliament can deliver what the NHS is asking for.

The unprecedented challenges of the pandemic have only deepened our affection for the NHS, and it has reinforced the noble idea that the NHS is there for all of us when we need it. I started learning about the NHS from a very early age when I used to go to check-ups with my mum and translate for her. It was there for her, it has been there for me, it has been there for my family, it has been there for my children and it has been there for all of us and our constituents.

Even in this fast-changing world, with the new and evolving threats to our health, the founding principles of the NHS are as true today as they ever were. It is our responsibility to build on this incredible inheritance. Our NHS is the envy of the world, so it is right that this Government should work across health and care to shape a system that is truly fit for the future. Our colleagues in health and social care have achieved extraordinary things in the most extraordinary times, and we in this place must give them the firm foundations they need to build back better in the years that lie ahead.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Before I bring in the shadow Secretary of State, I remind hon. Members that there will be an immediate three-minute limit on Back-Bench contributions. There is a countdown clock for those in the Chamber, and for those participating virtually, there will be a clock on the screens.

4.25 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “That” to the end of the Question and add:

“this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Health and Care Bill, notwithstanding the need for a plan for greater integration between health services and social care services and for restrictions on junk food advertising to improve population health outcomes, because the Bill represents a top down reorganisation in a pandemic leading to a loss of local accountability, fails to reform social care, allows further outsourcing permitting the private sector to sit on local boards and fails to reinstate the NHS as the default provider, fails to introduce a plan to bring down waiting lists for routine NHS treatment or tackle the growing backlog of care, fails to put forward plans to increase the size of the NHS workforce and see them better supported, and fails to put forward a plan that would give the NHS the resources it needs to invest in modern equipment, repair the crumbling NHS estate or ensure comprehensive, quality healthcare.”

Well, the Secretary of State talked a lot, but he did not say very much. Look at the context of where we are. Yesterday, we recorded 36,000 covid infections. Hospital admissions have increased to over 500 a day, up 50% in a week. Waiting lists are at the highest level on record, currently at 5.3 million. Some 336,733 people have been waiting over a year for treatment, over 76,583 people are waiting over 18 months, and over 7,000 people are waiting over two years. Some 25,889 people are waiting more than two weeks from urgent referral to a first consultant appointment for cancer. Emergency care is grappling with some of the highest summer demands ever seen. Two hundred and fifty thousand people are waiting for social care. NHS staff are exhausted, facing burnout. We went into this pandemic with 100,000 vacancies across the NHS and a further 112,000 vacancies across social care.

The answer from the Secretary of State is to embark on a top-down reorganisation when we are not even through the pandemic—a reorganisation that will not deliver the integration needed, because reforms to social care are delayed again; a reorganisation that will not deliver more care but in fact, in periods of stretched health funding, could well deliver less care; and a reorganisation that is, in effect, a Trojan horse to hide a power grab by the Secretary of State.

Let us be clear why this reorganisation is taking place. The Government have come forward with this Bill because of the mess of the last reorganisation—the mess that the Secretary of State supported and voted for, and the mess that he spoke out for in this House, saying that it would modernise the NHS and that the “concept of GP commissioning has been widely supported by politicians from all parties for many years. May I urge my right hon. Friend to keep putting patients first by increasing GP involvement in the NHS?”—[*Official Report*, 4 April 2011; Vol. 526, c. 773.]

Why, if he believed that then, has he U-turned now? And it was a mess that we warned of. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), who

[Jonathan Ashworth]

opposed that Bill in this House, warned the Government that it would increase bureaucracy and increase the fragmentation that the Secretary of State has just complained about from the Dispatch Box.

Ministers said that that reorganisation under Lord Lansley would reduce bureaucracy, and Back Benchers told us that it would reduce bureaucracy, but what ended up happening? Billions were wasted and thousands of NHS staff were made redundant. That was the Government's priority then, and now they are asking us to clean up their mess today. They also told us that that reorganisation would improve cancer survival rates, and where are we today? We are still lagging behind other countries on cancer survival rates. Perhaps the Secretary of State could have come to the Dispatch Box and apologised for that Lansley reorganisation and 10 wasted years.

The Secretary of State talked about NHS leaders, but the truth is that NHS leaders asked for a simple Bill to get rid of the worst of the Lansley restructuring and instead re-embed a sense of equity, collaboration and social justice in our NHS structures. That is not what this Bill is. Of course, the Secretary of State secretly agrees with me. According to *The Times*, he wrote to the Prime Minister saying that there were "significant areas of contention" that were yet to be resolved with the Bill, and that he wanted to delay it. The Secretary of State was only back five minutes and already Downing Street was overruling him. When it overrules him on his choice of spin doctors, he walks; when it overrules him on the future of the NHS, he puts his career first and stays in the Cabinet.

I listened carefully to the case made by the Secretary of State. He talked of the need for greater integration between health and social care and the need to provide better co-ordinated care, and he referred to an ageing population.

To be frank, that was a speech that Health Secretaries and their predecessor Social Services Secretaries have been making more or less since 1968, when Richard Crossman proposed the first set of NHS reorganisations. Indeed, there were echoes of the Secretary of State's speech in that made by his predecessor Keith Joseph, when he came to this House in 1972 to set up the area health authorities, bringing together hospitals and community care and working more closely with local authorities because we needed seamless care. Those authorities were of such a size that, within a year, they were rearranged again into district health authorities. Given the size of some of the integrated care systems that the Secretary of State is proposing, I suspect that the seeds of the next reorganisation are being sown today.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State told the House that his

"three pressing priorities for these critical...months" were

"getting us...out of this pandemic...busting the backlog" of non-covid care, and

"putting social care on a sustainable footing for the future."—[*Official Report*, 13 July 2021; Vol. 699, c. 163.]

But absent from his speech was any credible explanation of how this reorganisation will meet his objectives that he outlined to the House yesterday. In fact, in the last

30 years, we have seen around 20 reorganisations of the NHS. Have any of them delivered the outcomes that Health Secretaries have promised from the Dispatch Box? Well, not according to analysis in *The BMJ*, which observes:

"Past reorganisations have delivered little benefit".

Why should this one be any different?

The question for me is: how will the 85-year-old with multiple care needs experience better whole-person care as a result of the restructuring that the Secretary of State is embarking upon? How will waiting times for elective surgery for cancer and mental health be improved by this reorganisation? How will health inequalities that have widened and life expectancy advances that have stalled be corrected by this reorganisation? To those questions, the Secretary of State had no answer today: the Bill fails those tests because it is a badly drafted Bill and could in fact even worsen health outcomes.

Let me outline our specific concerns. On the proposed integrated care boards, the Bill collapses the remaining 100 or so clinical commissioning groups into 32 integrated care systems differing in geographical size and with some covering populations up to 3 million or 4 million. In some parts of the country, the ICSs are not based on the NHS agreed boundaries, but currently on centrally drawn-up boundaries for political reasons. We know that Cheshire will be combined with Merseyside. Glossop is cut off from Greater Manchester and allocated to Derbyshire. Frimley is split up, leading the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), to complain in an Adjournment debate recently:

"Do not break up Frimley ICS. Just for once, let common sense prevail."—[*Official Report*, 29 June 2021; Vol. 698, c. 238.]

These boundaries and the way in which they were proposed by the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), prompted NHS Providers to warn that the disruption could lead to "a worsening of patient care".

And then, of course, we have the design of the integrated care system, split across two committees—a partnership board containing people from local authorities, the third sector and others, and then an NHS board responsible for spending the money, for commissioning. The Secretary of State has moved away from GP commissioning, of course; he wants the NHS board to commission now. Those two boards will probably have different chairs, but the NHS board only has to have "regard" to the partnership board strategy. Nor is it clear how local authority seats—the one local authority seat—will be decided when they cover more than one council and possibly even councils of different political persuasions, so we will see how a consensus can be built then.

Other important voices are left out. Mental illness accounts for roughly a quarter of the total burden of illness, yet there is no guarantee that mental health providers will get the seats on these boards, when we know that mental health services are under pressure and the Secretary of State tells us that the mental health backlog is one of his personal priorities. The pandemic has also reminded us that the health and wellbeing of our community is not just in the hands of large hospitals or general practice. It is also in the hands of our directors of public health, who have shown exceptional local leadership throughout this crisis, standing on the shoulders of their forebears, who in the past confronted

diseases such as cholera, smallpox and diphtheria. Test and Trace would have been far safer in their hands from the outset, by the way, and what is their reward? They are sidelined. Public health, again, should be properly represented on the NHS boards and we will table amendments to that effect.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is not just about their being sidelined; it is actually about the budgets for public health, which have been pushed off into the autumn? If the consultation paper that went out last year is anything to go by, County Durham would lose 19% of its budget. How can we effect these changes without its being divorced from what will be provided in terms of cash?

Jonathan Ashworth: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. I will come to the financial flows in a few moments. But how on earth can we have a triple aim of trying to improve health outcomes for a population and not even give public health a voice and a seat on the decision-making body that decides health plans for an area?

The Secretary of State talks about integrating health and social care. There is no seat for directors of adult social services on these committees, either. And what about patients? Patients were not mentioned very often by the Secretary of State in his speech. Patients will always come first for the Opposition. They have no mandated institutional representation, either—no guaranteed patient voice—so we have yet another reorganisation of the NHS whereby patients are treated like ghosts in the machine. It is utterly unacceptable. This is fragmentation, not integration, with a continued sidelining of social care.

There is a loss of local accountability as well, because there is no explicit requirement that the boards meet in public or publish their board papers. Although NHS England has stated that that is its preference, it is not required; nor is there any commitment, despite the wide geographical spread of some ICSs, for meetings to be made accessible online. But, of course, the White Paper did indicate that the independent sector could have a seat on an ICS, and the explanatory notes to the Bill state that

“local areas will have the flexibility to determine any further representation.”

Kevin Hollinrake: The right hon. Gentleman talks about solutions to social care. Will he come on to his own solutions to social care? Will they potentially include the recommendations of the Select Committees about that German-style social care premium—recommendations made by members of his own party who were elected by his party to serve on those Committees? Is that something that he is now willing to explore? He has ruled it out time and again on the Floor of the House.

Jonathan Ashworth: I have. The hon. Gentleman is a dogged advocate for that proposal for social care, and he is quite right: he always raises it with me. I am unpersuaded but I am more than happy to sit down with the Secretary of State and with my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West to discuss a solution to social care. We keep being told that there are going to be cross-party talks, but I think I missed the Zoom link, because they have not happened so far.

As I was saying, these committees do permit a seat, if the committees want it, for the independent sector. In Bath, in Somerset, we have seen Virgin Care get a seat on the shadow ICS. The Opposition think that is unacceptable and we shall table amendments to prohibit it.

I welcome the removal of the section 75 competition and procurement rules, finally scraping the remnants of the Lansley competition rules off the boots of the NHS. We did warn him and others that this compulsory competitive tendering would lead to billions going to the private sector, would be wasteful and bureaucratic, and would be distracting—and it even led to the NHS getting sued by Virgin Care when it did not win a contract. But this is not the end of contracting with the private sector. Without clauses to make the NHS the default provider, it would be possible for ICBs to award and extend contracts for healthcare services of unlimited value without advertising, including to private companies. Given the past year, when huge multibillion-pound contracts have been handed out for duff personal protective equipment and testing, we naturally have concerns about that and will seek safeguards in Committee. We are worried about further cronyism.

We are particularly concerned about the Bill because of the power grab clauses for the Secretary of State. He is creating 138 new powers, including seven allowing him in effect to rewrite the law through secondary legislation, to transfer functions between arm's length bodies without any proper scrutiny. He has not explained why he needs these powers or given any guidance on how he expects to use them. These powers also include a requirement that Ministers be informed of every single service change, every single reconfiguration, and the Secretary of State will then decide whether or not to call them in for ministerial decision. Are you sure you want that power, Secretary of State?

The Government have gone from wanting to liberate the NHS under Lansley to now listening out for the clang of every dropped bedpan echoing through Whitehall. This is not a plan for service modernisation; it is a “Back to the Future” plan and it will mean more inertia. Instead of powers to interfere at every level, resetting the mandate for the NHS within years, we instead would want the duties on the Health Secretary, and therefore on the 42 ICSs to which he delegates those responsibilities, to continue the promotion in England of a comprehensive health service, as per the National Health Service Act 2006, to be fully reinstated and made explicit.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): As ever, I have listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. If this is the “Back to the Future” Bill, presumably it puts right what once went wrong. Does he support the clauses on foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar, and the watershed proposals for advertising?

Jonathan Ashworth: Yes, although I am disappointed that they are in this particular Bill. I think they should be part of a stand-alone Bill. In my concluding remarks, I will make a point or two about other public health interventions, which I imagine and hope that the hon. Member, as a great champion of public health, would support.

[Jonathan Ashworth]

It is crucial that the Secretary of State's duty to provide comprehensive healthcare is reinstated, rather than the duty to meddle in the NHS at any time he wants, because there is a lack of clarity about how the funding flows work in this system. The talk is of moving to capitated budgets for an area to provide holistic care to meet the complicated care needs of individual. But when waiting lists are increasing at the current rate, and when cancer waits and mental health referrals are going up, how is an area going to fund the episodic care for each unit of extra care that is needed—often care that is expensive and more complicated because it needs to be done in the acute sector?

We have worries. Clauses 21 to 24 on the financial duties on ICS boards, NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts are alarming, because they put in place a duty to ensure financial balance across the ICS area, but there is no clarification of how that balance should be achieved and enforced. Local health budgets have been stretched to breaking point after years of underfunding, so what does this duty mean for existing deficits? At the moment, trusts have a combined deficit of £910 million. King's has a deficit of £111 million. Worcestershire has a deficit of £81 million. University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust has a deficit of £80 million. Will the ICBs need to fill this £900 million black hole before they are even up and running? How exactly will trust and ICS board deficits be dealt with at the end of each financial year?

This could well be a return to the days that we saw in the '80s, which some Members in the House may recall, when health authorities would close beds and put off paying bills from January onwards in order to hit financial balance. If health authorities have to hit this financial balance year by year, will it result in a postcode lottery of more rationing and an even longer list of treatments being removed from the NHS through the decisions of ICBs because they have to hit balance, effectively forcing patients either to go private or go without? I hope that the Minister, in summing up, can clarify what the situation will be.

If a set of providers, trusts and an ICB feel that the financial settlement they have been given by NHS England will not allow them to deliver the levels of care to bring down the waiting lists, which the Secretary of State said is one of his top priorities, or to improve mental health outcomes, which he has also said is one of his top priorities, what is their appeal process? How will the arbitration process work on an area's financial settlement under the current plans to bring together NHS England and NHS Improvement, not split them out?

The Bill is spun as an attempt to integrate health and social care, but there is nothing in it actually to integrate health and social care, because there is nothing in it to fix social care. If it is about integrating health and social care, where is the long-promised Bill to reform social care? The Bill will repeal provisions in the Care Act 2014 that require patients to be assessed for their social care needs before they are discharged from hospital. Without long-term funding in place, that could mean a patient being sent home, left out without support and waiting for an assessment. Will the Secretary of State, or the Minister who responds to the debate, guarantee that that will not be the case? Will they put in place the necessary funding alongside the Bill?

A number of royal colleges and health bodies have said today that the biggest challenge facing the NHS is workforce. The Bill proposes a duty on the Secretary of State to report on workforce once every five years. That is simply not good enough. We need a solution to workforce now; we need a solution to recruitment now; staff need a fair pay rise now; we need more investment in training and professional development budgets now; and we need safe staffing legislation now. We will therefore look to amend the Bill, hopefully on a cross-party basis and perhaps working with others who put forward proposals to improve the workforce sections of the Bill.

As my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) asked the Secretary of State, what does the Bill mean for "Agenda for Change"? The Bill suggests that an integrated care system will be able to change "Agenda for Change" terms; we disagree with that.

Finally, on public health, the Bill introduces restrictions on the advertising of less healthy food and drink. We welcome this step—it, too, was in our 2017 manifesto, which the Secretary of State has been reading—but we would go further. Why can we not have more restrictions on the advertising of unhealthy food around schools? Our public health crisis is about not just obesity but smoking and alcohol, so why are there no provisions in the Bill on smoking services and to ensure alcohol calorie labelling? We will table amendments on those issues in Committee.

This is the wrong Bill at the wrong time. Will the person with learning difficulties or the older person who needs social care experience improved care? No. Will social care be brought back in from the wilderness? No. Will the cancer backlog be tackled more effectively? No. Will health inequalities be narrowed? No. Will parity of esteem for mental health be delivered? No.

Instead of this being a simple Bill to end competition and foster local collaboration, NHS staff will be left trying to second-guess where the Secretary of State will interfere next in the safe running of their local NHS with his in-year changing mandate. The rules on funding could result in more rationing and cuts, so we cannot possibly support the Bill. We have championed integrated care for many years, but the Bill does not deliver it and we urge the House to accept our reasoned amendment.

4.47 pm

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): To reorganise the NHS as one of your first acts as Health Secretary is what Sir Humphrey would describe as brave. I support this Bill, because it contains changes that the NHS has asked for. I take the Secretary of State at his word that there is more to come on social care, and he has said that he will pursue the idea of independent safety and quality inspections of the new integrated care systems to make sure that they are outward facing and focused on the needs of patients.

When it comes to the biggest challenge facing the NHS today, which is workforce gaps, the Bill says little or nothing. Independent forecasts say today that we are currently short of 400 psychiatrists; 1,400 anaesthetists; 2,000 radiologists; 2,000 midwives; 2,000 to 2,500 emergency care consultants; and 2,500 GPs. We have more nurses but we are short of learning disability, mental health and community nurses.

Steve Brine: It is unquestionable that we have a challenge with the GP workforce. It is about numbers, yes, but does my right hon. Friend agree that constituents have a big challenge with access to general practice? We currently do not have the right balance between telemedicine and in-person medicine.

Jeremy Hunt: There is a big issue, and my hon. Friend is aware from his time at the Department of Health that its root cause is capacity in the system. These capacity issues taken together are why the Health Foundation says that, in just over a decade, we risk a workforce gap in the NHS of about half a million people. That is why this is such a big issue. I urge the Secretary of State to think about that during the Bill's passage.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is also the case for the rehabilitation services used by stroke victims? There is a vital link between occupational therapists and physios, but we do not have the proper workforce in place for at-home care after a stroke.

Jeremy Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. These issues are about not just doctors but all associated health professionals, allied health professionals and indeed the social care workforce. It is important to note that they predate the pandemic. That is why, when I was doing the job of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I set up five new medical schools and increased the number of doctor, nurse and midwife training places by a quarter, but we need to go further.

When the number of clinicians we train is decided by haggling between the Department of Health and the Treasury in a spending round, there is always the risk that it will be eclipsed by more short-term considerations. The truth is that we have a short-term emergency with workforce burnout, so I urge my right hon. Friend to look at the simple and sensible solution proposed by the Health Foundation and all the royal colleges in *The Times* today to legislate for Health Education England to have a statutory responsibility to publish annual independent workforce projections across the health and care system for the next five, 10, 15 and 20 years. That would show how many training places are needed, which would start to tackle this problem and the obscenity of spending £6 billion every year on locum doctors and agency workers. That cannot be the best use of funds.

Frontline health and care workers are exhausted. They know that there is not an instant solution, because they know it takes three years to train a nurse and seven years to train a doctor, but we can at least give them the reassurance that there is a long-term plan in place. That is not in the Bill, but it needs to be. Given the dedication that we have seen from health and care staff over the last year, it is the very least that we owe them.

4.52 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: The Health and Social Care Act 2012 was what got me involved in politics, as I followed the Lansley proposals in sheer disbelief that anyone could think that breaking the NHS in England into pieces and making them compete with each other would somehow improve patient care. So here we are, less than a decade on, and the Government are having to unpick some of the worst

aspects of their legislation, which drove competition instead of collaboration and led to the fragmentation of the NHS in England.

Many will be glad to see the back of section 75, which forced services to be put out to tender to commercial companies, but the Government's covid response does not exactly suggest that they are any less keen on outsourcing. In the last year, we have seen the establishment of parallel systems of laboratories and contact tracing instead of investment in the expansion of NHS labs and public health teams. Health and care services need collaboration and integration with the patient and their family at the centre. That was key to the NHS requests that led to the Bill.

This is obviously a bit of a kitchen sink Bill, with many disparate components. The main aim is meant to be removing some of the barriers to local collaboration, and to some extent it will do that. Achieving integration, however, will still depend on the establishment of a culture of genuine co-operation within integrated care systems and partnerships. They should be statutory public bodies focused on how to provide the best services to their local population, including working with local government to provide social care and tackle the social determinants of health. Instead, private companies can sit on the integrated care partnership boards, as is the case with Virgin Care in Bath, Somerset, and could influence the commissioning of services for which they are hoping to win contracts. It is hard to see how this is anything other than a blatant conflict of interest and suggests that private providers are moving higher up the ladder and could exert influence on a larger scale.

One issue is transparency, as private companies hide behind commercial confidentiality and do not publish accounts of how they have spent public money. Instead of taking the opportunity to return to a publicly funded and delivered health service, as we are lucky enough to have in Scotland, the purchaser-provider split remains and the principle of commissioning and procurement means that financial competition continues. The administrative costs of such transactional systems waste funding that would be better spent on direct clinical care. Unfortunately, the Government are still wedded to the flawed idea that financial competition drives up quality, yet there is no evidence of that. Indeed, financial competition can mean that, when a service starts to struggle, the loss of funding makes its failure become inevitable. It is actually a relentless focus on safety, clinical audit and peer review that can drive improvement in the quality of patient care.

Thanks to devolution, our NHS was spared this destructive experimentation in marketisation, but we inherited a system of competing hospital and primary care trusts, which were then abolished and replaced with statutory public health boards. These are funded to deliver primary, community and hospital care to the population of their geographical area, and work with local authorities on integrated joint boards to deliver public health and social care to the same population.

The long-term Scottish policy of integration was one of three aspects of our healthcare system that was praised in the Nuffield Trust report, "Learning from Scotland's NHS" that it considered the NHS in England might want to look at. The other two aspects were quality improvement and patient safety. I was honoured to lead the development of the Scottish breast cancer

[Dr Philippa Whitford]

standards in 2000, and, through our yearly audit and peer review, saw outcomes in all units improve in the following years. We now have regular prospective audits of clinical care in 19 of the most common cancers, as well as standards in a broad range of medical conditions and services as diverse as diabetic retinopathy, bowel screening and forensic medical services.

In contrast, many clinical outcome audits have disappeared in England, and publication of the “Getting it Right First Time” audit into breast cancer services has been held back since December 2019. The whole point of such audits is to identify weaknesses and drive clinical improvement. They should not be delayed for political reasons, because they highlight issues that need to be tackled.

With regard to patient safety, I am very glad to see the proposal for the Health Service Safety Investigations Body make it into the Bill after a four-year delay. The agency will take a similar approach to that used in air accident investigations and share the learning from significant healthcare failures to try to prevent similar episodes in the future. Having been on the pre-legislative Committee, it will be interesting to see how that innovative system evolves.

However, I find it surprising that more has not been taken from Scotland’s national Patient Safety Programme, which promotes a whole-team approach to patient safety to try to prevent incidents from happening in the first place. I remember it being introduced to surgical theatres in 2008 and it reduced post-operative mortality by over a third within two years. It has been extended to almost every division of our health service, leading to a significant reduction in standardised hospital mortality and morbidity, such as sepsis or pressure sores. A key principle at the core of both the patient safety and quality improvement programmes has been the involvement of frontline staff and patients in their design and development. I am sure that the Secretary of State or Health Ministers would be made very welcome by me and my colleagues in the Scottish Government should they wish to visit Scotland to see the programmes in action.

Several clauses of the Bill apply to the devolved nations, but although some relate to traditionally reserved issues such as professional regulation, others are less clear. There is growing concern in Scotland and Wales about how this Government are using the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 to undermine devolution and about how the data-gathering or procurement aspects of the Bill might be widened to apply to our health services.

In 2015, NHS England’s five year forward view highlighted the critical dependence of the NHS on a well-functioning and resilient social care sector. That is still the gaping hole in this legislation. With the funding gap in England now between £8 billion and £10 billion a year, a failure to properly fund social care will undermine the whole integration agenda, as providers are unlikely to be willing to share financial risk with a woefully underfunded service.

Not only has the pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of the social care sector, particularly care homes, but it has brought home the important role played by care staff. The Feeley review for the Scottish Government proposes the development of caring as a profession and

proposes taking a human rights approach to social care, valuing it as enabling participation in society rather than looking on care support always as a burden. At the 2019 election, the Prime Minister boasted that he had a fully prepared social care plan, but it has yet to see the light of day. It is hard to see how any integration agenda will succeed without it.

Lord Stevens’s plan stressed the importance of preventive public health to reduce the burden on the NHS, but public health budgets in England have been slashed over the past five years. While policies on tackling obesity are welcome, they are quite narrow and there is little recognition of the role that food poverty plays. Healthy foods are often more expensive. Indeed, poverty is the biggest single driver of ill health. With another decade of Tory austerity due to begin with the cuts to universal credit in September, there is little chance of improving health and wellbeing, particularly among the most disadvantaged.

Wellbeing is not about healthcare, and it is more than just an absence of physical or mental illness. Developing a wellbeing economy would require a total change in philosophy from this Government—and there is little sign that they are interested in taking up the challenge.

5.2 pm

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): I want to make three quick points in my short contribution today.

The NHS is a great institution because it has wonderful, dedicated and selfless people working in it. That was recognised by the Department in the people plan, on which clause 33 builds. I had wanted to make other comments about the workforce but, frankly, they have made more ably by my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt). I support exactly what he said. I encourage the Minister to listen to his comments about the need for a long-term plan and perhaps for the duty to be shortened in time, as well as about Health Education England. All my right hon. Friend’s comments were admirably sensible, as we have come to expect.

I welcome the new powers of direction, and I want to counter some of the criticism in the House about them. The newly merged NHS England and NHS Improvement have a range of new functions. Despite what the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), said, it is clear that the powers of direction will apply only if they are in the public interest and if they relate to the functions. Given the new scope and scale of those functions, it seems right that accountability—and possibilities for the accountability needed in the future—be put in place.

Likewise, I encourage the Secretary of State not to listen to criticisms of political expediency and political interference with respect to reconfiguration. All too often, it is not political expediency but political acrimony that trumps political need. All too often, reconfiguration that would benefit our constituents and the health of this nation is held up. Far from meaning that every bedpan in the NHS will be looked at, reconfiguration is a sensible move. Quite rightly, the reconsideration will still be done by the Independent Reconfiguration Panel, and it is right that if the Secretary of State has the chance to look at those reconfigurations earlier, it should too. I strongly encourage my right hon. Friend to ignore the criticism and to proceed with that power.

My third point is on the prevention aspect of the Bill, which I warmly welcome. Obesity is a UK-wide health crisis. More than 60% of adults in the United Kingdom are above a healthy weight. Some of the measures may well be discussed in Committee, and there may well be some changes in Committee, but the thrust of the measures is correct. We in this country need to recognise that health outcomes and inequalities are affected by not tackling prevention. The Bill starts that; I warmly welcome it, and I will be happy to support it.

5.5 pm

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab) [V]: I find it very worrying that the Government are choosing to reorganise the NHS during the third wave of the pandemic—a time of exhausted staff and huge pressure. The health service has been stretched to its absolute limits and the road back will be long and difficult. The NHS is scrambling to catch up, yet amid the chaos, the Government want to completely restructure it. Although I support the integration of healthcare and social care, that is not what the proposed integrated care boards and partnerships will achieve.

I am especially concerned that the Bill removes the duty to provide secondary care services, permits the deregulation of all health professions and encourages hospitals to discharge patients prematurely without the assessment of their care needs. In some areas, commissioning responsibilities are up for grabs or even promised to local authorities, which believe they can just use them without the benefit of NHS commissioning experience. There is no doubt that patients and staff will suffer amid the organisational chaos.

I am delighted that this appears to be the end of the disastrous competition of the Lansley Bill, but I doubt we can trust that the end of tendering will mean the end of privatisation. It could actually give rise to privatisation that is unregulated by the tendering process. The private contracts awarded in my constituency have been nothing short of a disaster. To be told that the culprit can have a voice in future decision making is simply unacceptable. How can we allow self-interested, profit-motivated company stakeholders to influence decisions that are supposed to be made with one person in mind—the patient? Remember, it is all about the patient.

I am very concerned about boundaries and the democratic deficit that they will throw up in my constituency. Primary care will be in the Lancashire integrated care system, while acute services will be in the Cheshire-Mersey ICS. My constituents will not be at the table at any point when their hospital services are discussed, as they are not in the Cheshire-Mersey footprint, although their hospitals are—so much for the primacy of place that everybody talks about.

This is a disaster waiting to happen. Many MPs voted for the Lansley Bill with deep and great misgivings. They were right then—the Bill is testimony to that. I implore them not to make the same mistake now.

5.8 pm

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): Health Bills, rightly, do not come around too often, so when they do there needs to be good reason. My conclusion, from the necessary establishment of integrated care systems to the so-called triple aim, the removal of the competition aspect and the new power of direction, is that there is good reason for legislation at this time. This is obviously

a vast Bill, but because Health Bills do not come around very often, it is understandable that colleagues and officials will use the opportunity to give legislative cover to things that they have been working on for a long time. The Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch is a very welcome example of that.

I want to focus on workforce and then on primary care, and in doing so I refer the House to my entries in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. On workforce, I remember publishing the cancer strategy in 2018. The issue then was not our ambition but having the cancer workforce to meet it. Obviously, the chances of surviving cancer have improved significantly in recent years. There are many reasons for that, but detecting 75% of cancers at stage 1 or early stage, which must happen, needs the radiographers in post and demands an endoscopy workforce that can properly execute the FIT screening for the bowel cancer programme, as one example.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent point about the necessary workforce in the NHS. Does he agree that if we were perhaps to offer indefinite leave to remain to the many thousands of frontline NHS workers in all departments who are here on visas and have worked hard through this pandemic, we would help to fill the gap that so desperately needs closing?

Steve Brine: The hon. Lady makes a sensible point. There is obviously a process in place whereby that can happen, but if she is asking whether I agree with a liberal immigration policy to help our health service, then absolutely, yes I do. Addressing the cancer workforce and the wider NHS staffing picture is not an omission from the Bill—we cannot legislate staff shortages out of existence—but if we do not address that issue and face up to our long-term structural gaps, many of the reforms around tackling the backlog and building back better will not amount to a row of beans.

Jeremy Hunt: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the extraordinary work he did when he was a Minister on early diagnosis of cancer. Is he aware that the Health and Social Care Committee has just opened an inquiry—we had our opening session yesterday—into that issue, and into how we can get the right workforce in place to deal with those important matters?

Steve Brine: I was aware of that, and I am pleased to hear it. The Select Committee will soon have Cally Palmer before it—she is the national cancer director and one of the best in the business—and I look forward to following what she says. In advance of the comprehensive spending review, the Bill should include a requirement on the Government to publish modelling of the future supply of the entire healthcare workforce.

On primary care, I welcome the formal creation of integrated care systems, but we need them to realise their potential, and to do so fast. If they are going to work, general practice needs to embrace the wider primary care family, which means finally to recognise the potential of community pharmacy, ophthalmology and dental services as vehicles of prevention as much as of treatment.

Finally, if we move upstream of the Bill, what we do must be about prevention. We hear talk this weekend of a waiting list touching 13 million people. Let us tackle

[*Steve Brine*]

that for sure, but let us also get behind the food and drink clauses in part 5, and think about the future and our children as much as about the present. Several years ago I was fortunate to write up the high fat, sugar and/or salt proposals as part of chapter 2 of the child obesity plan, and I am pleased that the 9 pm watershed is legislated for in the Bill. I pay tribute to Jamie Oliver and his Bite Back 2030 campaign, and the young people involved with that, as well as to Cancer Research UK for its support. I realise that not everyone on these Benches, or perhaps outside, supports that move, and I agree that it will have little impact if that is its grand sum. Ministers need to take the tackling obesity strategy that was published last year, implement it all, and then go again.

I welcome the clauses on the fluoridation of water supplies. Let us stop debating whether we do that and—to borrow a phrase—follow the science.

In conclusion, the Bill is worthy of support on Second Reading. There will be an awful lot of work to do in Committee and the other place, but I will certainly support it this evening.

5.13 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Our NHS is built on the values that Britain holds dear: each of us is equal, and we will be treated on the basis of our need, never on our ability to pay. It is part of our national heritage, so much so that even the Tories have to pretend that they believe in its founding principles. Those are principles of fairness for all: from each according to their means, to each according to their needs. Those are the values that led to the creation of the Labour party over a century ago. If the Tories hold those values so dear, why have they failed to apply them everywhere else?

This is the Tory Government who left children without food during the school holidays, and who are failing to pay for children to catch up with their education. They are cutting £20 from universal credit for the poorest households in the country. Why did we have 11 years of austerity, when billions were taken from public services, hitting the poorest communities hardest? There was no sign of levelling up there.

In the past 40 years our NHS has come under threat on two occasions: first during the Thatcher years when it was starved of resources to breaking point, and again from 2010 with the Tory austerity years and the Lansley Health and Social Care Act 2012. Now the Tories are at it again. Integrated care systems are nothing short of capitulation to the forces of the market.

This Bill will give the private sector the freedom not only to plan services but to do so in their commercial interests above those of patients and to cover their tracks by hiding the records of meetings where they have intervened. For too long, there have been those within the NHS who believe that it can only be improved if it is exposed to the rigours of the marketplace. The rigours of the NHS are saving lives and healing patients. There is no higher market test for the skills and dedication of health workers and none is needed. Where the private sector is used, it should be to support NHS services, not replace them.

Nye Bevan said:

“The NHS will last as long as there’s folk with faith left to fight for it.”

The Labour party breathed life into the NHS. This Bill is one of those occasions where we have to fight for the NHS again, and the Labour party will lead that fight.

5.15 pm

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): I was almost three when I was lying in a hospital bed and my parents were told that I only had two hours to live and they should start preparing for the worst. It was the brilliant doctors and nurses of the NHS who saved my life. The paediatric surgeon who saved my life still refers to me as his miracle.

Only five weeks ago, I became a father for the first time. Thank God for the amazing doctors and midwives at Warwick Hospital, who displayed the highest degree of professionalism. While I do not want to say that they made the journey as painless as possible, mainly because I was not the one giving birth, they certainly made it a little bit easier. I want to thank the midwives, Sharon Lester, Gemma Fletcher and Nadine Morley, and the doctors, Samir Sadanandappa and Giles Coverdale, for all that they did.

I am a believer in the NHS. I am grateful for it. I want to do everything I can to preserve its status as one of the foremost healthcare services in the world. To do this, we must not shy away from reform. We cannot stop in the journey to make the NHS better, fixing what is broken, revolutionising old practices and evolving into a healthcare system that continues to be free at the point of access but delivers world-leading healthcare.

In this Bill, I am particularly supportive of the integrated care systems approach and putting ICSs on a statutory footing. In Birmingham and Solihull we have an ICS on a non-statutory footing. In my experience, while clinical commissioning groups do many good things, when they do not, there is no clear line of accountability. I believe that the Bill will fix that. When I have not been happy with the CCG, I have found myself getting lost in an opaque quagmire of the passing on of responsibility and lack of accountability, and ultimately it is my constituents who suffer. I am therefore pleased with the ICSs’ place in the Bill, with clear lines of communication straight to the top and putting patients at the heart of everything we do, as we will then have a more tailored and better healthcare service.

In particular, I am keen for us to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach. What works for the urban part of my constituency does not necessarily work for the rural parts. Will the Minister consider what ICSs can do to provide a much more adaptable approach to different communities and different patient needs?

I am concerned about the impact of the past 16 months on the mental health of our population. One charity I spoke to this week said that one in four people will suffer from a diagnosable mental health problem in the next 12 months. I have spoken to a number of charities that have equally great concern about the situation that we are facing. I would like to hear a bit more from the Minister on what the Bill does in terms of improving mental healthcare provision and hopefully get some clarity on that.

I believe that this Bill will improve the NHS. I am optimistic for its future and for the healthcare of this country, as long as we put patients at the heart of everything we do.

5.18 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Meriden (Saqib Bhatti) and to congratulate him on the birth of his child.

First, I am going to vote against giving this Bill a Second Reading. I cannot believe that the Government are going ahead with the Bill at this time. It is irresponsible and without any consideration to those who have worked to save our lives and continue to save our lives. The Secretary of State is going to have to assert himself, because he is only just in the job and he seems to have been bounced into this legislation.

Why is this happening now? We have been through this before. I was on the Health Committee from 2010 to 2015. The right hon. Stephen Dorrell was its Chair. On a cross-party basis, we heard evidence that the Bill introduced in 2012 was not the best solution for the NHS. We managed to pause the Bill but the Government continued to press ahead.

Integrated care is Labour party policy. We have seen it. We visited Torbay, where the fictitious Mrs Smith had a single point of entry and everyone was able to track her all the way through the system—through hospital and out—for all her needs. But the 2012 Act stopped that. It stopped the pooling of resources. Integrated care can work only if there are adequate resources for local authorities. Austerity measures since 2010 have starved local authorities and other public services of funding. That is what is making people angry. But the governance of the integrated care system has no clinicians and no patients. People who use it or work in it do not get a say. All sorts of other people can be added on.

My second point is that we do not trust the Government on contracts. Look what happened during the pandemic: £347 million to Randox, the Tory-linked private healthcare company whose testing kits had to be recalled over the summer because of concerns about contamination. We warned them about section 75 and opening this out to tender. The transaction costs associated with that drain the NHS of resources. There is fragmentation and destabilisation. Just ending section 75 is not sufficient; the NHS must become the first and the default option, and private providers cannot be involved in the ICS or in commissioning decisions. We cannot have a select group of fast-tracked friends.

My third point is about the workforce and it has already been raised. They have been magnificent. They have already had a slap in the face with a 1% pay rise and now they are facing further reorganisation. Workforce planning is key to a smart organisation. Clause 33 says who is responsible, but not what must be delivered. Instead of reporting once every five years, how about laying that before Parliament every year? The modelling will have to be done on the workforce assessment, so why can it not be made transparent and available? As the British Medical Association said, we need independently verified projections of future workforce supply so that local and regional decisions can be made on safe staffing levels. That phrase is not even in the Bill, post Francis.

The Secretary of State should think again, as this is the wrong time. The graphs are going up. The BMA and the royal colleges are against this Bill. The main point about healthcare—the right to healthcare—has not been enshrined in the Bill. It must be stopped now, and people and patients should be put first.

5.22 pm

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): May I thank Neil from Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, Buckinghamshire County Council, the local Bucks clinical commissioning group, local GP surgeries, REACH care homes and care workers across South Buckinghamshire, Thames Hospice and Jayne from the Care Campaign for the Vulnerable? They are all already modelling integrated care, which is promised and promoted through this Bill, and I just want to thank them for their tireless service.

I also need to declare an interest: I am now a carer for a very disabled relative, who became disabled through the pandemic and now requires 24-hour care. So I am fully aware of how broken the care pathways are. I want to speak on behalf of disabled adults and their access to care, and the carers who struggle with the demands of finding ways of advocating for their loved one in the current system. I welcome any changes to integrated care because of that. I want to share examples from my personal experience, not because it is important; it just chimes with what I keep hearing from patient advocacy groups, Age Concern, Mencap and other charities. The problem we see is: when a patient is discharged from hospital, who then takes up the duty of care? I have countless examples of my relative being discharged with open bleeding wounds or bed sores, of waiting four days for a nurse to come to attend to them, of being given the wrong medication, of being unable to access—

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I just wanted to give the hon. Lady a bit more time. Does she agree that we would want to see more in this Bill on how social care is going to be accounted for? Currently, I feel that is lacking.

Joy Morrissey: I thank the hon. Lady for the point she has raised. I have had reassurances from the Minister that we are going to address the social care issues, but I agree that we need parity of esteem between health and adult social care. We need to see those who are delivering those care pathways—local authorities—given the parity of esteem that the NHS and other care providers now have. I hope that we will look at this further as the Bill progresses.

Parity of esteem is very important because there is a difficulty with collaboration and co-ordination of care, and it is the major driver of health inequality and avoidable deaths for people with learning disabilities. Many people with learning disabilities have very complex health needs that require healthcare professionals to collaborate and to co-ordinate interventions. On top of that, healthcare staff need to work together to deliver the healthcare that those vulnerable patients need, which requires effective communication and understanding, as well as resource. How those funding streams are co-ordinated and improved in future is something that should be looked at.

I have seen at first hand, particularly with stroke victims who leave hospital with varying levels of cognitive and physical impairment, the need for critical rehabilitation services to be co-ordinated and put in place the moment people leave hospital, but that is often difficult. Many Members have raised the issue of workforce capability—I echo that. We need to look at how we can work together collaboratively to put patients first and deliver the vital

[Joy Morrissey]

services that many disabled adults need. We have an ageing population, and we face a crisis in adult social care that will eclipse all other things in healthcare. If we work to deliver solutions now—I welcome what is in the Bill—to the hard problems that we face in integrated social care, we can find the solutions that we need for the future.

5.26 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab) [V]: With the climate crisis and the reality of an ageing population, there has never been a better time for the Government to centre the wellbeing of people and planet and the way in which public services and the economy are run. Sadly but unsurprisingly, the Bill fails in this context, so I will vote against it, because it does not fundamentally deal with the very real issues facing our healthcare system. It does not address the desert of NHS England providing oral and dental healthcare, which has made it impossible for my constituents to get an appointment. It does not guarantee fair pay and conditions for the key workers who have seen us through the pandemic, and it does not deal with the scandalous state of mental healthcare. Patients in my constituency are in crisis, are discharged too early, or not admitted at all, while for a decade, Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust has failed to end the practice of sending patients out of area.

What the Bill does do is transfer yet more centralised power to the Executive—rightly described as a power grab by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth)—and, of course, to the private sector. Clause 13, which provides for the establishment of integrated care boards, opens the door to private companies having a say in where funding is allocated and what services are delivered. Clause 3 gives greater political control to the Secretary of State over the NHS England mandate without creating a duty to provide universal, comprehensive and free healthcare to all. Clause 38 empowers the Secretary of State to intervene in the reconfiguration of services, opening the door for politicised interference and gridlocks on decision making.

Where is the democracy, accountability and transparency in the Bill? How will the right of my constituents to healthcare be guaranteed over and above the interests of private companies and the political whims of the Secretary of State? To see what happens when private companies have any role in delivering care, we need only look at the social care crisis. In England, 84% of care home beds are managed by private companies, and three of the five largest care home companies are owned by investment firms whose main priority is economic rent seeking, not the long-term care of our elderly. That model has, unbelievably, led to a cut in the number of care home beds, despite an ageing population, meaning that demand is only growing.

I therefore urge the House to vote against this legislation on what remains of NHS England. It extends the same failed ideology that puts profit before people and which has driven our planet and public services to breakdown.

5.29 pm

Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Ind): Today's Bill will help our healthcare system to become more accountable and less bureaucratic, allowing our brilliant healthcare professionals to focus on their job of providing world-renowned care

to patients, rather than filling in unnecessary paperwork. It allows our healthcare system to be flexible, adapting to meet future and local needs.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Saqib Bhatti) said earlier, a one-size-fits-all approach is rarely the most effective, and today's Bill will mean local areas can develop practices that best suit their needs.

Jess Phillips: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rob Roberts: No.

This is something we are acutely aware of in Delyn, as we have a much higher proportion of over-65s than the national average. Sadly, the Welsh Government's funding to the north Wales health board is significantly lower per capita than that enjoyed by the health board in south-east Wales, but that is a debate for another time and place.

Jess Phillips: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rob Roberts: No.

Sadly, one of the major elements of today's Bill that should be praised falls a little short for my constituents in Wales. The Bill will lead to greater collaboration and integration between the NHS, local authorities and care providers in England, and ultimately this will deliver more joined-up working and the best outcomes for patients, yet this move towards greater collaboration needs to go further. We need to see collaboration in healthcare across all the constituent parts of the United Kingdom.

The NHS is not limited to one part of our country; it is nationwide. When someone is treated in their local hospital, they are treated by the NHS—not NHS England, or NHS Wales but the national health service. People do not see that there should be a difference and, frankly, they do not care.

Just as we should be united in our response to covid-19, it is now time for our healthcare system to work together across borders for the good of all UK residents. Despite holidaying within the same country, as so many people are doing this year, if a constituent from Delyn holidays in Cornwall and needs NHS treatment, their medical records will not be on file and will be difficult to access. Without immediate access to those medical records, I cannot help but worry that it could affect the outcome and care they receive, demonstrating the need to share records between all four nations. This issue is one of many that could be resolved through greater collaboration between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations on healthcare, just as we saw with the fantastic vaccine roll-out.

I urge the Government to remember that they are the Government of the whole United Kingdom, which should come with an overarching responsibility to care for and look after all their UK citizens, regardless of the nation in which they reside. As this Bill progresses through the House, I hope the Government draw on the lessons they learned from working together on the covid-19 vaccine programme to consider how greater collaboration in healthcare can be achieved between all four constituent parts of the UK to tackle the public health issues that we collectively face.

5.32 pm

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): I previously had a role within the NHS, and I have family members who work in the NHS, of whom I am very proud.

Nine years ago the Conservative party passed the Lansley reforms, and for nine years the NHS has suffered the consequences of that disaster. We have seen creeping privatisation, fragmentation of services and a lack of adequate funding. For patients that has meant disjointed care and soaring waiting lists, made worse by covid. For healthcare professionals, it has meant the NHS is no longer a hospitable place to work.

Before the pandemic, the national health service had a vacancy rate of 8%, which is 100,000 vacancies. I know from discussions with a variety of professional bodies and unions that there are significant skill shortages that will only get worse. Last year, a survey by the BMA found that 45% of doctors across the UK experience depression, anxiety, stress, burnout and other mental health conditions. How is it right that our NHS professionals are so over-represented among those experiencing mental health problems?

The Royal College of Nursing has found that 36% of nurses are thinking of leaving the profession, and YouGov reports that a quarter of NHS workers are more likely to quit their job than they were a year ago, due to low pay and understaffing. While Ministers have clapped for carers on their doorsteps, many of my constituents who have worked in the NHS rightly say that they do not want platitudes. They want to be heard. They want a proper pay rise and an end to top-down reforms that do nothing to address the real needs and their real concerns.

For them, this Bill is more of the same, but it is also an indictment of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. It is the Government admitting that they have failed. Rather than learning the lessons, they have doubled down on the failures. There is nothing on waiting lists, nothing on vacancies and, despite the Prime Minister's promise of a plan for social care, nothing on fixing the system that the pandemic has shown is not fit for purpose.

Rather than reinstating the duty on the Secretary of State to provide a comprehensive health service, reversing the privatisation of the NHS or reinstating the NHS as the default provider, the Bill allows private providers to sit on the boards that decide how NHS money is spent. It is astounding, but not surprising. After nine years of failure and after a year of handing millions of pounds to Tory cronies for useless PPE and a failed privatised test, trace and track system, the Government are now proposing to increase the influence of private companies in the health service. Unfortunately, on all these issues the Bill has nothing good to say, and even worse, it says all the wrong things.

5.35 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): In opening this debate, the Secretary of State said that the Bill would improve patient safety. One area in which it does not do that is the area of cosmetic surgery. In April 2013, the Government commissioned Sir Bruce Keogh to do a review of this industry following the PIP—Poly Implant Prothèse—implants scandal. He came forward with some very sensible and clear recommendations to improve safety in the cosmetic surgery industry and to make sure that patients were protected. The review highlighted the fact that those buying a ballpoint pen have more protection than people having non-surgical procedures in this sector. These recommendations have sat on the shelf in the Department of Health since then. I have asked numerous

times when they are going to be implemented, only to be told tomorrow, but tomorrow never seems to come.

We did see some change with the private Member's Bill of the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott)—the Botulinum Toxin and Cosmetic Fillers (Children) Act 2021—which, for example, limited botox for under-18s, but this business is a wild west when it comes to regulation. There is a missed opportunity in this Bill not only to get proper patient safety, but to implement Sir Bruce Keogh's recommendations, which the Government say they support but somehow do not want to implement. This is a multibillion-pound industry, and patients are being put at risk. It is mainly women who, in this sector, need protection. I hope that the Government will implement the Keogh recommendations in this Bill, and I put the Minister on warning now that I will be tabling amendments for that. This is important, and I do not yet understand the reason why the Government are not doing it, because the royal colleges support this and a large number of Members of Parliament have backed these reforms. They do need to be implemented, and we are missing an opportunity to do so.

May I touch on one last thing about public health? I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) that public health, strangely enough, has been forgotten about in this crisis. If we had actually concentrated on putting the main focus on public health and supporting directors, I think we would have had a better outcome. This is not just about this Bill forgetting about public health; it is about the money that goes with it. Under the fair funding formula being touted last year, County Durham would have lost £19 million in public health funding, while Surrey would actually have increased its budget by £14 million a year. That cannot be right. Public health now needs to be at the centre of our healthcare locally, and the Government have to ensure not just that it gets a voice in this Bill, but that local directors of public health get the finance and support they desperately need.

5.38 pm

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): In the short time I have to speak, I would like to comment generally on the Bill and specifically on one part of it. This is a Second Reading debate, and I see much merit in many of the provisions of this Bill, and the general thrust and direction of it. I understand much of the thinking behind it, as it is a real opportunity to improve the overall performance of our health service, remove some of the unnecessary bureaucracy that has grown up around it and rationalise some of the geography through the ICSs—a very relevant issue to Cumbria—as well as to improve the decision-making process through the boards and encourage collaboration within the health service, although we must still be open and transparent. These are all very welcome changes that have broad support, including from the health professionals in my community with whom I have already had discussions. This will be on top of the additional financial commitment to the health service that this Government have already made, and of the commitment to more doctors and nurses, all of which is very welcome.

I would, however, like to focus on an area of the Bill where I have some concerns. Clause 125 and schedule 16 relate to advertising, and they have the potential to adversely affect our food and drink sector. I remind the

[John Stevenson]

Minister that that is the largest manufacturing sector in the country. It employs a significant number of people up and down the country, it makes a huge contribution to our economy and our exports and—this is a key point—it is an innovative sector with considerable research and development and investment. It has already done a huge amount of reformulation to take sugar and salt out of our foods and it continues to do much on this.

I fully appreciate that obesity is a major concern for our society, and rightly so. Everybody wants the UK to be a fit and healthy country, but we have to tackle this issue in a sensible and proportionate manner. I am not convinced that schedule 16 in its present form will achieve very much. What it will do is reduce investment, resulting in fewer products coming to the market, including fewer healthy products—and those are what we want to see those. There would be less incentive to innovate and ultimately fewer jobs and less money in our economy, and all for very little gain in many respects. Also, as an aside, we need to remember that our own health and wellbeing are our own responsibility. I shall therefore be supporting the Second Reading of the Bill today, but in Committee and on Report, I and I am sure other hon. Members will seek amendments to schedule 16. That is so we get the right balance between our health agenda, the food sector and our individual freedoms and responsibilities.

5.41 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I would like to make it clear that the Liberal Democrats have long supported the aim of integration between health and social care, and the far greater involvement of local authorities in the planning, commissioning and delivery of services. We recognise that the pandemic has forced many of these bodies to work closely together in a much more collaborative way, and that is welcome. However, the Bill pays lip service to social care. It is largely a Bill about NHS reform, with yet another acronym-laden reorganisation that seeks to provide the legislative basis to integrate NHS services, currently in crisis mode, with a broken, underfunded and fragmented social care system. It is a massive power grab by the Secretary of State for political interference in operational and local service reconfiguration decisions and in who runs integrated care boards. The Bill is woefully inadequate in ensuring that the plans and resources are in place to ensure that we have sufficient doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals and carers to deliver care, both now and in the future. This is all against a backdrop of record waiting lists and staff who are burnt out, stressed and struggling to cope with the third wave of the pandemic while dealing with surging A&E visitors and tackling the enormous backlog of care.

Without meaningful social care reform, this Bill cannot realise its aim of providing citizens with better joined-up care. With over 100,000 vacancies in the workforce, 1.5 million people are currently missing out on the care they need, putting additional burdens on the NHS and, importantly, on 9 million unpaid carers. The Government have promised—at the moment I take them at their word, though they have broken it many times—that they will bring forward social care reforms later this year. So why not delay the Bill for a few months and take account of the new model of social care, rather than doing a half-baked job now?

It really beggars belief when we look back over the past 16 months of the pandemic that the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), who was the architect of the proposals, seriously thought that granting himself more powers over the day-to-day running of the NHS was a good idea. We only need to look at the PPE fiasco and the failures of test and trace, both of which were run centrally, to see that handing back power to the Secretary of State is the very opposite of what we need. Allowing him or her to meddle in the day-to-day running of our NHS seems to fly in the face of the desire for more local and regional decision making.

I fully support and endorse the proposals of the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt) on the health and care workforce independent planning proposals. They need to be properly resourced and annually reported to Parliament. Without a workforce plan, without wholesale reform of social care and while waiting lists are skyrocketing and the Health Secretary is embarking on a power grab that is his predecessor's vanity project, this Bill will fail in its fundamental aim, shared by most Members of this House and health and care leaders—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. The hon. Lady's time has run out.

5.44 pm

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I declare my interest and my family's interests in healthcare service.

I welcome the Bill. Those concerned about it should realise that it is an evolution, not a revolution, coming from the ground up. Do not take it from me; take it from the evidence to the Health and Social Care Committee from Simon Stevens, who said:

"We have been working so closely for a number of years with colleagues across the health service and our broader partners. Genuinely, I think this is unusual, if not unique, in having come from the NHS as a series of asks to Parliament rather than something that Parliament is perhaps imposing on the NHS."

That is the leader of the NHS.

Three minutes is a very short time to try to pull this Bill apart, so I am going to use my time to set out some amendments and new ideas that I would like the Minister to consider. Some are practical, some are short and some are much bigger. The first is simple: annual virus drills for care homes. We have fire drills regularly, but, given the pandemic, care homes may well benefit from being further prepared for future pandemics.

I would like mental wellbeing to be seen as a public health issue. Everyone suffers with their mental wellbeing; not everyone has mental ill health, and this House often gets confused between the two. That is really important, because until we label mental wellbeing as such, it becomes very hard to implement education and protective policies. Many Members will know that my particular interest is body image—the labelling of altered images, just as we label calories on food, so that we have parity between physical health and mental health.

My final idea—this is probably the most revolutionary piece I would like to put across—is to have a named person for change on the frontline. We have named bodies for whistleblowers, and we have protected people who are guardians for data, but fundamentally, change has to come from the bottom. All too often in my career, I was told, "You're too junior" or "This is the

way we've always done it." We want to empower the people on the frontline who understand how the system works to make changes, and I think there is a chance to amend the Bill to do exactly that. I am happy to meet the Minister to explain further.

As I have a little more time, I am keen to comment on the reduction of bureaucracy. It is all very well making sure that there is not a problem when we are commissioning, but fundamentally, we need to look at the admin on the health service side—the barriers between primary care and secondary care. About 5% to 10% of a GP's workload is dealing with chasing admin. That is not time well spent; it takes services away from the clinical frontline, and it is something that could be remedied, possibly even without legislation.

5.47 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab) [V]: We all know that the last top-down reorganisation of the health service was a disaster for our people and those who work in it, so I was quite excited to hear of the plans to sort it out. I must have been mad. Instead of bringing forward a Bill to deal with their own mess and sort out the health crisis they have created, the Government have introduced a hotchpotch, which will do neither and could make it worse.

The Prime Minister's response to decades of regional inequality and underfunding of communities such as mine is pathetic. It seems that, instead of introducing robust proposals to reskill our people, invest in our services and tackle their homemade crisis in the NHS, the Government are telling us that an increase in al fresco dining and an extension to the service of takeaway pints are the answers. That sort of trite nonsense is downright insulting to people who live in constituencies such as mine.

People in Stockton North live shorter, less healthy lives than others in more affluent areas by virtue of geography alone. As Cancer Research UK has said:

"If the UK is to tackle inequalities and make sure no community is left behind... then health must be hardwired into the Government's 'levelling up' agenda."

If the Government are serious about levelling up for communities such as mine, they will have to take meaningful action to tackle the health inequalities that plague them.

In Stockton North, 7.4% of the population suffer from asthma, higher than the 6.5% who suffer across England. In England, the level of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease among the population is 1.9%; that rises to 3.1% in my constituency. There are other inequalities, too, and we need action now. Will the new Secretary of State come good where others have failed and provide Stockton with the new hospital it desperately needs?

Some 13.2% of adults in Stockton-on-Tees are smokers, and smoking-attributable hospital admissions and deaths are increasing, yet Government action to reduce smoking has generally stagnated. Measures in the Bill to tackle obesity are welcome, but smoking is the leading cause of preventable premature death, and yet there are no proposals to tackle it. The Bill represents an ideal opportunity to introduce a US-style "polluter pays" levy with tobacco control, as recommended by the all-party group on smoking and health, and which the Government promised to consider two years ago in their prevention Green Paper. The all-party group—I declare my interest as the vice-chair—has provided a model for this approach, and I am grateful to Action on

Smoking and Health and others for their work. The all-party group published a comprehensive set of recommendations that would help the Government to achieve their ambition of a smoke-free 2030, including further regulatory measures to de-normalise smoking, but nothing has happened.

Cancer Research UK has estimated that, on current trends, we will not make England smoke free until at least 2037, and it will be longer for poorer communities. We need action now. The Government say that we need bold action; they should take it now. That is one step towards tackling inequalities that blight our country.

5.50 pm

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con): In the past, successful reorganisations have been centred on patient care. We have seen that with cardio and we have seen that with cancer. The reason why this will be successful now is that the aspect of patient care that will improve, including the outcomes for patients, will be around accountability. There are three ways in which the Bill does that quite successfully, but there are also ways in which it could do more.

First, on the involvement of the Care Quality Commission, having the CQC inspect social care services will be crucial for increasing visibility and transparency in terms of the outcomes for patients. The criteria that the CQC uses when inspecting social care and focusing on patient outcomes will make a difference in terms of the quality of care that patients will get—that is also true for integrated care systems as well. We need to make sure that these services are not measured on bureaucratic targets, but on what they are actually doing for patients.

As a side note, let me say that we have talked a lot about GP surgeries today. The CQC, as we all know, inspects GP surgeries. There is a question as to whether these surgeries are doing enough, especially at the moment, when it comes to the outcomes for patients. I have a lot of very good GP surgeries locally, but the levers by which we as Members of Parliament can get them to improve the quality of services are somewhat lacking in many cases and this is something that could be looked at as part of that admirable proposal to increase the involvement of the CQC as part of the Bill.

The second area I want to touch on is to do with the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch. We have seen through the Health and Social Care Committee how important it has been in terms of changing the culture within the NHS. What we have also seen, though, is the number of times that the recommendations have not necessarily been followed through. More focus on that within HSIB and a mechanism by which the Department of Health and Social Care can be mandated to follow through on the outcomes could really add to the accountability part of the Bill.

The final point is around the somewhat thorny issue of political control. I happen to think that my constituents have a right to be involved in decisions that are made by the health service on their behalf that are not clinically based. It is absolutely right that we have a health service that has to explain to my constituents why it wants to do a reorganisation in the area. If my constituents do not agree with it, I should have a mechanism by which I can go to the Secretary of State and say, "Do you know what? I do not agree with what you are doing here. This is not right for my constituents."

[Laura Trott]

I understand the arguments that are being made today, but the fundamental point about accountability is the one that will really shape the future of our health service. It is a very positive thing, and the mechanisms in the Bill will have a positive effect on the outcome of patients within my constituency and nationwide.

5.53 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): During the pandemic, NHS staff, care workers and public health teams have all gone the extra mile, as they always do, in protecting and caring for people. Health professionals have been ably assisted by a number of former colleagues who had retired and by an army of volunteers, and I thank them all.

In government, Labour increased NHS funding by more than 9% a year. Let us compare that with the just 2.5% from the Conservatives before the pandemic, or the £8 billion cut from council social care budgets since 2010. In the Liverpool city region, 50,000 patients are waiting to start routine treatment at Aintree University Hospital alone, of whom a third have waited more than 18 months. Meanwhile, many people find it difficult to get an appointment at their local GP surgery. New facilities, including a new health centre in Maghull in my constituency, would help there.

Alongside dealing with the immediate challenges of the pandemic, Labour's priorities involve addressing the problems caused by those Conservative cuts which predate the crisis: waiting lists, staff recruitment, social care funding, and yes, the need to give our staff a pay rise. After all, who will look after patients if we do not value our staff? Sadly, the Conservatives have rather different priorities. The pandemic has seen companies without a track record—companies that happened to know the right people—making their fortunes. As the National Audit Office confirmed, companies without political contacts had only a 1% chance of succeeding, while £10 million was handed out in contracts without competition. Then there is Serco Test and Trace: delays in returning test results, dependence on £1,000-a-day consultants, and unused call centre capacity.

All that waste and inefficiency prompts us to ask why Ministers were so committed to outsourcing. The Bill offers some answers. Private companies on new health boards and the centralisation of power point to a potential consolidation of the cronyism and privatisation that have characterised the Conservatives' approach to the covid crisis. Every day that frontline NHS staff are forced to spend on top-down reorganisation is a day less to tackle waiting lists, address the challenges in social care, and cope with covid. Meanwhile, the reorganisation will take money away from local services, where it is most needed. A prime example is the cut of £253 per patient from Knowsley as a result of the Bill. One of the poorest boroughs in the country will face poorer health outcomes.

That is the reality of this Bill. How can it possibly be right?

5.56 pm

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): I welcome the Bill, particularly its intention to better integrate health and social care in England. As vice-chair of the

all-party parliamentary group on obesity, I am pleased to see the introduction of restrictions on the advertising of high fat, salt and sugar products online, and on television before 9 pm. I would, however, emphasise the need for a level playing field between the two. As a member of the Health and Social Care Committee, I endorse the findings of our inquiry into the preceding White Paper, especially its comments on social care provision and workforce planning. I hope that these matters can be addressed as the Bill, and indeed the year, progresses.

The Bill also provides the opportunity to address some of the disparities in healthcare provision across the United Kingdom. Further to my constructive engagement with colleagues at the Department, I hope that the Minister for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), will consider four key proposals.

First, we should mandate the collection of an agreed set of UK-wide directly comparable data on NHS performance and outcomes, for clinical and research purposes. I am already engaging with the Office for National Statistics on how that could work in practice, and believe that the Bill could have an important enabling role to play. Secondly, data interoperability must be improved. It is unacceptable that the health service in Wales often cannot communicate in a fit-for-purpose way with services in England, and vice versa. Thirdly, my direct experience of working in the NHS leads me to feel strongly that inspection, safety and audit mechanisms should be introduced at a national level to ensure a minimum standard of care for all British citizens. Those who are managing inferior services must be able to learn lessons from more effectively run areas and, ultimately, be held to account.

Finally, I hope that the Bill can be used to provide people with equal access to and choice of secondary and tertiary healthcare services across the country, regardless of where in Britain they live. My constituent Ian Kightley was diagnosed with cancer in 2015. As a result of his treatment, he developed problems with his vision and required cataract surgery in both eyes. Like so many in north Wales, when he was advised of a two-year waiting list he was forced to pay for private healthcare, which he was able to do only through fundraising. Only in the last week, while working as a GP, I saw patients who had been advised of two-year waits solely for their first out-patient clinic appointments at Glan Clwyd Hospital.

This Bill provides a vital opportunity for us to level up healthcare and ensure that all our constituents can access the best treatment as soon as possible.

5.59 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): When a Labour Government proposed a national health service after the second world war, promising free universal healthcare for all, it was a radical idea opposed by the Conservative party, which complained—I quote from an amendment tabled at the time—that it

“discourages voluntary...association...and undermines the freedom and independence of the medical profession”.

The Conservatives did not like that the NHS was centralised, public and free for all. They condemned it as Marxist and voted against it 22 times. Fundamentally, they opposed the NHS for taking healthcare out of the

market and for putting public good before private profit, but they saw its popularity and begrudgingly were forced to accept it.

Those fundamentals have not changed. This NHS corporate takeover Bill is another step away from the original truly public healthcare system, free from the corrosive influence of profit. The Conservative party still opposes that idea. Conservatives should not just take my word for it; they should take the words of their own Members. The Prime Minister, when he was a Back Bencher, slammed the NHS as “monolithic” and “monopolistic”, and called for privatisation. Four senior Cabinet members, when they were Back Benchers, wrote a manifesto in which they argued that two thirds of hospitals should be run outside of the NHS, and run privately or not for profit. We also have a new Health Secretary, who in the last year, alongside his role as a Back Bencher, has been on the books of US megabank JP Morgan. He has been making £150,000 a year from a company that—I quote from its literature—

“see the opportunities that lie ahead”

for private healthcare. The Health Secretary’s ideological hero, Ayn Rand—whose work he says he rereads every year—was an extreme right-wing libertarian philosopher, who detested socialised healthcare.

It is not just words; it is deeds too. The Government are breaking up the NHS, not all in one go, because they know that the public would not like that, but piece by piece. Privatisation by stealth—that is what they have been doing. Since coming into power in 2010, more than £96 billion has gone to non-public healthcare providers and nearly 20% of healthcare bids now go to private providers. This Bill will not reverse that. It will simply entrench it. It will put private companies on healthcare boards, giving them a say over our care and public funds. It will add steroids to the cronyism on steroids that we have seen in this pandemic, whereby Tory mates and donors have been handed billions of pounds in dodgy covid Government contracts. It will implement a healthcare model that incentivises cuts and closures, and rations funding to health boards.

This dangerous Bill is another step towards privatisation. In its place, we need to reinstate the NHS as a truly public service with a proper pay rise for its workers of 15%, making up for a decade of falling pay.

6.2 pm

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): I draw the House’s attention to my declaration in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

I want to focus on two main areas of the debate: the role of patients in accountability and transparency; and tariffs—the way in which we pay for procedures and care. I support the Bill, but I hope that we have the means to address the deep-rooted cultural issue of regarding patients’ views as less valuable than those who work in our national health service. Before I was elected, I was often involved in advocacy campaigns. Patient groups would want to challenge NHS England’s commissioning policies or service specifications. These policies govern the technologies and procedures that are used to treat conditions, but the patient groups would find the decision-making processes totally impenetrable, as would the clinicians and health policy experts advising them. What chance do individual patients and relatives have to make their voices heard?

The same impenetrability applies to clinical commissioning groups. Patient access to established procedures and technologies is blocked by local policies, but people have to be dedicated to find these policies on convoluted websites or page 178 of a 256-page document. For example, CCGs regularly restrict patient access to hip and knee procedures for patients with a body mass index of over 30. Extraordinarily, some CCGs allow procedures only for patients who have a BMI of less than 25. I would confidently predict that that would disqualify the vast majority of hon. and right hon. Members, and we should call it out for what it is, which is rationing.

Such rationing was routine before covid created massive backlogs in NHS waiting lists in some CCGs. Transparency and openness is the solution to these problems. A formal role for patients on ICS boards, a formal role for patients in the development of commissioning policies and creating a national appeals board for challenging commissioning decisions are all ideas that I hope Ministers might consider as the Bill progresses.

Finally, on tariffs, national tariffs are not perfect but they do incentivise providers to treat as many patients as they possibly can. The Bill states:

“NHS England must publish... ‘the NHS payment scheme’”—a document “containing rules for determining” the prices to be paid in future, including, for example, for hip and knee procedures. Tariffs have led to hip and knee procedures and other procedures being done at volume and at scale, certainly, at least, when commissioners agree to pay for them. High volumes of elective procedures have been a good thing and the current elective backlog is probably the biggest challenge that the NHS faces coming out of the pandemic, so whatever ends up in that document, it needs to be clear, transparent and provide incentives for high-volume procedures to be carried out at pace and at scale.

6.5 pm

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): The Government’s health strategy is clear: while health demand rises, the amount of resources being provided to the NHS is declining, which leaves well-heeled patients with nowhere else to go to avoid ill health except into the so-called independent sector. For example, a constituent told me that his opticians had said that he could wait six years for cataract operations, by which time he would be nearly blind, or he could pay for a cataract operation now in the private sector.

Even before covid, the Government had cut the health budget and spending. In Britain we were spending £2,000 per head of population less than was being spent in Germany. There were cuts to the numbers of staff and to their pay, 100,000 vacancies, 17,000 fewer hospital beds and over 100 fewer A&E facilities, with hospital waiting lists therefore doubling—even before covid arose—since the end of a Labour Government. The Bill continues all that process, as we would expect. It will make the NHS more remote because it is top-down, and it is a Trojan horse for elements of privatisation.

Newly remote administrators will have little sensitivity to local health requirements. Members should think of the differences in the health needs of former coalfield communities such as those I represent in West Yorkshire, the inner city of Bradford and the relative affluence of Harrogate, yet all that is to be covered by a single new

[Jon Trickett]

board, and the centralisation of clinical services makes them less accessible. Some 20,000 people are living in my constituency with no car to their households' name and with poor public transport, many of them with chronic health needs. How on earth will they be expected to travel to centralised services in Leeds or elsewhere under those circumstances?

There are two competing views of health provision facing each other. Either health is about an ethos of care or it is about making money. This Bill leads in one direction. The Government do not want to fund the NHS properly, so they are trying to entice more private money into health, often from sources, we note, from the Tory party. Privatisation puts one person's wealth in front of another person's health. We should look at the pages of the American health service providers today salivating at the prospect of growing NHS waiting lists, and now, so-called independent providers are to be invited to sit on boards that actually manage the NHS budgets. The idea of profiteering from someone else's ill health is repulsive to most British people, yet it is intrinsic to this Bill. We can call it only one thing: parasitic capitalism. Along with the Royal College of Nursing, the British Medical Association and many other practitioners, we must resist the creeping destruction of our NHS.

6.8 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): Generally, the Bill is to be welcomed as it seeks to promote collaboration and the integration of local health and care services. It aims to give local people, local clinicians and those running local NHS and care services more control over the way that health and care services are delivered. The King's Fund highlighted that the Bill will remove "clunky" competition rules and make it simpler for health and care organisations to work together and deliver more joined-up care to more people. That said, it is important to recognise that the last 16 months have been very challenging and very exhausting for those working in health and care, and in many respects, the last thing that they now need is yet another NHS reorganisation. Groups such as the BMA have concerns and I urge the Government to look at those closely in Committee.

I wish briefly to highlight two issues. First, I urge the Government to retain the existing boundaries, with the Waveney area remaining in an ICS with Norfolk. To change the boundaries to make them coterminous with the two counties would be highly disruptive and an unnecessary distraction, and it would demotivate hard-working staff. It would place at risk the health integration that has taken place in the area in recent years. To achieve better collaboration with care services, it is better to build on the existing foundations rather than to dismantle them. In many respects, boundary wars have been going on behind closed doors for the past seven to eight months, though I am grateful to both the Secretary of State and the Minister for listening to my concerns in recent weeks. I urge them to retain the status quo.

Secondly, the health issue that has taken up most of my time in recent weeks is NHS dentistry—or rather the lack of it. Many of my constituents are in agony and local NHS dentists urgently need the funds to see more

patients. We are gradually moving towards a short-term solution, but it has taken far too long. In the longer term there needs to be greater accountability; dentists need to have a voice on integrated care boards; dental budgets should be protected; and steps must be taken to tackle the staffing crisis.

In conclusion, the Bill provides a statutory footing to ways of working that are in many respects evolving naturally. However, there are potential pitfalls, particularly—from my perspective—the changing of ICS boundaries, which I urge the Minister to avoid at all costs.

6.11 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab) [V]: This is the wrong Bill at the wrong time. To introduce a Bill like this when the covid pandemic is far from over and staff are on their knees shows a lack of understanding of what is needed.

I am concerned that this reorganisation of the NHS is being used as an opportunity to extend the involvement of UK and international private healthcare companies. The Bill proposes that private healthcare companies can become members of the integrated care boards, potentially meaning they will be able to procure health services from their own companies. Under the Bill, ICBs will have only a "core responsibility" for a "group of people", in accordance with enrolment rules made by NHS England. There are concerns that this evokes the US definition of a health maintenance organisation, which provides

"basic and supplemental health services to its members".

What is included in the core responsibilities?

Why is there no longer a duty but only a power for ICBs to provide hospital services? What does that mean for the thousands waiting for elective surgery? What about those waiting for cancer and other therapies? For those who say, "What does it matter who provides our healthcare as long as it meets the NHS principles of being universal, comprehensive and free at the point of need?" I say that not only is the Bill a clear risk to those founding NHS principles but there is strong evidence that equity in access to healthcare, equity in health outcomes and healthcare quality are all compromised in health systems that are either privatised or marketised, as the NHS has increasingly become.

That brings me to my third area of concern: health inequalities. It is notable that the Bill places the duties for the reduction of health inequalities with ICBs. The 2012 duty on the Secretary of State and NHS England to reduce inequalities is repealed, showing the clear lack of commitment to levelling up and the reduction of the structural inequalities that have been laid bare by this pandemic and contributed to the UK's high and unequal covid death toll. With this change, the Secretary of State is ignoring not only decades of overwhelming evidence that clearly shows that health inequalities are driven at national policy level, but the Prime Minister's commitment to implement the recommendations that Professor Sir Michael Marmot made in his covid review last December to tackle inequalities and build back fairer.

My final point is on social care. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on dementia, I express my profound disappointment that, 19 months since the Prime Minister pledged to fix the broken care system, it

still has not been fixed. The Bill is a missed opportunity to set out the framework for social care reform in the context of an integrated health and social care system. For people with dementia and their family carers, who have suffered disproportionately from covid, this is a real blow. They deserve better. For me, the principle of health and social care—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Sorry, but we have to go on.

6.14 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Anything that starts to undo the damage done by the 2012 Act is welcome. Some of the Bill reflects what has been the reality on the ground for some years: our local health services have indeed been ignoring the competition elements. I applaud them for it; they sensibly recognised that the only way the NHS could cope would be to co-operate, not compete.

I put on record my thanks to those leading our health and care system in Cambridgeshire in recent years. They were brave—they should not have had to break the law to deliver the services that our people needed. I also give heartfelt thanks to all the staff, medical and non-medical, who go above and beyond. What they do not need at the moment, on top of everything else, is the uncertainty that now encompasses them.

The reason why those people were in that difficult position is what makes me oppose the Bill: I will never trust the Conservatives not to try to privatise the NHS. That is based on long experience, because Cambridgeshire was the test bed for many of the 2012 reforms, which of course were driven by Lord Lansley, the then MP for South Cambridgeshire. Long before I came to this place, I was working with other campaigners, particularly Unison, Unite and GMB colleagues, to tackle what felt like an endless onslaught.

I remember arguing over the lifting of the private patient cap. The then chief executive of Addenbrooke's Hospital told me at an annual general meeting that where he came from, people were very relaxed about private healthcare. For years, Addenbrooke's had land allocated for a private hospital, and the chief executive admitted that the future business model was to seek to bring patients from across the world.

The then chief exec of the Royal Papworth Hospital was on record as wanting to expand private care from 5% to 15%. Nearby Hinchingsbrooke hospital was run as a private outfit by Circle Health, until it handed it back because it could not make it work; Circle was then run by Ali Parsa, now CEO of Babylon Health, whose app was so brazenly promoted by the former Health Secretary, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock). Then there was the UnitingCare fiasco, which I spoke endlessly about in this House: an £800 million five-year contract under which older people's services were, effectively, privatised, until it collapsed in a huge waste of time, effort and public money. So there is form, and that is why I will always oppose this legislation.

There are other concerns, but time is limited, so I will cite just a couple. The British Association of Social Workers has highlighted the removal of social work assessment prior to hospital discharges. It is right to do so. The relationship between hospitals and some care homes has long been far too close, in my view—frankly,

at times it borders on the corrupt. There is pressure to discharge too quickly, so the last thing we need to do is remove professional assessment. I am also concerned about clause 80 on data sharing, because I do not trust the Government on that either.

We have a wonderful NHS. It needs support, not reorganisation, but all past experience and evidence tells me that the Tories will always want to find a way of making money out of it. We will always try to stop them, because that is not what the NHS is about.

6.17 pm

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con) [V]: I am pleased to support the Bill. It is the first significant reorganisation of healthcare in recent years, and only the second since the Conservatives came into office following 13 years of Labour Administrations who reorganised the health services nine times, so we should not be taking lessons from the Opposition on the timing or the fact of putting things right.

The Bill is very substantial legislation that learns lessons from the way in which the NHS has had to work during the covid pandemic. In particular, the flow-through of patients discharged out of the acute sector as a result of much closer working with social care and local authorities is an integral part of creating the new integrated care boards. I very much welcome the fact that they are being established on a statutory footing and that there will be representation from local authorities and a role for health and wellbeing boards to provide local oversight. That is an essential step to allow the healthcare economy across our communities to collaborate effectively, and to remove some of the artificial barriers.

I will touch briefly on three other points. On the measures proposed for reconfiguration, we in Shropshire have been at the wrong end of a protracted reconfiguration process for our acute hospitals. Streamlining the process by which decisions are made will benefit patients. In Shropshire, it has taken several years to reach the point at which decisions can be made, and at every stage obstacles are put in place that add to delay and uncertainty. As a consequence of that, it is hard to attract staff to a system not working as well as it should, and the system has gone into special measures. The provisions to streamline difficult decisions are therefore very welcome.

Secondly, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, said, the Bill is somewhat light on workforce, but it does include key measures to speed up the ability of physicians trained in other systems to be welcomed into the NHS or to return to the NHS and if they have retired. I urge Ministers in Committee to look carefully at what can be done—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I am afraid we are under huge time constraints.

6.20 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): This Health and Care Bill has been conceived in bunkers behind screens within echo chambers. It is straight from the US health market, and its architects are immune to objection from the frontline leaders who are expected to deliver a new health and care system. In case the Government had not observed it, those people are in the midst of managing a pandemic, its resurgence and

[*Rachael Maskell*]

its aftermath. They are holding together a fragile workforce, traumatised by the pressure and sacrifice of the covid war. They are vaccinating a nation while seeing others fall to preventable diseases. They are embracing those with broken minds as they try desperately to hold on to their own.

It is no time to strip out the NHS's infrastructure and replace it—eager as we are to do so—with something as ill-defined, void of detail and illiterate as the Bill presents. The Bill will shift the blame for an imploding NHS and shattered care system from the impervious Prime Minister to NHS workers. The backlogs will be their fault. They will be to blame for service cuts, and the Government will shrug their shoulders at the postcode lottery and rationing. We have more than 5 million people waiting for hospital appointments. We are unable to see a GP for weeks. We are waiting longer than ever at A&E and, when the care system fleeces people for all they have and fails to restore their dignity in their fading years of life, the Bill scapegoats local health and care teams while the Government wash their hands.

We are in this mess because, in 2012, the Government—and, let us not forget, their Lib Dem chums—messed with our NHS, ignored clinicians and seeded the failures that we have witnessed throughout the pandemic. History repeats itself. The market-driven system enabled Ministers to sign away billions of pounds on crony contracts while frontline staff were wrapped in bin bags—and some, tragically, in body bags. The Bill lets the Government off the hook. When things go wrong, they will simply blame others as they avoid shame. But, worse, private companies are already sitting round the tables of the shadow integrated care systems to profit further. Nothing has changed. If the Bill changes nothing, we do not need it to further destroy the remnants of Labour's precious NHS. At the one time we need certainty, there is none.

The Bill fails to provide the vital stability, funding, accountability or transparency that is needed. It fails on prevention and the advances that patients need. It has more private commissioning, not less, no workforce planning or vital staff pay and, crucially, no social care, yet the NHS will integrate with it. Labour believes that people deserve better. We must have integrated health and social care, free to all in need, wholly delivered in our public sector by fairly rewarded staff and accountable to this Parliament and to the people. Now is not the time and this is not the Bill. I will vote against it.

6.23 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con) [V]: I welcome the Bill, and I particularly welcome its aims and objectives to provide the best possible health and care to everyone in this country. However, to achieve that, things must change in the legislation. It must have explicit provisions for mental health, not just physical health. It must also include provisions for children's social care, not just adult social care, and provide for the commissioning of not just medical services, doctors, nurses, infrastructure and hospitals but medicines and devices, which we know have been crucial in the fight with covid.

How are we going to do that? First, we need to include parity of esteem clauses—one for mental health and one for social care. We need to define what we mean

by parity of esteem, which will be a first: what are we going to put in? Not just money; what processes will we promise to deliver? What healthcare outcomes are we looking to deliver? We need the same for mental health and social care—both are deserved.

As others have said, we need a proper workforce plan, but it must cover not just health but social care, and it must look specifically at how we will deal with recruitment. How will we deal with the career path in future? How will we look at training and retention for the future? There should be an integrated plan, not one for health and one for care. Our nurses, for example, work across both systems.

We need to provide for the commissioning of medicines and devices. Currently, it is a postcode lottery. The previous legislation on medicines and devices covered licensing, but not commissioning. Patient choice depends upon forming that system so that everyone gets access to the medicines approved by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Currently, that is not the case.

We must positively review the big-picture strategy. What do we need? What are the skills we need for health and care? We must look broadly, not narrowly. We must look at what greater role our pharmacists can play. How can we improve our training so that people have more general skills that we can use in a pandemic such as this, so that everyone in the health system can be used? To support that, we will need to rework the membership provisions for the ICBs and the ICPs. We will need to amend the data regulations to ensure that they can go beyond the boundary of the NHS, and we will need to look at our medicines directory—the sister of the devices registry—to ensure that it includes information from research through to patient experience. There is much to do; it can be done. Where there is a will, there is a way.

6.26 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The NHS was established to provide equal rights to healthcare, free at the point of delivery, irrespective of income or personal health. Yet as we emerge from the pandemic in praise of the NHS, this Bill is yet another step towards dismantling and privatising the system.

With the highest vaccination rates, thanks to the NHS, England also has the highest infection rate of the delta variant, thanks to the Government going into lockdown too late and coming out too soon. With 128,000 people dead, 695,000 currently have the covid variant and there are record waiting lists. The Government should be investing in more capacity now—in the workforce and in beds. They should be reinstating the 12,000 empty beds. Instead, the Government are putting £10 billion into the private sector over four years, with the framework contract, when the private sector has only 8,000 beds in total. Doctors will have to leave NHS hospitals to go to private hospitals, further disrupting NHS services.

Coming out of the pandemic, we need a healthcare Bill that re-energises the NHS and rewards our nurses and doctors who saved the country from calamity. Instead, this Bill allows private health companies to sit on boards, deciding where the NHS funding is spent. It allows further outsourcing, opening the door to more taxpayers' money being siphoned off to the profits of private contractors. The NHS is being fragmented. Talk

of patient choice is disingenuous, as funds must be transferred in the internal market, so it is a postcode lottery. There has not been patient choice in England since the internal market was introduced.

In contrast, in Wales, the Labour Government continue with a planned system that has delivered the highest vaccination rate in the world and a 90% effective test, track and isolate system, wholly delivered by the public sector through councils and health authorities. Wales has a lower death rate over a five-year average—13% in Wales vs. 20% in England, despite Wales's older population. There is public procurement in place of crony contracts to Tory donors.

Wales has shown that public money is used most effectively in the NHS by public sector delivery, so more people are treated equally, irrespective of income and personal health, true to Aneurin Bevan's founding principles. Instead, the Bill is a back door for United States companies, via trade deals, to further break up our system, on the road to health insurance, which hits the poorest and sickest hardest.

This is a rotten Bill. It is bad for Britain's health, bad for our wealth and bad for our most treasured achievement—our NHS.

6.29 pm

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I confess that I am wary of NHS reorganisations, but as Sir Simon Stevens told the Health Committee, this one is almost unique in being primarily a response to a series of requests from the NHS to Parliament. In delivering a more integrated health and social care system, the Bill will implement a number of proposals in the NHS's own long-term plan and crucially, as other hon. Members have said, the Bill is accompanied by the commitment to raise NHS funding by £33 billion—the largest cash increase in its 73-year history.

I would hope that, in putting the integrated care systems on a statutory footing, Ministers will give them a strong mandate to conduct and fund research. The pandemic has shown the vital importance of research. Not only did the Oxford University scientists deliver a world-leading vaccine in record time, but their recovery trial established dexamethasone as the first effective treatment for covid, saving thousands of lives.

The report that I co-authored for the Taskforce on Innovation, Growth and Regulatory Reform sets out a blueprint for a new regulatory architecture for clinical trials to replace the EU clinical trials directive. The Bill could be an opportunity to take those reforms forward, along with our ideas on a more modern approach to health data. These plans would improve the chances of discovering better treatments for life-threatening diseases and could unlock huge economic opportunities, capitalising on the abilities of our world-leading scientists and universities.

As many have said, the Bill must be used to improve workforce planning. As demands grow on the NHS, we must continue to expand capacity, and we cannot do that unless we are training and recruiting the people we need. In particular, we must have more GPs so that our constituents can get the care that they need when they want it. GPs are currently under unprecedented demand pressure. I urge the Minister to ensure that the Bill gives GPs a strong voice in the new structures to ensure that local input is given to those new structures.

Supporting the NHS will always be a key part of the work that I do as MP for Chipping Barnet, because I know how important it is to my constituents. Knowing that the NHS is there when we need it is one of the greatest advantages of living in our United Kingdom. The covid emergency has reinforced that a thousand times over, and I take the opportunity to pay tribute to the staff of our NHS and thank them for their courage, dedication and professionalism.

6.32 pm

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab) [V]: This month we marked the 73rd birthday of the NHS, and instead of celebrating it and giving it the homage that it deserves—the NHS, one of the very best things about our country—the Government have introduced a Bill that looks set to ramp up their long-standing attempts to continue to privatise it. I was proud to add my name to the reasoned amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana) because we do not need private healthcare companies to sit on boards deciding how NHS funding is spent, further outsourcing of contracts without proper scrutiny, transparency and accountability, or the introduction of a model of healthcare that incentivises cuts and the closure of services.

Forcing NHS staff to implement yet another top-down Conservative reorganisation would take people away from the task of tackling growing treatment lists and coping with rapidly rising covid cases. We need to fill our 84,000 vacancies, and we need a 15% pay rise across the board for our NHS staff. It is hard to see how ordering a reorganisation such as this while ignoring calls for increased funding and a plan for social care could be anything other than disastrous.

This corporate takeover Bill—which is exactly what it is—will put private companies at the heart of the NHS and pave the way to sell off our confidential health data to multinational corporations. Nobody wants that. It will normalise the corrupt contracting that we have seen during the pandemic. The money that we spend on our healthcare should go to the services that we need, not to the pockets of Conservative party donors or corporate shareholders. Over the path of the pandemic, we have seen what this outsourcing and privatisation has meant in practice. Contract after contract awarded without competitive process. People being failed. Failing contracts. Delivery failed on again and again. Now the Government want to open up new ways for that to happen, just as they have done throughout the pandemic.

Let us consider what happened with Track and Trace, which was a complete disaster in the hands of Serco. The system has been so ineffective that, recently, MPs concluded that it had "no clear impact"—a £37 billion system with no clear impact. After a decade of cuts, it was our NHS and its staff and volunteers who led the vaccination roll-out. That was a success, but it was their success, not the Government's success. That is a lesson that we can learn about exactly what happens when we give the NHS the funding it needs, but the Bill does nothing to do that. We do not need more overpaid consultants involved in the NHS; we need to value the staff we already have, and put in the investment that made the vaccination programme a massive success. We must be clear—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We must move on to the next speaker.

6.35 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I strongly support the Bill. However, although it contains strong measures to combat obesity, there is none to tackle smoking, which is the leading cause of preventable premature death, including cancer. I declare an interest as chairman of the all-party group on smoking and health. The report we proposed suggested that we implement the “polluter pays” levy that the Government promised to consider two years ago. The Bill is the ideal opportunity to introduce such a levy. Analysis by Cancer Research UK shows that we will not achieve the Government’s aim of a smoke-free England until 2035—the Government target is 2030, so years later—in our poorest communities, so there is no time to waste. We must get on with the job.

In the Government’s recent paper on public health, they accepted that they have a responsibility not only to help people improve their own health, but to go further when it comes to industries that are based on addictions such as smoking. The Bill is the ideal opportunity, and I urge the Government to consider the recommendations laid out by the all-party group and table them as amendments in Committee, so that we tackle the most deadly addiction in our society.

We need to combat not only smoking rates but the long-standing, unacceptable health inequalities that exist across the country. The plan needs to be comprehensive, but it will not be effective without sufficient additional and sustainable funding. A smoke-free 2030 fund, using the industry to pay for it, but without industry interference, could pay for the comprehensive measures that we need to reach that ambitious target across all socioeconomic groups.

On the plan to combat obesity, there is a measure that will be harmful to many of our media companies, but it will not hit some of the social media and online companies. That runs the risk of having a two-stage process. Perhaps we could consider having limits at weekends to limit the impact of junk food advertising on TV when our young people are watching.

Overall, however, this is a good Bill. We should support it, and we should support our national health service that has brought it before us today.

6.39 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I pay tribute to everyone working in health and social care and to unpaid family carers. All of them have gone above and beyond in their caring roles during the pandemic. The Government’s response to that could have been to give NHS staff a proper pay rise, to publish plans to put social care on a sustainable financial footing, or to recognise fully the tremendous contribution made by unpaid carers. Instead we have this Bill, and a top-down reorganisation of the NHS that will concentrate power in the hands of the Secretary of State, offering no guarantees of better outcomes for patients and removing rights from carers.

It is welcome that the Bill brings an end to every NHS contract having to be put out to tender and that some changes in the Bill reference unpaid carers, but further changes are needed. Change is needed to put a duty on the NHS to have regard to carers and to promote their health and wellbeing.

It is welcome that the Bill includes a duty on both NHS England and the integrated care boards to consult carers, but rather than just involve and consult them in relation to patients, the duty that is needed is for the NHS to consider carers in their own right, as proposed by the Health and Social Care Committee in its report.

It is worrying that the Bill undermines carers’ rights in relation to hospital discharge. Clause 78 removes carers’ fundamental rights by removing the need to assess a patient at the point of hospital discharge. The way that is done removes carers’ fundamental right to have an assessment to ensure services are provided to make sure the patient is safe to discharge into their care. This is an issue, as Carers UK quotes research showing that only 26% of carers were consulted about discharge and that a third were consulted only at the last minute.

The Bill proposes to extend the Care Quality Commission’s remit to cover the delivery of social care services. However, that excludes social care provided through NHS continuing healthcare. The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman found last year that people continue to be seriously let down by failings in how continuing healthcare is delivered. I ask the Minister to agree with the Continuing Healthcare Alliance that there should be an additional duty on the CQC to assess integrated care systems’ delivery of their continuing healthcare duties and to hold them to account where these duties are not being met.

The Care Quality Commission will have a remit to rate local authorities’ delivery of social care, but when £9 billion has been taken out of social care budgets and long-term reform is consistently delayed, the Government should recognise that inadequate social care services are a problem of their own making.

Finally, I question the timing of the Bill. Staff are exhausted and are facing another wave of covid infections over the summer. I urge the Secretary of State to recognise that and adjust the timeframes for implementing these reforms so that they do not end up distracting from the NHS’s real job of caring for patients.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The wind-ups begin at 6.44 pm.

6.42 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I welcome this Bill, and I pay tribute to my NHS managers and social care managers in Cornwall. They have been straining at the bit for a long time to integrate more effectively and more successfully, and the Bill will help them to formalise that integration and do a good job of it.

In the short time I have, I want to talk about the patient’s perspective. We know that diabetes, for example, costs the NHS and social care a colossal amount of money, and we also know that across the UK we have pretty much all the tools, treatment, care, support and devices so that someone with diabetes can manage their condition and live, as much as possible, a full and good life. We also know that, because of the current situation, that care is not joined up and is not universal across the country. I hope the Bill delivers, for diabetes, a joined-up, clear pathway from diagnosis—I welcome the emphasis on prevention, too—through their lifetime, as they manage this lifelong condition. The Bill enables them to get

every bit of support and care and every device they need to live full lives, to manage their care and to take an active part in society as a whole.

I am talking about people with diabetes because I chair the all-party parliamentary group on diabetes, which I should have declared, but the Bill also provides a blueprint for all sorts of lifelong conditions that enables people to live their lives successfully in their community.

6.43 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): In today's debate we have heard from 37 hon. and right hon. Members, as well as the Member for Delyn (Rob Roberts), and another 29 hon. Members registered an interest to speak but were not called. A huge range of topics has been covered, some of which I hope to address briefly. I hope Members will forgive me if I cannot mention each contribution individually.

Many Members have talked about the particular geographic configuration of their ICS, and it is clear that there is lots of unhappiness about that in certain parts of the country. That is hardly surprising, given that that has been done without any parliamentary oversight so far. It seems that, under the Bill, Parliament will not even get to approve where the boundaries lie.

There has been no attempt at public consultation or discussion about where these boundaries sit, and that is a theme throughout the Bill. Decisions, money and power move further away from the public and closer to the Secretary of State. He is certainly taking back control but, at the same time, he is silencing the patient voice.

In the Bill, the Secretary of State has a veto on who leads the integrated care systems, and he can stop foundation trusts borrowing money that they desperately need to tackle the £9 billion maintenance backlog. He even has the power to decide whether to instigate the closure of local services.

By contrast, when the 2012 Act was going through Parliament, Lord Lansley, who was then Secretary of State, told the Chamber:

"We want clinicians and their patients to lead the NHS, but they cannot do this while they sit under a vast hierarchy of regional and local organisations, all reporting to Whitehall. Everyone agrees that top-down command and control gets in the way of clinicians doing their job".—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2011; Vol. 522, c. 613.]

The Bill supercharges command and control, so it is little wonder that even the British Medical Association has come out against it. It creates a vast web of new organisations, but very few of them will make decisions. It is pretty clear that the integrated care partnerships in particular will be little more than bystanders when it comes to the crunch, and that the boards will have all the power. That is a huge democratic deficit that must not be allowed to go unchallenged. When we hear about companies such as Virgin already having a seat on one of the ICS boards in the south-west we know that the power lies in totally the wrong place. The Bill needs to make it crystal clear that private companies should be a million miles from making decisions about how the NHS is run.

At the same time, the Bill does not legislate for boards to include a representative from a mental health organisation, for example. How will that encourage

integration, let alone parity of esteem? There are plenty of others who are not guaranteed a seat at the table but who ought to be in the vanguard of integration: directors of adult social care, directors of public health, carers and, most of all, patients, who seem to have been completely forgotten in all this. How will decisions be made by the boards? Will there be transparency about where the money is spent in those areas which, we should not forget, are much larger than clinical commissioning groups. How can we be sure that the money will go to those parts of the ICS with the most need, and how can that be challenged if it does not?

We have seen the blatant abuse of the levelling-up fund, and party political considerations seep into every decision made by the Government. Will it now be patients who pay the price for that? How will the combined trust deficits of £910 million be met? The danger is that the Bill will force ICSs to close small local services to bail out the bigger trusts.

While we welcome an end to section 75 provision, I wonder exactly how much money has been wasted in convoluted procurement processes and legal challenges. Is it £3 billion, £4 billion or £5 billion? Whatever the final figure, there is no doubt that that money could be better spent on frontline services. While moving away from that monumental mistake is a good thing, it seems as if we are going from one extreme to the other, with the removal of any safeguards at all on who contracts can be awarded to. The Government are legislating for cronyism. I am sure that pub landlords and pest control companies will be delighted, but we cannot give the Secretary of State the blank cheque that the Bill allows.

There is a huge blank sheet of paper where the plan to tackle the workforce crisis ought to be. The Secretary of State will produce a report once every five years, but that is not a serious commitment to the workforce. Indeed, it is not a serious commitment to Parliament either, and the social care workforce is not even mentioned. Let us not forget that we have 122,000 vacancies in that workforce. The Select Committee has set out the kind of people whom we really ought to aim to employ, with annual, independently audited reports that cover the NHS and social care. In the words of the Select Committee:

"The way that the NHS does workforce planning is at best opaque and at worst responsible for the unacceptable pressure on the current workforce which existed even before the pandemic."

The Bill will only reinforce that position, rather than reverse it.

In the introduction that the Secretary of State gave to the Bill today, it sounded very much as if he thought that it was the panacea that we have all been waiting for, but many more experienced Members could be forgiven for having a sense of déjà vu. Let us remind ourselves of what Lord Lansley told the House about the 2012 reforms:

"Previous changes have tinkered with one piece of the NHS or another, when what was needed was comprehensive modernisation to create an NHS fit for the demands of the 21st century. That is precisely what this Health and Social Care Bill will deliver."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2011; Vol. 522, c. 616.]

The Health and Social Care Bill provided for the constitution and structure of the NHS to work for the long term. How has that worked out? There are record waiting lists and staff vacancies; billions diverted into the private sector away from the NHS; life expectancy has stalled; and A&E targets have been missed five

[Justin Madders]

years in a row. The NHS was trying to unpick the last disastrous reorganisation before the ink was even dry on the Royal Assent, so why is this set of reforms going to be any more successful than the last? How is one line of this Bill going to tackle the operation backlog? Is not the truth that without a proper sustained funding settlement to meet the demand in both health and social care, this latest set of reforms is merely another rearrangement of the deckchairs? Why, oh why, is so much time and resource being focused on a wasteful, top-down reorganisation, in the middle of the pandemic? Even the Prime Minister told us on Monday that we are not out of it yet. Only today, planned operations have been cancelled in Newcastle because of a surge in covid cases. Is it not the case that every meeting called, every document written, every minute spent on this top-down reorganisation is less time spent on fighting the increase in covid cases we currently see, bringing down waiting lists, tackling the increase in mental health conditions, solving the workforce crisis and actually delivering the reform to social care that the Prime Minister promised nearly two years ago?

This Bill is the equivalent of someone reorganising the whole interior of their house, spending fortunes on new furniture and decorations, but finding it is all ruined within months because they forgot to put a roof over their head; we cannot fix the NHS if we do not fix social care. We know that, everybody knows that. The Government say they have a plan, but we still do not know what it is. Crucially, for the purposes of today's debate, we do not know whether it will fit in with what is in this Bill. So are we going to have yet another reorganisation next year because there was no forward thinking? What about learning the lessons from covid? The inquiry is not even going to start until next year, so are we going to see yet another reorganisation when we have learned the lessons from that? The only thing guaranteed from this reorganisation is that another one will surely follow shortly afterwards. So let us reject this Bill, go back to the drawing board and come up with a plan that actually deals with the challenges that we have to face.

6.51 pm

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): Before winding up this important debate, I would like to put on the record, as I always do and as I know the shadow Minister does, our gratitude to all the staff in the NHS, social care and local government, and other key workers, for everything they have done in recent months. This Bill is evolution, not revolution. It supports improvements already under way in our NHS and it builds on the recommendations of the NHS's own long-term plan, laying the foundations for our recovery from this pandemic. This Bill is backed by not only the NHS, but so many others working across health and care. A joint statement from the NHS Confederation, NHS Providers and the Local Government Association reads:

"we believe that the direction of travel set by the bill is the right one."

It notes that working in partnership at a local level is "the only way" we can address the challenges of our time. The chief executive of Age UK has said that ICSs are to be embraced and made as effective and inclusive as they can be, and the King's Fund is calling for us to

press ahead. The list goes on; the NHS wants us to press ahead, and in the words of Lord Stevens, "The overwhelming majority of these proposals are changes the health service have asked for." So it is vital that we in this House do right by them and by patients at this critical juncture. It is the right time for this Bill. We legislate, Opposition Members obfuscate. I remind the shadow Secretary of State of his 2017 manifesto, which stated:

"We will reinstate the powers of the Secretary of State for Health to have overall responsibility for the NHS."

With this Bill, we put increased accountability for the Secretary of State at the heart of this, yet now the shadow Secretary of State no longer seems to agree with himself and characterises his own proposals as "meddling". I know that he is dextrous in his politics and in his policy position, which is probably why he has survived under multiple Leaders of the Opposition, but this is stretching it a bit.

We have sought, in getting to this point, to work on a collaborative basis at every stage, and hon. Members can be reassured that we will continue to adopt that approach in the weeks ahead as we proceed with this Bill, when we hope it goes into Committee. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out in his opening remarks his willingness to listen. In particular, he highlighted that in the case of ICS boundaries no decision has yet been made. As he set out, we are determined to embrace innovative potential wherever we find it. That is quite different from many of the accusations we have heard here today. I know it is tempting for some—even when they know better, and they do—to claim that it is the beginning of the end for public provision. It is not and they know it. They know it is scaremongering rather than reality. They know that there has always been an element of private provision in healthcare services in this country, and they should know that because, as the Nuffield Trust said in 2019:

"The...evidence suggests the increase"

in private provision

"originally began under Labour governments before 2010".

The shadow Secretary of State should certainly know that because he was a special adviser in the Treasury and in No. 10 at that time.

With regard to the implementation of the Bill, the NHS itself wants, subject to legislation, to move at pace to implement statutory arrangements for ICSs by April 2022. That is why NHS England is beginning preparatory work, including publishing an ICS design framework. Further work, including on integrated care board design and consideration of appointments and staff from CCGs will take place, after Second Reading, of course; this is all subject to the passage of the Bill.

Let me turn to some of the specific points raised by hon. and right hon. Members. The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) asked about "Agenda for Change". I can reassure her that it is not the intention that ICBs depart from "Agenda for Change". The Bill's drafting and wording is in line with existing arrangements for other NHS bodies with regard to "Agenda for Change" and translates it into this context. However, I am always happy to discuss that with her further if she wishes. Her suggestion that this was conceived, as she put it, in a bunker is quite simply not the case. Indeed, all the stakeholders, including the NHS, have said that this is one of the most collaborative pieces of legislation development they have seen.

Turning to the workforce, as my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) said, we cannot legislate to address workforce challenges but we can and we will look very carefully at the recommendations of the Select Committee and of my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt).

While we do not always agree on everything, the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) made sensible points, although I would slightly tease her that she argued against the principle of the Secretary of State taking powers in reconfiguration and shortly afterwards her hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), intervened on him asking him to do exactly that.

Munira Wilson: I did point that out.

Edward Argar: She did.

In response to the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), I am again grateful for her comments and happy to accept her kind invitation to join her on a visit to Scotland.

The right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) made a very important point. In doing so, he rightly paid tribute to the work in this space done by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott) with her recent private Member's Bill. As the Secretary of State said, either he, I or the relevant Minister will be happy to meet him to discuss it further. My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Saqib Bhatti) was right to talk about the need for local flexibility. That is what we are seeking to do.

The hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) asked more broadly about public spending constraints after 2010. He is brave, perhaps, to mention that. I recall the legacy of the previous Labour Government, which the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) summed up pretty effectively in saying,

"I'm afraid there is no money."

On social care, which a number of hon. and right hon. Members mentioned, we will take no lessons from Labour. In 13 years, after two Green Papers, a royal commission and apparently making it a priority at the spending review of 2007, the net result was absolutely nothing—inaction throughout. We are committed to bringing forward proposals this year. Labour talks; we will act.

The NHS is the finest health service in the world. We knew that before the pandemic, and the last year and a half have only reinforced that. It is our collective duty to strengthen our health and care system for our times. I was shocked, although probably not surprised, that the Opposition recklessly and opportunistically intend to oppose the Bill—a Bill, as we have heard, that the NHS has asked for—once again putting political point scoring ahead of NHS and patient needs. For our part, we are determined to support our NHS, as this Bill does, to create an NHS that is fit for the future and to renew the gift left by generations before us and pass it on stronger to future generations. We are the party of the NHS and we are determined to give it what it needs, what it has asked for and what it deserves. I encourage hon. Members to reject the Opposition amendment, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I apologise to the 30 Members who did not get to speak in this important debate, some of whom are currently in the Chamber.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 218, Noes 359.

Division No. 55]

[7 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Evans, Chris
Abrahams, Debbie	Farron, Tim
Ali, Rushanara	Farry, Stephen
Ali, Tahir	Fletcher, Colleen
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Fovargue, Yvonne
Amesbury, Mike	Foxcroft, Vicky
Anderson, Fleur	Foy, Mary Kelly
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Gardiner, Barry
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Gill, Preet Kaur
Barker, Paula	Glendon, Mary
Beckett, rh Margaret	Green, Kate
Begum, Apsana	Green, Sarah
Benn, rh Hilary	Greenwood, Lilian
Betts, Mr Clive	Greenwood, Margaret
Blake, Olivia	Griffith, Nia
Blomfield, Paul	Gwynne, Andrew
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Haigh, Louise
Brennan, Kevin	Hamilton, Fabian
Brown, Ms Lyn	Hanna, Claire
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Harvey, Neale
Bryant, Chris	Hardy, Emma
Buck, Ms Karen	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Burgon, Richard	Harris, Carolyn
Butler, Dawn	Hayes, Helen
Byrne, Ian	Healey, rh John
Byrne, rh Liam	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Cadbury, Ruth	Hillier, Meg
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Hobhouse, Wera
Carden, Dan	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Chamberlain, Wendy	Hollern, Kate
Champion, Sarah	Hopkins, Rachel
Charalambous, Bambos	Howarth, rh Sir George
Clark, Feryal	Huq, Dr Rupa
Cooper, Daisy	Hussain, Imran
Cooper, Rosie	Jardine, Christine
Cooper, rh Yvette	Jarvis, Dan
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Coyle, Neil	Johnson, Kim
Creasy, Stella	Jones, Darren
Cruddas, Jon	Jones, Gerald
Cryer, John	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Cummins, Judith	Jones, Ruth
Cunningham, Alex	Jones, Sarah
Daby, Janet	Kane, Mike
Davey, rh Ed	Keeley, Barbara
David, Wayne	Kendall, Liz
Davies, Geraint	Khan, Afzal
Davies-Jones, Alex	Kinnock, Stephen
De Cordova, Marsha	Kyle, Peter
Debbonaire, Thangam	Lake, Ben
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Lammy, rh Mr David
Dodds, Anneliese	Lavery, Ian
Doughty, Stephen	Leadbeater, Kim
Dowd, Peter	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Dromey, Jack	Lewis, Clive
Duffield, Rosie	Lloyd, Tony
Eagle, Dame Angela	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Eagle, Maria	Lucas, Caroline
Eastwood, Colum	Lynch, Holly
Edwards, Jonathan	MacAskill, Kenny
Efford, Clive	Madders, Justin
Elliott, Julie	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Elmore, Chris	Mahmood, Shabana
Eshalomi, Florence	Malhotra, Seema
Esterson, Bill	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
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
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
Owen, Sarah
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

Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmar, rh Keir
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeter, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Sarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Taiwo Owatemi and
Gill Furniss

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
Bottomley, Sir Peter
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
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, 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
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
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
Girvan, Paul
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
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkins, 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
 Largan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cheryl
 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
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 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
 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, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 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
 Throup, Maggie
 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, Mr Heather
 Whittaker, Craig

Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
 Tom Pursglove and
 Maria Caulfield

Question accordingly negated.

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.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 356, Noes 219.

Division No. 56]

[7.11 pm

AYES

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
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 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
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, 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
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinanage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo

Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 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
 Girvan, Paul
 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
 Heappey, 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
 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
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cheryl
 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
 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
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 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
 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, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 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
 Throup, Maggie
 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
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Maria Caulfield and
Tom Pursglove

NOES

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
 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, Philip
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glendon, Mary
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 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
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 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
 Owen, Sarah
 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
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 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
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Taiwo Owatemi and
Gill Furniss

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

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.

HEALTH AND CARE BILL (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Health and Care Bill:

Committal

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

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

- (2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 2 November 2021.

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

Proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading

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

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

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

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(*Edward Argar.*)

Question agreed to.

HEALTH AND CARE BILL (MONEY)

Queen's Recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Health and Care Bill, it is expedient to authorise:

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State; and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(*Edward Argar.*)

Question agreed to.

HEALTH AND CARE BILL (WAYS AND MEANS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Health and Care Bill, it is expedient to authorise:

(1) the making of provision under the Act in relation to income tax, corporation tax, capital gains tax, stamp duty or stamp duty reserve tax in connection with a transfer of property, rights or liabilities by a scheme under the Act; and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—(*Edward Argar.*)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate**DELEGATED LEGISLATION**

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (ROAD TRAFFIC)

That the draft Road Vehicle Carbon Dioxide Emission Performance Standards (Cars and Vans) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 8 June, be approved.—(*Alan Mak.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CHANNEL TUNNEL

That the draft Railway (Licensing of Railway Undertakings) (Amendment) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 21 June, be approved.—(*Alan Mak.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

PUBLIC HEALTH

That the draft Health Security (EU Exit) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 7 June, be approved.—(*Alan Mak.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS**Santander Bath Road branch**

7.19 pm

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents of Feltham and Heston to call on Santander to stop the closure of the bank branch on Bath Road in Hounslow West.

The petitioners declare that it is crucial to save this vital, valued branch, which has two cashpoints, helps to boost our local economy and provides vital banking services for thousands of local residents, many of whom are older people without access to online banking. Residents use the branch frequently and have valued the service from Santander for many years.

This petition, along with the corresponding online petition, has collected more than 400 signatures and been supported by local councillors, particularly Councillor Bandna Chopra, Councillor Jagdish Sharma and Councillor Sumra, and colleagues and residents from across Hounslow West, Heston and Cranford.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to ask that Santander does not close the Bath Road branch.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of Feltham and Heston,

Declares that the Santander branch on Hounslow Bath Road should not be closed; further that access to in-person banking services is crucial to many residents in the local area; and further that residents feel that they will not have access to a comparable banking service over the phone or online and will struggle financially as a result.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to ask that Santander does not close the Bath Road branch.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002675]

Sandbach Cemetery

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents of Sandbach in my constituency. It asks for provision for the existing Sandbach cemetery to be extended.

I have met a number of local people who are very concerned that in a short time Sandbach residents will no longer have access to cemetery space in their own town and will have to travel some miles out of the town for burials and to visit relatives' gravesides, unless an extension or alternative cemetery provision in the town is not secured.

A petition with similar wording that has been circulated by volunteer campaigners in Sandbach has been signed by more than 4,400 people—a very substantial number for a town the size of Sandbach. I hope that my presentation of this petition in the House today will serve to highlight the extent of the concerns deeply held by local residents and constituents more widely.

The petition states:

The petition of the residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that Sandbach cemetery is nearly full so future burials would take place several miles out of town; notes that a local petition calling for an extension to the cemetery land has received over 4,400 signatures.

The petitioners therefore urge the House of Commons to request Cheshire East Council to reconsider their decision not to extend burial provision in Sandbach.

And the petitioners remain etc.

[P002676]

Rhyl Cut and Prestatyn Gutter

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents of the Vale of Clwyd regarding maintenance of the Rhyl Cut and Prestatyn Gutter, alongside an online petition on the same topic that has been signed by 606 people.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of the Vale of Clwyd,

Declares that the maintenance of the Rhyl Cut and Prestatyn Gutter should be the responsibility of Natural Resources Wales, Denbighshire County Council and connected public sector bodies; further that existing riparian ownership should not prevent the creation of an effective system of oversight; and further that the current ineffective management of this local waterway results in significant environmental blight.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take immediate action to ensure that a full public sector maintenance programme is introduced to manage the Rhyl Cut and Prestatyn Gutter.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002677]

Devolution for the East Midlands

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

7.24 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I am pleased to have secured this important debate on devolution in the east midlands region. I understand that the forthcoming levelling-up White Paper will set out the Government's plan for further rounds of local and sub-regional devolution. If so, it seems a pertinent time to examine the opportunity in the east midlands to put an ambitious levelling-up and devolution package at the heart of a sustained recovery for our region. I have had some exploratory discussions with other council leaders across the region and have been met largely with enthusiasm and a commitment to explore our options in more detail. There is a genuine will and a drive to get on with things in the east midlands. We need the Government to give us the tools to do the job at hand for UK plc.

I pay tribute to the great work of leaders across the region who have come together in recent years on projects such as HS2, our development corporation and our freeport. Those leaders, from across the public and private sectors, have shown courage and commitment to the region, bringing forward ambitious plans despite the pressures of the pandemic. In my conversations with those colleagues, there is a strong ambition to bring power and resources closer to their councils, universities and businesses. In a post-pandemic world, it is vital that we harness that enthusiasm, and commit to rebuilding the east midlands economy, improving the living standards of local people and bringing high-value jobs, sustainable employment, training opportunities, growth and prosperity to the region.

I also thank Sir John Peace for his leadership of the midlands engine. A devolution package for the east midlands would complement and strengthen the work of the engine and Midlands Connect, and help him to deliver on some of the ambitions that he has for the region. It can support the huge effort and resource that he gives to our key priorities.

The east midlands is home to more than 5 million people and over 175,000 businesses. It has a diverse mix of counties and cities, market towns, countryside, and distinct culture and communities. It contains world-class business, innovation and manufacturing excellence. The east midlands economy has untapped potential for growth. Despite this critical mass and potential, the east midlands has received some of the lowest levels of Government investment over many years compared with other parts of the country.

Ours is a region of undoubted attributes and proud heritage. What is often overlooked, however, is its strategic location, creating, as it does, a bridge between the south and the north of the country. It also has strategic transport links that help connect the Union as they go north through England and up into Scotland. For that reason, the east midlands is vital. It is a hub for our nation, but for too long it has been seen instead as a place that people drive through to get from one place to another. It is so much more than that and we must capitalise on that potential.

The resurgence of the east midlands is critical for the renewal of the UK economy as a whole. Given our position at the bottom of those rankings for investment,

[Ben Bradley]

we must therefore be at the centre of a levelling-up agenda. An east midlands combined authority, under a unified vision and plan that is complementary to the midlands engine and the Government's devolution and recovery ambitions, would be levelling up in its most literal sense. Other regions with devolution packages, such as the west midlands, Greater Manchester and Teesside have more local powers and more powers to make a real impact. A package for the east midlands would equalise those things and bring us up to a level of equal opportunity with those other areas.

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. It is great to hear the east midlands being debated in this House. As he knows, I am a member of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, and we have been looking at the evolution of English devolution. Tomorrow we will be hearing from the excellent Ben Houchen and also Tracy Brabin. Last week we heard from Jamie Driscoll, the North of Tyne Mayor and Andy Burnham, who spoke about their experiences. Andy Burnham says that the entities that have been created can help to bring “coherence to areas that may have felt a little disparate”.

In the context of the east midlands, does my hon. Friend agree that devolution or some sort of authority is the best thing that we can do to bring that region together and get the investment that we really need?

Ben Bradley: I thank my hon. Friend and Nottinghamshire neighbour for engaging in this debate. He is absolutely right, particularly when it comes to a region such as ours, which does not have that metro centre—an obvious urban hub. We are three cities, three counties with different spatial geographies, different transport links. We need that hub and connectivity to have a single vision for how we plan that across the region, otherwise we will all head off in our own different local directions and will not be able to make a coherent argument to Government. Such a hub is really important for that unity of purpose and delivering that investment.

The unprecedented financial, economic and social challenges facing our area require a more ambitious and dynamic response, which we cannot achieve operating within the status quo. A regional devolution of powers and resources is key to enabling us to be competitive, and ambitious for our people and places. The conditions created by a combined authority would enable us to pool sovereignty and capacity on an unprecedented scale.

The benefits could include a coherent, planned focus on delivery for our economy, a focus on achieving the greatest public value for residents and places, more efficient and effective spatial planning in the region, including transport, and dealing with some of the challenges that my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Tom Randall) mentioned.

A unified approach, which would be more attractive to the Government, could work to make sense of the many complex structures that exist in our region—the midlands engine, strategic partners, councils, businesses and investors—bringing a clarity of purpose, strength through unity, and confidence to those who want to invest in our region. Councils could come together to create a mayoral combined authority. That body would

complement the West Midlands Combined Authority to the west, the northern powerhouse to the north, and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to the south—in many ways we are the hole in the middle of the doughnut, without the powers that everybody around us seems to have.

Building on our excellence in high tech and advanced manufacturing companies, an east midlands authority could take the regional lead, for example by promoting action on climate change or carbon reduction to be a catalyst for our green economy and artificial intelligence industries of the future. Governance of the authority could be inclusive to provide strategic co-ordination of regional policy, with councils joining forces with industry, higher and further education, and wider public sector partners.

Across the three cities and counties of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire, there are 28 local councils. Through the levelling-up White Paper, there is an opportunity to lay down enabling legislation requiring the vast majority of councils, rather than all, to sign up to a combined authority, so that we can be confident of consensus for a new combined authority and move at pace. An alternative option could be to discuss and negotiate a geography for a mayoral combined authority that could incorporate all partners—the vast majority of local authorities within the region—that wanted to be part of it in the first instance, perhaps with a system of affiliation for others that might want to join. In short, there are options; much of the work and planning for them has been done, much of the documentation exists, and now is very much the right time to explore them.

An east midlands combined authority would create a single voice in the region. A clear and focused channel of communication would improve services to communities and generate additional gross value added, creating new jobs, supporting businesses and promoting radical public sector reform. It would give us localised powers to genuinely tackle inequalities in skills and health in a way that is bespoke and that fits with our communities. That cannot be done from Whitehall; it needs a local drive.

In the past, the Government have challenged the east midlands to work together, and there has been progress. Our new interim development corporation is working to generate nearly £5 billion a year of GVA for our regional economy, 4,500 homes and 84,000 net additional jobs. Transport for the East Midlands provides collective leadership on strategic transport issues, agreeing major investment priorities. There is joint work on strong political consensus across the region on a coherent vision for HS2 around Toton. Partners are working on a business case for an inland freeport, centred around East Midlands airport. We have secured two sites on the longlist for the STEP fusion programme. We are working together on developing defined economic corridors for the A46 and the A50, and partners are working across the region on our covid-19 response.

There are other great projects under way: the Space Park in Leicester, pioneering world-leading research and engineering in space technologies; work in Derby and Derbyshire on future fuels such as hydrogen in partnership with Toyota; and a recently announced partnership with Thomas Heatherwick to reimagine the future of Nottingham city in a post-covid world.

These examples demonstrate the huge potential and the collaboration happening across the region, but the current system is constraining. A combined authority

would change that, giving a new mechanism for devolution, pan-regional determination of strategic priorities, dialogue with Government and a credible delivery partner. For all the many boards and bodies that we now have and all the work we are doing together, none has the financial clout or the legal powers to deliver. This is the next step that we need to take.

The initial priorities for the east midlands authority could include a strategic approach to working with industry on a zero-carbon future and full-fibre connectivity for the east midlands, establishing it as one of the most digitally enabled regions of the UK. It could manage a co-ordinated and targeted plan for transport infrastructure that supports our wider growth, particularly through delivering the benefits of HS2, the development corporation, the freeport and our wider spatial vision. It could help us to put together a skills system aligned to our region's future economic landscape and in tune with the needs of our residents, with more people in employment in higher-skilled jobs, to support business growth and productivity and ensure that all our communities can benefit from that growth.

A joined-up east midlands-wide tourism, culture and heritage strategy could help us to showcase our region and its assets to the world, including our world-class destinations—the Peak district, Sherwood forest, Bosworth battlefield—our vibrant cities and our rich heritage. Bringing partners together in this way offers enormous potential to tackle the great challenges of our times, including climate change. We have begun that journey through initiatives such as the midlands engine 10-point plan for green growth, but there is much more that we can do by working together, pooling capacity, innovation and resources. We are famous for our invention and innovation and can become a world leader in green growth with the right incentives.

In summary, I believe that this is the right time to create a strongly governed east midlands combined authority. Any successful reform is a combination of strong central Government direction and locally led implementation. The current covid-19 crisis demonstrates that: the best of our response has been where central Government have provided the policy and local areas have implemented it. We know from our joint work on HS2, the development corporation and the freeport that there is latent potential for inward investment. The east midlands has a low level of private capital and now more than ever, with Government funds strained by covid, we need to attract investment to our region to fuel that recovery, growth and prosperity. We have so much to offer, and bringing our undoubted potential to the market in a unified and coherent way will pay dividends now and for future generations.

If the UK economy and society are going to move forward quickly, decisions must be made at the right level, freeing us up locally to work across wider areas and to get on with the job of securing growth and prosperity. I am asking the Government to look at this carefully, to work with local stakeholders in the region and to support us in trying to make it happen.

7.15 pm

The Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government (Luke Hall): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) on securing this extremely important debate. He articulated his points passionately on behalf of his community, and I can certainly assure

him that his ambition to secure a more prosperous future for the east midlands is shared in every corner of the Government.

I also take the opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend on his new role as leader of Nottinghamshire County Council. It is great to see such strong local leadership being provided, which we all recognise is essential to the mission of levelling up. He talked articulately about our passion and commitment to unlocking economic prosperity across all regions of the country, and that is absolutely right. It is why we have made levelling up and the levelling-up agenda a central part of our economic strategy. We plan to address the long-standing economic inequalities, delivering economic opportunity and improving lives and livelihoods up and down the country. Wherever someone was born and wherever they grow up, we believe that they should have an equal opportunity to get on in life, thrive and find the type of opportunity that they want in their life.

As the Prime Minister announced in May, our landmark levelling-up White Paper will be published later this year. It will set out and articulate bold new policies that will improve opportunity, support businesses and boost livelihoods across the country, including in Nottinghamshire and the east midlands. Levelling up is about providing the sort of momentum to address precisely the long-standing local inequalities that my hon. Friend articulated so clearly, providing the means for people to pursue life chances that previously had been out of reach for too many people in too many communities.

We are backing up these ambitions with considerable funding to help to unlock the investments most needed in our communities, particularly as we help local places to rebuild and recover from the pandemic. The White Paper will be a natural continuation of our commitment and support to local places, particularly building on the £4.8 billion levelling-up fund that we announced in the spending review. That fund is enabling local areas across the whole of the UK to invest in the type of infrastructure that improves everyday life. That could be regenerating town centres and high streets, upgrading local transport networks, and investing in cultural and heritage assets—exactly the kind of projects that my hon. Friend said are so urgently needed in towns and places in the east midlands.

We published the prospectus in March and explained how we are welcoming bids from all parts of the country, as everywhere has its local challenges, but we have also been clear about the areas of the country that have the highest category of need based on the fund's priority themes of economic recovery, transport connectivity and regeneration. We have recognised the need in Nottinghamshire with three districts—Bassetlaw, Mansfield, and Newark and Sherwood—as well as the city of Nottingham being identified as category 1, so benefiting from that £125,000 of capacity funding to help them to work up bids for later rounds of the funds. In Derbyshire, Derby and the district of Chesterfield, Derbyshire Dales, Erewash and High Peak have been identified as category 1, along with the city of Leicester. Furthermore, we are recognising explicitly through the levelling-up fund prospectus the crucial role of Members of Parliament in championing the interests of their communities and understanding their local priorities.

Before turning to devolution, I want to mention the community renewal fund, which sits alongside the levelling-up fund and is enabling places to pilot new

[Luke Hall]

approaches, tackling the skills, employment and local business support challenges that are faced in different local communities. Ultimately, the UK community renewal fund will help us to pave the way for the introduction of the new UK shared prosperity fund from 2022, about which we will be saying more in an investment framework later this year.

It is important for local areas, councils and groups of communities to look at the dual opportunities of the levelling-up fund and the UK community renewal fund, which have the potential to complement each other extremely positively. Given that many places in Nottinghamshire and the east midlands are among the high-priority areas for UK community fund investment, and given the excellent work that east midlands councils have done in developing plans for more investment in the region, I have no doubt that they will be grasping the opportunities presented by both those important funds.

Nottinghamshire has submitted proposed sites for the STEP programme—an ambitious plan to design and construct a prototype energy plant—including the Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station. In March it was announced that the east midlands freeport—based around East Midlands airport, the busiest cargo airport in the country—would be one of eight new freeports. We entirely recognise the scale of the opportunity that that presents for communities in the east midlands. The region's connectivity to other freeports and the combination of an airport and a rail port create a distinctive offer in comparison with those of other freeports in England, and we are keen to see all partners working together constructively to deliver this for the east midlands.

I am pleased that our officials at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government are currently assessing the proposal from the East Midlands Development Corporation, covering Ratcliffe-on-Soar, East Midlands airport and Toton. I commend the councils involved, including Nottinghamshire County Council, for maintaining the momentum and setting up a companies interim vehicle to show intent. I also note that only yesterday local partners met the Minister for Housing, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher), and engaged in productive discussions on progress to date as well as future plans. I understand that the excellent collaborative work of councils in developing these proposals has led to the formation of an Alchemy Board bringing together local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and universities. They are to be commended for working together. It is no surprise that given all this co-operation, consideration is now being given to what devolution should mean in the east midlands.

As I said earlier, the Prime Minister will publish a landmark levelling-up White Paper later this year, which will articulate the bold new policy interventions that will improve livelihoods as we recover from the pandemic. We have already made huge strides towards rebalancing the economy and empowering local government. That has been supported by our programme of devolution, one of the largest in recent decades, including nine mayoral devolution deals and one non-mayoral devolution

deal in Cornwall. Forty-one per cent. of the country is now served by metro Mayors, and nearly £7.5 billion of investment funding is being unlocked over 30 years for those combined authority Mayors. That is already paying dividends, with Mayors delivering the programmes that local people want to see on the ground, accountable to the electorate and shaping local priorities.

We recognise that the country is large and diverse, and that what works for our city regions, particularly those with single-tier local authorities, might not be right for every part of the country. Our plans for further devolution will be included in the White Paper which we will launch later this year. Local support for governance changes is of course a key principle for us, and we will welcome proposals from areas for local government reorganisation where there is strong support. However, we appreciate that reform of an area's local government is most effectively achieved through locally led proposals which are put forward by those who know the area and which have a good deal of support among the councils and stakeholders.

I wholly recognise the complexities of the east midlands, with its three unitary city councils, three county councils and 22 district and borough councils, but there are already clear signs of their willingness to work together. We want to help the area to build on that potential, and it will be extremely interesting to hear more about the proposals my hon. Friend has highlighted today to allow more decisions to be made locally to better serve residents. I welcome the discussions that he has begun, with vigour and passion, and I look forward to further discussions with him and other local leaders to hear how those proposals can be taken forward.

I am aware that Members and local leaders in other parts of the east midlands are also looking at locally appropriate solutions to help deliver levelling up, and I would very much welcome hearing more about that in due course as well. This is an extremely important area, and I think we can make progress working with my hon. Friend, and we will consider his proposals, which I look forward to discussing in more detail. I thank him for bringing this debate to the Chamber today, and we will certainly reflect on the points he has raised as we continue to pursue our levelling-up agenda right across the UK.

Despite the challenges of covid-19, ensuring that the whole country can benefit from the same opportunities remains a core part of our agenda. We will tackle geographical disparities in key services and outcomes across the UK, improving health, education and skills, increasing jobs and growth, building stronger and safer communities, and improving infrastructure and connectivity. We believe that all areas of the country should have the means to positively shape their own future. This is more important now than ever as we look towards the road of recovery. I look forward to working with Members of Parliament and local council leaders from the east midlands to ensure that we can deliver this for our country.

Question put and agreed to.

7.45 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 Afriyie (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
Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
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
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)	Jim Shannon
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
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
Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
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
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
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (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)	Wera Hobhouse
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
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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)	Wera Hobhouse
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)	Stuart Andrew
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
Sir Jeffrey M Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
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
David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
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)	Ben Lake
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
Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)	Wera Hobhouse

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Jim Shannon
John Glen (Salisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Green (Ashford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Green (Chesham and Amersham) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
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)	Ben Lake
Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba)	Kenny MacAskill
Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr 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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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 Heappey (Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
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
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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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
Kim Leadbeater (Batley and Spen) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Jim Shannon
Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
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 McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John McNally (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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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
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)	Wera Hobhouse
Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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
James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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
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)	Wera Hobhouse
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
Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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
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
Anum Qaisar-Javed (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
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
Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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
Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)	Ben Lake
Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Spellar (Warley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (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
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)	Wera Hobhouse
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
Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (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
Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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
Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (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
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
Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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
Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC)	Ben Lake
Gavin Williamson (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 14 July 2021

[ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

Town Deals: Covid-19 Recovery

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 25 February).

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

9.25 am

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): Good morning. I remind hon. Members participating, virtually and physically, that they must arrive for the start of a debate in Westminster Hall and are expected to remain for the entire debate.

9.26 am

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Town Deals and covid-19 recovery

It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell.

For too long, towns across the country have been in decline. Once bustling with shoppers and visitors, they have become blighted by high levels of deprivation, a lack of opportunity, and empty shops, leaving a chasm, where there was once aspiration, for entire communities, particularly across the north of England. That is why I welcome the Government's commitment to levelling up and unleashing the economic potential of towns across the country.

In the course of this Parliament, the towns fund will invest £3.6 billion across our country in communities such as Southport, Barrow-in-Furness, Blackpool, Norwich, Darlington and many more. It will help to reshape and unleash the economic potential of 101 towns through regeneration, connectivity, skills and culture. This funding also includes the future high streets fund, which aims to renew town centres and high streets to make them more attractive places to visit, thereby increasing footfall, driving growth and supporting local businesses. That is exactly what Lord Street, in my constituency, and other parts of Southport need.

The pandemic has kept people away from the high street. Although more people shopping online is nothing new, restaurants have also adapted to a new model of working. People are eating takeaways and restaurant meals at home and they are shopping online. As convenient as that is, and as good as the hospitality sector in Southport has been at adapting, there is a real fear that hospitality and retail will suffer as we come out of the pandemic, because people's shopping and leisure habits will have changed remarkably. In tourist economies such as Southport, that is not an insignificant thing. That is why we need to think differently about town centres and make them a destination, thereby giving people a real reason not only to visit but to spend money and to make return visits.

Town deals provide a meaningful avenue to rebuild many communities across the country as we emerge from the pandemic. That is why I very much welcome the bid submitted by my constituency: it has the potential to drive forward growth and investment and to create

opportunity. I want to illustrate the benefits of the towns fund by informing hon. Members about how it will benefit Southport.

Let me explain for those who may be unfamiliar with my constituency that Southport is a coastal town in the north of England with a large tourism and hospitality sector. Its high street, Lord Street, was the inspiration behind the tree-lined boulevards of Paris today, including the Champs-Élysées. Today, however, Southport faces many of the issues that sadly are common in many northern towns that have missed out on decades of regeneration. Those who come to Southport will see the grandeur of what it once was, but sadly with a rising number of empty shops and marred by an increasing number of takeaways and vaping shops. We have improvements in educational standards, large-scale investment coming in and hundreds of new homes being built, but the town centre, like others across the country, looks like it needs support.

We started with £1 million of accelerated funding for shovel-ready projects: £900,000 was used to rejuvenate the market hall as a state-of-the-art facility with an innovative approach to dining—it opens next week—and a further £100,000 to create a “boulevard of light” on Lord Street. That, combined with securing a £37.5 million investment in my town overall, is allowing us to unlock our economic potential.

I pay tribute to Rob Fletcher, chair of the Southport town deal board, and to all those who have served on it, including the council executive member and officers, local businesses, leaders in health and education, and the consultant Turley. I also serve on the board, and that is what makes the towns fund different: not only do the Government believe in the economic potential of these towns, but Members have been invited to be directly involved with the projects and personally associated with the submissions. Together with stakeholders across my constituency, I have lobbied and supported the bid from day one.

The funding will see £30 million invested to create a new theatre, conference and eventing centre on the waterfront and a business incubator space, bringing highly skilled, highly paid jobs back to our town centre. The Southport town deal bid will help our town rebuild its reputation as the premier tourist destination of the north-west and allow us to attract millions of new visitors and business delegates. It has the potential to unlock £350 million of investment in our local economy. That is why the towns fund is so important. It is not just a spend; it is a true investment.

Key to the success of the deal is the private sector contributing many more millions into the local economy. Although I welcome Southport's receiving such significant investment, town deals alone cannot solve the problem of dwindling town centres. Towns must change. I would like to say three things about that, and I shall say them very briefly as I know others wish to speak.

First, I want to raise with the Minister the issue of business rates, which are a significant barrier to businesses, particularly small businesses, in my constituency. Many of the buildings that stand empty in Southport today are large heritage buildings that are too big and too expensive to maintain; many businesses simply cannot afford the rising costs associated with their upkeep. If town centres are to resemble anything like what they once were, or even to adapt to the new normal, the

[Damien Moore]

Government must overhaul the business rates system and make it easy for businesses to open up in town centres. That would help to reward innovation and risk.

Secondly, I want briefly to mention parking charges. Local authorities have a role to play in creating change, encouraging investment and bringing people back to our town centres. It is extraordinary that, in this day and age, councils still take a short-sighted approach to parking. Local residents cannot travel into their own town centres and support small businesses without facing exorbitant charges or receiving penalties. They should be able to do so. Local authorities, including Sefton Council, should enable that to happen as soon as possible. They should incentivise shopping, as they do in many other towns—for example, Lytham, across the Ribble estuary, provides a period of free parking. My constituents want the same.

Thirdly, connectivity has a huge role to play in ensuring that towns can attract a greater number of visitors. That gives me an opportunity to once again raise with the Minister two important pieces of rail infrastructure that are critical if the Government are serious, as I believe they are, about levelling up towns across the country: the maintenance of a direct rail service to Manchester Piccadilly and the reopening of the Burscough curves, connecting my town with the northern corridor via Preston. If our economy is to bounce back strongly, the Government need to do more to ensure that towns, particularly coastal towns, are not disconnected from major rail networks. Connecting my constituency to Manchester and Preston is just as important to levelling up as are faster trains to London.

I recognise that, over the last year and a half, the Government have spent a total of £400 billion on measures to help our economy recover from the pandemic. In particular, I welcome the levelling-up fund, the furlough scheme, the business rates holiday, bounce back loans, new recovery loans, the self-employment income support scheme and the cut to VAT—and who in the tourism and hospitality sector could forget the eat out to help out scheme, which was a real lifeline for many constituents and businesses in Southport?

I have reason to be optimistic for Southport as we emerge from the pandemic. We have submitted a bid to the restoring your railway fund to reopen the Burscough curves. The major department store Beales has announced that it will return to our high street in August, its third reopening after those in Poole and Peterborough. Southport will get its own version of the London Eye, thanks to Pleasureland owner Norman Wallis. I look forward to Southport Cove being built and the £40 million investment it will bring and the jobs it will create. Despite not being in Manchester, it was ranked among the 15 projects to look forward to in Manchester by the *Manchester Evening News*. Our £37.5 million town deal, the second largest allocation in the country, is a testament to how right they are and to how much town deals can drive growth and investment. The Government are laying the foundations that will improve the chances for many in the future.

The Government are unlocking the full potential of towns and communities by giving them the support that they need to thrive. Given that the fund was announced at a time when the Government were tackling an unprecedented health crisis, that is particularly welcome.

Some might have been forgiven for saying that the Government should have paused or slowed down and focused on the pandemic. Others might have encouraged a complete cessation of the deal. The Government have been giving hope and optimism to places such as Southport by helping communities build back better as we overcome the pandemic.

9.35 am

Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (Damien Moore) on securing this important debate.

It is vital that we level up areas left behind by rampant regional inequalities and a decade of austerity. My constituency of Leicester East suffers from structural disadvantages compared with wealthier areas of the country. The average weekly income for full-time employees in Leicester East is £420. That is £130 a week less than the east Midlands as a whole and £160 less than the UK average. The proportion of people claiming unemployment benefits is also higher in my constituency than it is at the regional and national level, as is the rate of food bank use, which has worsened during the pandemic.

I fear that the town deals will not address those severe inequalities. Indeed, the policy has faced repeated accusations of cronyism, gerrymandering and prioritising funding for Conservative-supporting areas. More than 80% of the towns set to receive Government funding through the £3.6 billion town fund are represented by Conservative MPs. Among the 86 towns that have had funding deals agreed so far, 72 are Conservative-held, five are in areas with both a Conservative and a Labour MP, and just nine are in Labour-held seats. That means that so far £1.6 billion-worth of investment has been signed off in Conservative constituencies compared with just over £200 million in seats held by Labour.

The process of selection and the criteria used by the Government have come under scrutiny, with both the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office producing reports that were critical of the lack of transparency and impartiality. Rather than the 100 towns with the highest score being selected, it was decided that the highest priority towns in each region would be eligible by default, with Ministers then free to choose from the others regardless of their need, so some towns that scored very high on need lost out. For instance, my community in Leicester is one of the most deprived areas of the country, yet we were not eligible for funding, so it is hard to escape the conclusion that the towns fund is a vehicle for political corruption that uses the rhetoric of combating regional inequality to mask its nefarious party-political intentions.

Similar concerns exist about the Government's levelling-up fund. Among 93 English regions placed in the priority group of three tiers to receive money from the £4.8 billion fund, 31 are included while not ranked as being in the top third most deprived places by the average deprivation score. Of those 31, 26 are entirely represented by Conservative MPs, with the others having at least one Conservative MP. Four places are in the uppermost level for funding despite being ranked in the bottom third of English regions by the deprivation score. All those areas have Conservative MPs, including Richmond (Yorks), the Chancellor's constituency, which is among the top fifth of the most prosperous places in

England according to the average deprivation score. That raises severe concerns that the levelling-up fund and the towns deals are not designed to address regional inequality, but instead are designed to benefit the Conservative party.

To assuage those concerns, I urge the Minister to publish the funding metric as a matter of urgency. I would also be grateful if he confirmed how much of the towns fund and the levelling-up fund is really allocated funding, and how much is repurposed funding that was already covered by previous initiatives.

I fear that there is a dangerous pattern emerging with the Government's strategy. After 10 years of devastating austerity, they are now turning on the taps of public spending in areas that are electorally convenient for them. We cannot allow this hugely cynical pork barrel politics to continue. It is gravely damaging not only for neglected communities across the country, but for the health of our democracy. We need a bold, nationwide and internationalist recovery from coronavirus, including a radical green new deal to rebuild the country with a more just and sustainable economy. Instead of this damaging agenda in which only certain areas are allocated funding based on whether it benefits the governing party, we desperately need a recognition that in our country of deep and unequal wealth, the top 1% should be asked to contribute a bit more in order to fund the services that the entire country relies on.

9.40 am

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Rosindell, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Damien Moore) on securing the debate. I enjoyed his speech, but there was one notable omission. He did not mention Southport's most famous son, Red Rum, who lived in a stable behind a garage. He cured his ills on the beach and won three grand nationals from there. Hopefully, that will be remembered in Southport's towns deal.

Lowestoft has its own towns deal, which will play a key role in the post-covid recovery and in transforming the town, making it a compelling place to live in, work in and visit. The town investment plan was produced with the Lowestoft place board, on which I sit, under the chairmanship of Stephen Javes, and special thanks must go to the officer team at East Suffolk Council, who are now hard at work in turning an exciting vision into a compelling reality. In many ways, covid has accelerated processes of change in our towns that were under way in any case, but it has hit Lowestoft particularly hard, and the immediate challenge that we face is to get people back into the town, where there are so many independent businesses offering bespoke and special products and experiences. That is the objective of the Bouncing Back campaign, which is being promoted by the *Lowestoft Journal* and East Suffolk Council.

There is also a need for private landlords to play their role in coming forward with realistic rents and lease expectations that properly take into account current market conditions. We need to step off the unseemly not-so-merry-go-round whereby tenants, full of expectation, sign leases with the benefit of a rent-free period. When that ends, they find their businesses unable to sustain an unrealistically high rent. They leave, then someone else comes in, and the whole saga is repeated. We need to stop this. I appreciate that it is not necessarily a matter

for the Minister, but it is a matter for my previous profession as a chartered surveyor. From my experience over the years—I have not been in practice for more than 11 years—the commercial property sector has been much slower than, say, the agricultural sector to accept market realities and to adjust rents downwards when they need to go down, and in line with what tenants can afford to pay. Perhaps commercial landlords are clinging to the notion of the upward-only rent review clause, which is now very much a thing of the past. They and their lenders should fully accept—I acknowledge that some of them do—that this is in the past and work in the new reality.

The Lowestoft towns deal is based on the town's rich history and heritage, and it seeks to take full advantage of the new opportunities emerging in the marine environment, in renewable energy and sustainable fishing, and in showcasing the south beach and the close proximity to both the Suffolk Broads and the Norfolk Broads. The initial public sector funding of £24.9 million will unlock a minimum of £354 million of private sector investment. A wide variety of projects are proposed, including the station quarter, the historic quarter, the cultural quarter and the marine science campus. They may well require some additional pump-priming from sources such as the levelling-up fund and the community renewal fund. My concern is that, at present, Lowestoft is unfairly disadvantaged in submitting bids to those funds. Despite high levels of deprivation, the town is neither in category 1 for the levelling-up fund nor is it designated a priority place for the community renewal fund.

Lowestoft is remarkably similar in many ways to Great Yarmouth, 10 miles up the coast, with the same challenges and opportunities. Yet Yarmouth is in category 1 and is a priority place. I do not begrudge Great Yarmouth that; it is right that it should have those designations, but so should Lowestoft. Nelson ward in Yarmouth is the 39th most deprived nationally, but Kirkley in Lowestoft is the 25th. In Yarmouth 20% of children live in low-income families but 25.5% do in Lowestoft. In Yarmouth, 22.5% of the population have been diagnosed with a long-term, life-limiting illness or disability; in Lowestoft, that figure is 28%.

The explanation given for that disparity and unfairness is that Lowestoft is now part of a large district council area, the recently formed East Suffolk Council, where there are far better-off places, such as Aldeburgh and Southwold, which conceal this hidden deprivation, though it is not so hidden from my perspective. However, I am not sure that argument holds water. King's Lynn in west Norfolk—again, somewhere I have no grievance against, primarily because I used to spend summer holidays there with my late grandmother—is a priority place and in category 1. I do not have a problem with that. I do not deny that there are deprivation challenges in King's Lynn, but is that really the case in places such as Brancaster and Burnham Market, which has been dubbed “Chelsea-on-sea”?

I am not holding out a begging bowl. What I am looking for is fairness and a level playing field. At present, we do not have that for Lowestoft. The Government have been helpful in enabling us to secure the funding for the Gull Wing bridge and the Lowestoft flood defence scheme, two vital infrastructure projects that are now under construction. Moving forward, we must

[*Peter Aldous*]

be given the same opportunity as other similar places, in being able to submit bids to the levelling-up fund, the community renewal fund and the forthcoming UK shared prosperity fund, from the same place on the starting grid as towns and places with similar challenges.

I have written to the Minister highlighting these concerns. I have spoken to him and he has listened patiently. I urge him and his colleagues to look again and to right this wrong.

9.48 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for Southport (Damien Moore) and congratulate him on introducing the debate, to which the Minister will reply. I always like to give a Northern Ireland perspective to such debates and say what we have been able to do there. I hope to be able to support the Minister. The reason we are able to do these things through our Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland is that the central Government here ensured that all parts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland had the opportunity to respond in a positive fashion.

I understand that health is not a part of this debate, but that is another area where we could act collectively, with all the regions together. It is better to have a single strategy and purpose for us all to work together. That is just a by the way comment—it is not for this debate.

I have been astounded by the resilience and determination of our high street sector during this dreadful time. I always make it my business to shop local, and I know that other Members do the same. If I can get it locally, that is where I will buy it. If I cannot get it locally, I will look elsewhere, but I make it my business to shop in the wee bakery down the road and the clothes shop on the other side of the square. If I need any hardware stuff, I will go to Ray Grahams in Newtownards or N. G. Bell's in Ballywalter. I do all my shopping locally because I know how important it is to support the high street. Before covid happened, we were getting to a stage where there were no vacancies whatsoever on our high street. Some have appeared over the last period of time but, thank goodness, most of them have been filled.

The high street, by and large, has been very resilient. From changing regulations to decisions made overnight, they have carried out what this Government have required of them with a stoicism that is the best of British, yet the facts are clear: for many, the threat of another period of lockdown will be the end of their business. Many high street businesses need the trade that they had before covid, and even if we get back to where we were then, I suspect that we will not see that level of trade again until we move out of covid in its entirety. Those businesses need continued support in the interim, and I am thankful that the Government recognise that need and are looking to meet it.

In Northern Ireland, our Minister for the Economy has put in place two schemes, the high street stimulus scheme and the holiday at home voucher scheme. Every person in Northern Ireland aged 18 and over will be eligible to apply for a pre-paid card worth £100 to spend on the local high street, which is designed to stimulate local businesses, including retail and hospitality sector outlets. Following the pandemic, that is a very positive

scheme. Eligible individuals aged 18 or over will be asked to apply for that pre-paid card through a dedicated online portal. The card must be used in bricks and mortar businesses in Northern Ireland, and cannot be used online. Some online businesses say that that is a disappointment, but the scheme being specific along those lines means that people have to physically go to the high street, which is what we want to see. We want footfall to return and we want to see people out and about. It is encouraging that those high street stops that were able to open throughout covid-19 received lots of footfall, especially in my home town of Newtownards. The chamber of trade there has done some incredibly good stuff, and should be commended for it. The high street stimulus scheme means that some 1.4 million people in Northern Ireland will spend £140 million on our high streets, rather than online. It is a good scheme; it will have a multiplier effect that will help bring many more customers back through the doors of local shops in the retail, hospitality and other sectors.

The holiday at home voucher scheme will allow Northern Ireland households to claim back 50% for a stay of two nights or more in certified accommodation. This is another scheme that is very specific to the hospitality trade, because we in Northern Ireland probably depend on tourism more than most districts, although many colleagues in the House from Scotland, Wales and England will tell me that tourism is a key factor for them as well. Other vouchers will offer 50% off visits to attractions and tourism experience providers up to a value of £20. The central economic theme of my local council, Ards and North Down Borough Council, is tourism, because—I say this honestly, and very proudly—we live in a beautiful area. I live near Strangford Lough, and I am very fortunate to live there. It is a key tourist attraction. The Mount Stewart estate, which the National Trust is involved in, is a headquarters for us: it is a place of great historical value, and I have extended an invitation to the Minister of State for Northern Ireland to come over for a visit sometime in August. We also have the aquarium at Portaferry, the water sports and potential for tourism at Strangford Lough, and many other historical places to visit, so tourism is a really good theme for our council, and those moneys through the voucher scheme and so on have been able to help with that.

Vouchers will be allocated on a first come, first served basis, and each household can apply for each type of voucher. Households can then claim their voucher money back by uploading their receipt and voucher details online. The scheme will be launched in the autumn, because we figure that in the autumn things might be falling back a wee bit, so it will be good to have a scheme in place to drive demand after the summer season. I believe that both those schemes are a good use of public money and I congratulate the Ministers—it was Diane Dodds and it is now Gordon Lyons—on their research and work in introducing those schemes. We all eagerly await more details on the dates of release.

I referred to the active chamber of trade in Ards, which works proactively and positively in its engagement with all the shops in the high street in Newtownards and elsewhere. I will also make a plug for a former colleague who used to sit with me in the Assembly. Simon Hamilton stepped down and is now involved with Belfast chamber of trade. He is a guy with great potential and has great acumen for his job. I think that he also sees the benefits of all those things.

However, as welcome as this scheme most certainly is, it is not enough. I hate to say that, because it sounds terrible when someone says, “This is not enough”. However, I say it to make the point that there has to be an ongoing policy and strategy, because I believe that more needs to be done to secure high street shops. I noticed that one of the shops over here—was it John Lewis?—said that it would turn some of its shops into flats and accommodation, so there is a trend for some to take away from the high street. But I think we need to strengthen the high street and facilitate online reach with a town centre base.

We all understand that every penny sown into viable businesses helps to retain employment, and I see great potential for employment. Such businesses bring dividends to the local economy, not only to local suppliers but to Government resources through sustained tax and national insurance contributions, because when we work, we pay our national insurance and tax, so we all benefit. It is like a merry-go-round—we work and then the money returns to Government, and hopefully enough money to sustain what we are trying to do.

That is why I was very excited to hear of the town and city funding. I know that my local council—Ards and North Down Borough Council—was immediately working out how best we could revitalise our town with that funding. However, an issue was that projects had to be almost shovel-ready. Fortunately, we probably had a great many schemes that were shovel-ready, but there was a problem with the planning system; it takes months upon months to navigate it. So I suppose it is a case of having the planning system in place to ensure that these schemes can go ahead.

Again, I know that this is not within the Minister’s remit, but I ask him in his summing up to say whether he has had any discussions with the Minister for the Economy in Northern Ireland, to exchange ideas and see what we can do to help each other, because I believe that wherever we are in this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, we should help each other. I also believe that we have ideas that go well in Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales. We can do it better together, and I certainly wish to encourage that.

I know that my local council is making plans to prepare for new tranches of funding and I ask Ministers back home to work closely with local councillors to ensure that the funding goes where the need is. Local councils are on the frontline; they have the staff and the local councillors to push the strategy and the policies, so I think councils are the places where the schemes and the tranches of funding should be directed.

I have been made aware of a tremendous project. I am very pleased to encourage all new projects in my constituency of Strangford, and we are in discussions with planners and some of the developers who are keen to provide what I will refer to as “a staycationer’s dream”, in the form of glamping in the most beautiful part of the United Kingdom. It is a new scheme in Grey Abbey, the neighbouring village to mine. I think it has incredible potential, as do the developer and the council.

However, we need infrastructure in place to secure this wonderful environmental proposal, which will bring money into the local economy as well as preserving the beauty of nature in the area. That proposal is attractive because it is in an area of outstanding natural beauty,

which we want to preserve. It will also be good if we can tie some tourism into that in a way that is not obtrusive or overly visible but takes advantage of that outstanding natural beauty. Can we look at towns being able to use towns funding to enhance their potential for tourism? I know the Minister will refer to tourism when he sums up, which is a key issue for all of us who are speaking and others who were not able to come to the debate.

I believe that local councils are best placed to advise the Government on how to get every penny to where it needs to go, and ultimately back into the coffers. I look forward with pleasure to the Minister’s response and the contributions of those who speak after me. I hope he will assure us that councils will be able to advise and will be involved in all future town deals.

9.59 am

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell, and to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Damien Moore) on securing this important debate, and I thank him for supporting me, in his other role as Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Parliamentary Private Secretary, with the matter of Walleys Quarry landfill in my constituency, which I will touch on later because it relates to the town deal and the need to solve that problem before we get the benefits of the investment.

Before I talk more about Newcastle-under-Lyme, I want to start by addressing some of the comments of the hon. Member for Leicester East (Claudia Webbe). Let me quote at some length from one of her colleagues:

“For far too long the ambitions, needs and values of nine million people in towns across Britain have not been heard.

Our economic model treats cities as engines of growth, which at best drag surrounding towns along in their wake, causing life to become harder, less secure and less hopeful for too many people in towns in recent decades.

Our political system is blind to the values and experiences of people who live in our towns, wrongly treating cities as a proxy for the national opinion.

After the EU Referendum starkly exposed the growing gulf between towns and cities, it is clear that this is no longer sustainable.”

Those are brilliant words. They are the words of the shadow Foreign Secretary, the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), who represents another northern town, when she launched the Centre For Towns back in December 2017. Actually, it was the Conservative party and Government who took that agenda, ran with it and spoke to the people who felt they had not been listened to. Meanwhile, at the election, the Labour party doubled down on their votes in the cities and from people who voted remain and wanted to reverse the referendum result, whereas in most of the towns in the red wall, such as the one I have the honour to represent, people voted leave, wanted to be listened to and wanted their vote and their town to be respected. It is little wonder that the results of the election followed from that.

I believe that only 22 of the 101 towns invited to bid were in districts controlled by Conservative administrations and 39 were controlled by Labour administrations, so on the point that the hon. Member for Leicester East made, this is really about people voting with their feet, because they saw that this Government were proposing to offer something to towns that had been left behind

[Aaron Bell]

for far too long—towns such as Wigan and Newcastle-under-Lyme. I make absolutely no apology for that, and I am really glad that the Government have finally grasped the nettle on towns that have been left behind. That is not necessarily a consequence of politics. It is as much about economics; it is about people moving to cities and the globalisation of jobs. It is also about the change in retail—many of our high streets depend on retail. I will say a bit more about that.

On 8 June, 30 towns received funding in the most recent wave of town deal funding—the Secretary of State announced a total of £725 million—one of which was Newcastle-under-Lyme. I am very proud of our bid and our board, of which I am a member. I thank Trevor McMillan, who is also the vice-chancellor of Keele University in my constituency, for his leadership of the board, and Councillor Stephen Sweeney, the deputy leader of the council, for his role on it. We put in a tremendous bid, and we managed to get nearly the full £25 million, which will be incredibly valuable in regenerating Newcastle-under-Lyme.

I also want to put in a word for some of our other bids. There are many schemes, as the Minister knows. Newcastle College, which is one of the best further education colleges in the entire country and was one of the first ever to get “outstanding” across the board from Ofsted, has a bid for an institute of technology. Obviously, that is not within the Ministry’s remit, but there is an enabling bid with it because the site that it wants requires that we move the council’s depot, which is in completely the wrong location, to somewhere else on the site. There is an enabling bid through the levelling-up fund, and there is also a community renewal fund bid in.

I agree completely with what the hon. Member for Strangford said. We need to find better ways of helping local authorities and local community organisations to get bids. A lot of these places have not had investment and do not have the experience of putting in bids. They do not necessarily have a pipeline and things that are shovel-ready. The community renewal fund, in particular, was on a very tight timescale that also coincided with the local elections. We got a good bid together, but in some ways it is the same people who always bid for things, so I want to find ways to reach out to communities—even villages and parish councils—that could bid for some of these things but do not have the expertise or the resources to do that. We need ways to support our authorities and councils, even down to parish council level. That would be really welcome in making sure everybody can bid in to these funds in the future.

I will speak a little bit about Newcastle’s bid, which has three main objectives. First, to open up new growth opportunities through enhanced physical and digital connectivity. We will have new electric vehicle charging infrastructure and improved wi-fi across the town centre, better public transport and better cycling measures. Secondly, we will encourage increased footfall in the town centre by diversifying and enhancing it. We will demolish and redevelop lots of previous sites. Some have been demolished already with the advance funds. There is not much to point to at the moment because things are going down, but very soon things will be coming up again, and I know that will be a real moment of hope for the town.

Finally, the bid aims to channel investment into regenerating communities, particularly some of my most deprived wards such as Knutton and Chesterton. The master plan for Knutton includes improving business accommodation, a new village hall and village green, 240 new homes and improvements to road safety. There will also be investment into Chesterton and Cross Street, enabling high-quality housing for the local community—not only new housing but replenishing and replacing the existing stock.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman mentioned electric vehicle charging. Yesterday, his colleague, the hon. Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) proposed a ten-minute rule Bill that I think will be critical for the future if we are looking towards electric vehicles, and I was pleased to sponsor it and pleased that the hon. Lady brought that forward. The hon. Gentleman mentioned development, and I think the hon. Member for Kensington referred in her introduction yesterday to all new developments having those key charging points in place. Does he feel that that should be part of this?

Aaron Bell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. We absolutely need to ensure that we think about future technologies and those that are here today when we undertake development. We see that on the estate now; I think Speaker’s Court is having charging infrastructure installed. If we are to build new buildings, it makes sense that they should have those places for charging.

I should also mention that, as well as the £23.6 million from the town deal, we secured £11 million from the future high streets fund, which means the levelling up funding already secured by Newcastle-under-Lyme is more than £34 million, with other bids currently in. That future high streets fund bid is so crucial to the actual recovery from covid, which is the title of the debate. Unfortunately, covid has exacerbated trends that were already there in our town centre. We have lost an awful lot of tenants on our high street. We have a large high street and the Ironmarket pedestrianised area, but unfortunately there are an awful lot of empty shops at the moment.

The solution obviously cannot be more retail, because people are shopping online. We need more hospitality and housing in the town centre, and that is exactly what our future high streets bid will do, with the redevelopment of the long vacant Ryecroft site and the pulling down of the old civic offices, which I believe is beginning this week, although it will take quite a while because there is a lot of asbestos and it has to be done carefully. Again, these are real signs of regeneration. Things that have been left derelict and vacant for far too long are finally being addressed by this Government, by our town deal bid and by our future high streets fund bid.

That all shows the commitment of the Government to levelling up places such as Newcastle, which are long overdue some TLC, basically. Once we have got it all done—it will take a few years—we will actually have a better high street. We will build back better. We will have more skills, with a skills centre opening in Lancaster Buildings that will help people get back into jobs or to reskill, and we will have more attractive public spaces. That is important too, because the physical infrastructure of a town centre is so important for people’s experiences.

I should mention a couple of private sector issues blighting Newcastle that I think the Ministry should have an interest in. We have a large student flat building that has been left unfinished for many years, called the Sky Buildings. It is incredibly difficult to work out who can actually handle that process. Various companies have gone through liquidations and takeovers. The investors appear to have lost their money, but that has not been finalised as such. The council is not in a position to take it over through a compulsory purchase order because it is probably more of a liability than an asset now. This sort of thing can blight town centres. We need to find better ways of dealing with unfinished buildings, where the architect or the builders have essentially gone bust and left something unfinished, which can blight an area from a long time and discourages further private sector investment coming in.

Finally, it would not be a speech from me without my mentioning Walleys Quarry, the landfill site in my constituency. We already have £34 million of investment, and it will be nearly £50 million if we get this institute of technology bid, and these will make Newcastle such a better place, but there is a bleak cloud hanging over the town, and that is the landfill and the odour coming from the landfill. It is principally a DEFRA issue and a Department of Health and Social Care issue. However, it requires a multi-agency approach, and Staffordshire County Council and the Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council are involved as well. Any help that the Minister's Department can give us in getting this situation resolved as quickly as possible will be vital, because the stink from the landfill is undermining what is excellent news for Newcastle. When I announced the £23.5 million, people were obviously pleased but all the money in the world will not help unless we get this problem resolved. Through the Minister, I plead again to the Secretary of State and will raise it at Prime Minister's questions.

Newcastle-under-Lyme has so much potential. Finally we are unlocking it with this investment. I thank the Government for what they are doing and my hon. Friend the Member for Southport for calling this important debate.

10.10 am

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): It is good to see you in the chair, Mr Rosindell. I appreciate the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Opposition. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (Damien Moore) on securing the debate. Southport is a town I have enjoyed visiting but I did not know it was the model for Parisian boulevards—never let it be said that Westminster Hall debates are not educational. I agree about the need for good connectivity to Manchester so that my constituents can enjoy the Southport Eye, and I look forward to seeing it.

This is an important topic and a useful opportunity to look closely at what the Government have promised under the town deals, how much has been delivered and to consider whether this the right way to drive recovery from covid-19. I thank the Members who have spoken in this debate. We have heard about the importance of reasonable private rents, the need for reform of business rates, shopping local and wider access to funds. The hon. Member for Leicester East (Claudia Webbe) made important points about areas that have been left behind under austerity.

Labour wants to see towns up and down the country thrive, and we are pleased for any community that has managed to receive funding from the towns fund, but we have to put this into context. There is a reason why so many towns are struggling, in desperate need of investment, and why regional inequality is rife in this country and high streets at breaking point. It goes back far beyond the covid crisis. The Government like to talk about levelling up, but over the last 10 years they have imposed £15 billion cuts on local authorities. I hardly need to point out that that outweighs the one-off £3.6 billion towns fund that will benefit a minority of English towns. The pandemic has heaped even more pressure on local councils, but the Government have broken their promise to fully compensate them for the costs of tackling covid-19, leaving a further gaping funding gap to cover and forcing many to raise council tax to cover costs, making local families pay.

The long-term decline of the UK's high streets, with footfall down 10% since 2012, has complex reasons behind it and has left around one in 10 high street shops standing empty, even before coronavirus hit. In the past decade, 773 libraries, 750 youth centres, 1,300 children's centres and 835 public toilets have closed down largely because of austerity. In addition, our social care system is in crisis. After several years of kicking the can down the road, the plan for reform, which the Prime Minister claimed he had already prepared, has not been forthcoming. Families, care staff and local authorities are crying out for that plan. Most recently the Government appear to have confirmed our worst fear: the Chancellor intends to proceed with the £20 cut to universal credit from September, which will push more than half a million people, including 200,000 children, into poverty. How can the Government claim they are about levelling up one day and plunge some of our least well-off citizens into difficulties the next? That is not the way to recover from covid-19.

Even if administered fairly, the towns fund would only act as a sticking plaster over these problems. However, we do not know if it has been administered fairly because, typically of this Government, the allocations process is—I am being generous here—opaque. Let us not forget that a town in the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government's own constituency of Newark was selected for funding under the towns fund by the then Communities Minister, the right hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), while the current Secretary of State selected Darwen in the former Minister's constituency.

The allocation should have been a fair and open process but instead Ministers seem to have stitched up back-room deals that aim to funnel money into relatively wealthy areas and away from those who need it most. Ministers refused to consult elected mayors directly on the process concerning towns in their regions, despite the Government's own officials explicitly recommending that they do so.

Investigating the allocation process for the towns fund in November 2020, the Public Accounts Committee said:

“The selection process was not impartial...The justification offered by ministers for selecting individual towns are vague and based on sweeping assumptions. In some cases, towns were chosen by ministers despite being identified by officials as the very lowest priority...The Department has also not been open about the process it followed and it did not disclose the reasoning for

[Jeff Smith]

selecting or excluding towns. This lack of transparency has fuelled accusations of political bias in the selection process, and has risked the Civil Service's reputation for integrity and impartiality."

If the Government have nothing to hide, why not be transparent about the decision-making process?

For those who have been lucky enough to get some funding, it is now almost exactly two years since the towns fund was announced and the Government are still vague about what they actually hope to achieve using the fund and how they intend to measure success. Since the fund was announced, only 5% of the money committed so far—£90 million out of the promised £3.6 billion—has been paid out. Heads of terms have been agreed with only 53 of the towns, and it is unclear whether one single project has been delivered in full. In fact, there is a concern that, with so many delays, some projects may not be viable by the time the Government have finally stumped up the money.

The Government say they are aiming to deliver town deals by 2025-26. In a time of severe economic downturn following the pandemic and with support such as furlough ending and universal credit being cut, we need to support the covid recovery with a sense of urgency and boost local areas in that context. It only fuels the suspicion that the Government are more interested in stretching out the announcements when it most suits them, rather than urgently stimulating local growth and job creation.

If we want the towns fund to help with the recovery, how do we know if it is working? In a written answer earlier this week, the Minister said:

"The Department will publish a monitoring and evaluation strategy for the Towns Fund. This strategy will set out the evidenced framework and theory of change, which underpin the evaluation methodologies for the Towns Fund, a work plan, timeline and key milestones, and a bibliography."

Two years after they announced the fund, the Government say they "will publish" their strategy, so they have still not laid out how they are going to monitor and evaluate the fund.

Any funding for our towns is better than no funding at all, and Labour supports those who have been lucky enough to get something, but what about the majority who have not? This is, after all, the same Department that has announced a levelling-up fund that again pits regions and nations against each other for crucial funding and that will hand money to wealthy areas held by Cabinet Ministers ahead of areas in greater need.

The methodology prioritised the Chancellor's own local authority for regeneration funding ahead of more deprived areas, such as Barnsley, Flintshire, Coventry, Plymouth, Salford and the Wirral. Prioritised constituencies included those of four other members of the Cabinet. This Government cannot repair even a small part of what they have destroyed over the past 10 years using piecemeal pots of funding, let alone build back better from the covid pandemic.

Labour supports funding for every town and every region, and that has to be done transparently, fairly and with a say for local communities. Through the towns fund the Government are making promises to a minority of English towns, with many of those in need losing out. The Government need to set out a detailed account of exactly what the towns fund aims to achieve, what it

will fund and, importantly, how it will measure success. Piecemeal pots of funding do not make up for a decade of cuts to local communities.

Now, more than ever, we need to give all our local areas the funding they need to recover from the covid pandemic. The real yardstick of success will be if this Government put opportunities on everyone's doorsteps. We have seen little evidence so far that the towns fund will do that.

10.18 am

The Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government (Luke Hall): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this morning, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Damien Moore) on securing the debate and on opening it in the passionate way that he did. He talked fiercely about protecting his community, securing investment and enhancing it for the future. That really shines through to every Member in the House and, I am sure, to his constituents as well.

I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. The towns fund is a cornerstone of the Government's levelling-up programme. It is delivering investment to towns and cities to help reshape their future, provide opportunities for regeneration and help businesses and communities thrive.

I am delighted for my hon. Friend the Member for Southport that his constituency secured a truly transformational town deal, worth £37.5 million. The town investment plan that was submitted last year constituted the largest investment into Southport from the Government in the town's history, and I am delighted he was successful. He played a vital role in that process and worked hard in the town hall with local stakeholders, and I thank him for his support.

In 2019, we announced that 101 places had been invited to develop proposals for a town deal as part of the £3.6 billion towns fund. The towns are spread right across the country. Many are birthplaces of industry that have been centres of commerce for centuries. Others are bastions of the maritime economy along our coastline. They are all different, but what they all have in common is that too many have been underinvested in and left behind as investment focused too heavily on big cities in our country.

Town deals, such as the ones in Southport and Newcastle-under-Lyme, are about reversing that trend. They are about providing investment and confidence at such a crucial time for our economic recovery, and about driving long-term regeneration, growth and productivity in communities. We are investing in new uses for often unloved spaces on high streets and in towns, creating new cultural and economic assets that will benefit communities for many years to come. We are connecting people through better infrastructure, both physical and digital, such as the new walking and cycling routes in Torquay and the creation of the new digi-tech factory in Norwich.

Where towns are particularly vulnerable, we have already made some investments as a rapid response to the effects of covid-19. Last year, we provided all towns with grants of up to £1 million to make improvements that can have an immediate impact on their recovery and people's experience of their town. In Burton upon Trent, they have used that funding to make their main

shopping street much more accessible to cyclists and pedestrians. In Southport, part of the funding has gone towards refurbishing the market hall to create an exciting new food and drink venue, which I understand is opening very soon; I look forward to visiting when it does.

We have seen many towns take creative approaches, such as repurposing empty shops as vibrant community and business spaces. Each town that was selected to bid for a town deal was eligible for investment of up to £25 million. Of course, that was not guaranteed, but many, such as Southport, secured more in exceptional circumstances. I am delighted to say that we have already committed over £2 billion under the towns fund. We have offered town deals to 86 places across England and will be making announcements on the final 15 towns very soon. The Chancellor announced a further 45 of them in his Budget earlier this year.

Southport is a great example of why the investment is so transformational, as it will be critical in unlocking Southport's vision for opportunities for investment in the private sector, about which we have heard this morning, and in allowing the town to develop through further benefit from sustainable growth in the long term. I was pleased to hear about the passion of my hon. Friend the Member for Southport for seeing projects that are funded through the town deal continue to develop.

I look forward to the outcome of the county council's restoring your railway fund bid, which my hon. Friend talked passionately about. I understand that Southport's plans for reinstating the Burscough curves would give residents much better transport options, with an hourly rail service between Preston and Southport. I know how important that is to his constituents, and I know that he has been in discussions with colleagues at the Department for Transport regarding the railway links between Southport and Manchester. They are working closely with the local transport authorities on revisions to the current train timetables, to address all the concerns raised by his constituents. I know that includes particularly strong feedback around access to the southern side of Manchester from Southport and Wigan.

On 7 April, we announced the £23.6 million town deal for Truro, which will help transform Cornwall's capital into a connected river city and support its vision of becoming a modern economic, cultural and green capital for its residents and the wider community. More recently, in June, we announced a further 33 town deals, including the others in Cornwall. They are hugely exciting projects and have the opportunity to turn around so many towns and communities that have been underinvested in. We want everybody, no matter where they grew up or were born, to have the opportunity to access the right skills and education, and to have the access to police and health services that they deserve. Direct investment will help the transformation, which is needed now more than ever.

The hon. Member for Leicester East (Claudia Webbe) talked about the town deals selection process, and there was an interesting debate—even without my help—about that point. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) raised some very effective rebuttal points. I can reassure the hon. Lady that the selection process was based on an evidence-based

methodology that was comprehensive, robust and fair. We used a range of metrics to determine which towns would be selected for the first town deals. All towns selected were in the more deprived half of towns in the UK. Ministers made the selection due to the need for more judgment-based accountability and decision making, and we have ensured that towns traditionally left behind were secured as part of that.

I will reiterate a point that was made earlier. Despite wanting to understand the party political points made about this, we have tried to invest in towns that have been underinvested in for too long. The hon. Lady suggested that we had cut the cake unfairly, but when we look at the local authorities controlled by the towns we have invested in, we see that more than half are controlled by Labour councils. As the local government Minister, it is my job to push back on the implied assumption that parliamentary constituencies are more important than local authorities in the control of political parties. The delivery of the funds by Labour-held local authorities is really important. Only the Labour parliamentary party seems to be raising concern. The Labour local authorities are working constructively with us to deliver the investment that they are so passionate about for their communities, so I do not accept the points that the hon. Lady made.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), raised a point about making sure we can continue to deliver the town funds despite the challenges that covid presents, which is a really valid point. I can certainly reassure him that we are working closely with all the towns that have been offered town deals to make sure that all of their projects can still be delivered even in this challenging time. Councils and town halls have the opportunity, if they wish and think it appropriate, to re-submit individual projects, but we have not had any applications yet. We will certainly work with them through the delivery concerns that some of them have raised. That is really important as we look to help them through the response to covid. The hon. Gentleman also raised a point about the monitoring and evaluation strategy. I can reassure him that we are looking to publish that as soon as possible, hopefully before the summer recess. I also want to reassure him that we have had that work peer reviewed to make sure it is comprehensive, robust and done in the right way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) raised important points about the categorisation of the levelling-up fund. I was glad to hear the positive news in his constituency about the £24.9 million investment in Lowestoft that is being delivered. That is clearly hugely positive. I was also pleased to hear about the bounce back scheme being run by his council, which sounds extremely positive. I will be very interested to hear more about that. I will reassure him that when we look at delivering funding during this Parliament, we want to make sure that communities benefit from the many different funding streams being delivered. They all have slightly different policy objectives and goals, and therefore different assessment and eligibility criteria, which is why, for example, he secured the town deal, but I can reassure him there is the opportunity to be successful in the levelling-up fund. He clearly has that opportunity as the Member of Parliament to ensure

[*Luke Hall*]

that he helps the council prioritise the bid in Lowestoft, because that is the appropriate way to do so. We will look at that very carefully. That is why we thought it was so crucial MPs should have a role formally to suggest support for individual bids, but I will happily look at his local authority and perhaps provide him with some detail about the methodological process after this debate.

I was delighted to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme that £34 million has already been secured. I thank him for his work on that. It is exciting to hear that funding is coming through now, starting this week. He talked about the importance of making sure councils have the capacity to deliver the work, which is a crucial point. That is why, as part of the levelling-up fund process, we are providing category 1 councils with £125,000 to make sure they have the ability to do that. We are looking closely at what more can be done to support councils with capacity challenges. We absolutely recognise that that is an issue that has been raised. As I say, that capacity funding is extremely important. He made passionate points about his levelling-up fund bids. Unfortunately, I cannot comment on those today, which I am sure he will understand, but I very much look forward to seeing the outcome of the bids.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southport talked about the importance of business rates reform. He will understand the Chancellor is undertaking a comprehensive fundamental review of business rates and will report later this year, but I know his comments will have been heard.

I want to pick up on the comment made about local authority funding, and I am afraid I have to disagree on that. For the past two years we have had local government finance settlements with the support of the whole House. Not one MP objected to the finance settlements that were supported. There was a 4.6% rise in core spending power around the country. Conservative councils are raising council tax by less than Labour councils are around the country. We are trying to take steps to make sure that all councils get the support that they need. We took deliberate policy steps that were welcomed by the Labour party this year as part of that settlement, for example, by making sure that we equalise the social care grant by the tune of £390 million, redistributing money away from councils that are raising more money than they need, and making sure that councils which were not able to deliver services were still getting that support.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) talked passionately about the impact on the high street during covid. He is right, of course; we have seen this comprehensive shock delivered to the high streets and we are trying to support them as best we can. I will pick up that point—I missed the name of the Minister he suggested I speak to, but I will make sure that I take up that invitation as well. We are also delivering funding through the welcome back fund, through business rates support, through our business grants, and through all the support the Chancellor has outlined.

I am sure that all Members would agree that we need to support investment in communities and towns around the country. Southport's ambitious town deal is just one example of the transformative investment we are making

right around the country to ensure that places too often overlooked get the support they need as we emerge from this crisis. We are getting money to where it is needed the most and we are involving communities and councils every step of the way. I will just finish by echoing the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Southport—we are working to ensure that there will be optimism in places like Southport.

10.31 am

Damien Moore: I thank all Members for their participation in the debate today, which shows how much they want the best for their constituents. The tone of the debate has been passionate but polite, which is always the best way to conduct affairs on such issues. I would like to go through a few points made by hon. Members.

The first is from the hon. Member for Leicester East (Claudia Webbe) who talked about the scrutiny and political imbalance in the judgment of where the town deals have been based. I, like anyone, will look at how we make decisions. I am certainly interested in the decision of my local Labour authority—which has three parliamentary constituencies, two Labour and one Conservative—to put levelling-up bids in only for the two Labour ones and to forget about the Conservative one.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) is absolutely right—private landlords who own so many of the buildings on our high streets and in our towns have a massive part to play in this. They have to show that they want to see the best for our towns and our communities as well. I have not forgotten about Red Rum, by the way. There is a huge mural to Red Rum overlooking the waterfront area, so every visitor is reminded of Red Rum's history in our town.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) gives us a constant reminder of how important it is to make sure we support the whole of the United Kingdom. I am a bit envious of the fact that if I lived in his constituency I would get a pre-paid voucher to go spending on the high street. I think that I would probably spend a bit more than £100, which is the entire idea behind the scheme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) was absolutely right when he talked about towns being left behind for too long. We are fed up with the ripple effect that if we throw money into a city, the towns at the edge will get some of it. We need to start investing in our towns. That is exactly what our town did in Southport, and it has done what it says on the tin. It has brought and is bringing in private investment week by week into my town—not Government money; the Government money has been the stimulus for the £350 million.

Shops are reopening again on our high streets. Big department stores reopening, for example, is a real testament to how much enthusiasm is around it. I would say that we have already delivered two projects, the first being the boulevard of light which was delivered months ago, and the second being the Market Hall reopening next week, so if you want a fantastic dining experience, please come to Southport. The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) is only a train ride away still, and I would welcome him to come and

see how fantastic that is. Finally, I would say that our towns do have a future, but it is our duty, our responsibility to make them stronger.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Town Deals and covid-19 recovery.

10.34 am

Sitting suspended.

Dog and Cat Meat Trade

[Relevant documents: e-petition 555039, Make the consumption of dog and cat meat illegal; e-petition 308926, Urge the Chinese government to stop the annual Yulin Dog Eating Festival; and e-petition 318423, Pressure Chinese & Korean governments to end slaughter of cats & dogs for meat.]

11.1 am

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government efforts to end the global dog and cat meat trade.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. Dogs and cats have been our faithful companions for not just centuries but millennia. The beginning of human interaction with dogs and cats predates recorded history, and the earliest confirmed dog has been dated to 14,000 years ago—long before we domesticated animals such as sheep. Our relationship with dogs even predates the concept of agriculture.

Cats, meanwhile, are known in our popular culture as being among the favourite animals of the ancient Egyptians. Although research has yet to find a conclusive answer to exactly when they were domesticated, it is clear that they have been part of our everyday human life for thousands of years.

In the UK, we pride ourselves on being a nation that loves our pets. I know that you love animals, Mr Rosindell, and so does the Minister and a lot of us in this Chamber. It is estimated that there are more than 12 million dogs in the UK, and millions of households, including mine, own one. Millions of our households own a cat, and it is estimated that there are just under 11 million in the UK. These animals provide us with support when we are depressed and, importantly, they never judge us, unlike some people.

To many, particularly those who have been through difficulties brought on by covid-19 in the past year, our pets are a lifeline. Our love of pets is not a recent phenomenon. Nearly 200 years ago, the Member of Parliament William Wilberforce, from my neck of the woods—where I am originally from—Richard Martin and the Reverend Arthur Broome established the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, more commonly known as the RSPCA, which has grown to become one of the largest charities dedicated to protecting animals, and not just here in the UK but globally.

Our dedication to animal welfare can be seen in the legislation that the UK has passed: 199 years ago the Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act 1822 and the UK's first animal protection law were enacted. In the years since those Acts, there has been the Protection of Animals Act 1911, the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and the Hunting Act 2004, further improving animal welfare in the UK. It is clear that this Government are proud to carry on that tradition of leading on animal welfare. They have demonstrated that in recent months by passing the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021, and they are set to pass the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill, both of which clearly demonstrate that they are willing and actively attempting to take action to further improve animal welfare standards in the UK.

I believe that we are one of the best nations in the world for animal welfare, and that is backed up by recent data and reports that show that we are the third-best globally in this field. I hope that one day we will be

[*Andrea Jenkyns*]

No. 1. Sadly, across much of the world, the poor quality of animal welfare regulations and legislation means that millions of animals, including dogs and cats, continue to suffer needlessly. Despite the companionship, loyalty and trust that they show us, every year millions of dogs and cats are killed around the world so that people can consume their meat.

I would like everybody listening to this debate to close their eyes for a moment. Imagine being locked in a cage, barely fed, struggling to stand from hunger. Living conditions are squalid and the sounds are of another animal suffering. Eventually life will end, often through barbaric means such as being beaten or boiled alive. I am sure that we can agree that no living thing deserves to suffer like that. Yet, sadly, that is a reality for millions of dogs and cats each and every year.

I have recently seen footage from the animal welfare charity Four Paws, of a puppy being boiled alive, the ultimate cruelty. That barbaric act was harrowing to watch, and that image will remain with me for ever. According to Four Paws, 10 million dogs and cats are killed in south-east Asia yearly. Humane Society International estimated in 2016 that 10 million to 20 million dogs were killed for their meat in China, 5 million in Vietnam, 2 million in South Korea and 1 million in Indonesia.

The consumption of cat meat has been reported to be on the rise in certain countries too. Research suggests that more than 4 million cats are killed in China, along with a further 1 million cats in Vietnam, purely for their meat. Those numbers are so large as to be barely comprehensible. They represent the reality, scale and prevalence of the trade in the world today.

Next week, I plan to interview Nara Kim, an activist from the Humane Society who works in South Korea to combat the trade on the ground. She was involved in the break-up of the Gupo dog market in Busan. Over the course of her career, she has helped save hundreds, if not thousands, of dogs. I take my hat off to her. I have also recently spoken to the NoToDogMeat Foundation, led by the wonderful Julia de Cadenet, about the actions of the group on the ground in countries where this practice is common. That group has taken an active role in communicating on the ground to those in the industry, and it has been involved in actions, including saving 1,300 dogs that were bound for the Yulin dog meat festival in China.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing forward this debate. It is an issue I have been interested in over the years and on which, along with colleagues, I have pursued legislative change. Does she agree that we have said plenty to China over the years about the dog meat trade? It is now time to take steps to bring about change. Chinese officials repeatedly say that they will politely listen to our concerns but refuse to do anything. Perhaps we must consider bringing into use any and all peaceful means at our disposal, to effect real change and to end the barbaric trade that the hon. Lady describes.

Andrea Jenkyns: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I completely agree. This matter is too important. It cannot be a talking shop; we need to see real action. It is a barbaric practice and too many animals suffer.

Nara and Julia are shining examples of the fact that one person can make a noticeable difference, and of the work that has been done by individuals and groups in the third sector to combat the dog and cat meat trade. Although such individuals and groups make a real and notable change on the ground, more can be done, particularly by Government, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) just suggested.

I am proud that the UK has already taken a leading role in improving animal welfare standards globally, including by sending troops to protect endangered species and moving towards banning the importation of hunting trophies. Yet it is possible for us to play a more proactive role in combatting the barbaric dog and cat meat trade, which is an unnecessary and morally indefensible industry.

How could the UK go about that? The answer is simple: through our soft power. Make no mistake, in this field the UK is one of the major players in global affairs. We have one of the five seats on the United Nations Security Council. Our TV and radio shows are played across the globe, and our diplomatic service is widely respected in the vast majority of countries. In terms of soft power, the UK punches significantly above its weight, which is an achievement we should all be proud of. With our presence on the global stage, we can make a real and significant difference in this field, whether through programmes to educate people in the countries I have mentioned or by lobbying Governments about the benefits of abandoning and ultimately outlawing this practice.

In order to maximise our effectiveness, it is important to note that the nature of the trade varies from country to country. For example, in South Korea dogs that are ultimately destined for the meat trade are factory farmed, whereas in other nations, such as China, Cambodia and Vietnam, it is far more common for dogs to be taken directly off the streets, often to be sent hundreds of miles away and, ultimately, slaughtered. If the Government were to take a more proactive approach to tackling this issue, such considerations must be taken into account, in order to maximise our impact and effectiveness in working for the best possible result. For instance, in the countries where it is more common for dogs to be taken off the streets, we should seek to increase our education programmes and outline the dangers of eating meat from these sources, and the prevalence of meat from these sources in the wet markets in those countries.

Although we are yet to determine the true origin of covid-19, one of the most widely held beliefs is that the disease originally occurred in animals and jumped to humans through the consumption of meat. It is more likely, given the minimal regulation of the dog and cat meat trade when the meat is sourced from the streets, that a disease will again jump from animal to human through this trade. Taking steps against this trade will therefore have a real and profound impact on our ability to combat the next potential pandemic.

What other steps can the Government take and why should we take them? One of the most important actions that we can take, in my view, is to make it clear to the Governments of the countries I have mentioned that we fundamentally disagree with this practice, giving reasons why we disagree.

In conclusion, I thank Humane Society International, Four Paws and the NoToDogMeat Foundation for their evidence and data, all the great work that they

have done in this area, and their support in helping me prepare for this debate. In my view, the dog and cat meat trade is morally wrong in the world today, and there is little defence for it. The Prime Minister and his wife Carrie have both written about this issue recently with regard to the Yulin dog meat festival. The treatment of animals by this trade is barbaric. Although there are many amazing charities and individuals trying to fight this practice, more can be done.

I am proud to support the Government in their domestic animal welfare policies and the measures they have taken to help animals abroad. It is my hope that in the future the Government will consider what more we can do to combat the global dog and cat meat trade.

11.12 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): It is lovely to see you in the Chair, Mr Rosindell. I know that you have a great interest in animal welfare, so we have a room full of people, albeit small in number, who are passionate about this issue. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) for securing this debate. Of course, as she has said, we are a nation of animal lovers. I want to put the names of my two cats on record—Raffa and Mr Tipps—without whom my life would not be the same. Animals are so unjudgmental, are they not? They are also a delight, although I am always amazed at how long they can sleep for, while I have to work for hours.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, citizens in this country find the consumption of dog and cat meat absolutely inconceivable. The Government strongly agree with that view and are appalled by the prospect of dogs or cats being consumed. I myself have spoken quite vociferously on this issue as a Back Bencher, which she might remember. Indeed, I went on the Victoria Derbyshire show to talk about exactly this issue of dog and cat meat sales overseas, with a group of other organisations that she referred to in her speech.

I truly believe that we have a world-leading record on animal welfare, which my hon. Friend has referred to. Over the last decade, we have made great strides in ensuring that we offer animals the care, respect and protection that they deserve. Just recently, as she also referred to, we passed the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021, which came into force on 29 June. It realises the Government's manifesto commitment to increase the sentences available to our courts for the most serious cases of animal cruelty. I know that lots of parliamentarians pushed for that, and I am very pleased that we brought it through. The Act provides one of the toughest sanctions in Europe.

We also launched the action plan for animal welfare this year, which sets out our future aims and ambitions in this space, both domestically and internationally, cementing our commitment to maintain the UK's position as a world leader on animal protection. Our continuing work also includes replacing outdated practices with those that provide better welfare outcomes for our animals, and positively affecting other nations through the examples we are setting and using our international influence, which has been much referred to.

At this point, I want to reassure hon. Friends, Members, and anyone else listening that it is already illegal to sell dog and cat meat in the UK. There are strict rules for

food businesses on the slaughter and production of meat for human consumption, and dog and cat meat would not be permitted under those requirements. The Government see no evidence that dog or cat meat is being sold or consumed in this country.

Jim Shannon: As the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) and I were saying beforehand, we understand that it is illegal to sell dog meat, but I understand that it is not illegal to consume it in the United Kingdom. In the past, I and the hon. Lady's colleague—I am sorry, I cannot remember his constituency, so I will not mention his name—were pursuing legislative change with the former Minister. Do the Government have any intention of considering legislative changes to make it illegal to eat dog meat in this country?

Rebecca Pow: I have asked that question myself, but we already have a raft of different pieces of legislation that make it illegal to sell dog and cat meat in the UK, and those strict rules that we have for the food industry mean that one could not slaughter or sell the meat. There is no evidence of people eating dog or cat meat in the UK, and any meat imported into the UK has to be accompanied by health certificates to attest that it has met certain requirements. The UK has strict procedures in place to prevent meat such as dog or cat meat entering our food chain.

As set out in our action plan for animal welfare, our work on animal welfare extends far beyond our borders. That work includes our membership of international organisations such as the World Organisation for Animal Health, which was created in January 1924 to fight animal disease at a global level. It now has 182 member countries, and it now also plays a unique global leadership role in advancing animal welfare. This includes publishing a global animal welfare strategy, producing a terrestrial code for animal welfare standards, and putting food safety and animal welfare at the heart of its mission.

In addition to our own offences applying to cat or dog meat entering the food chain, I am glad to see that the US Government have also prohibited the slaughter of cats and dogs for human consumption, and a similar ban on slaughter was put in place in Taiwan in 1998. The Republic of Korea has its Animal Protection Amendment Act 2007, which prohibits some of the cruel methods used to handle and slaughter dogs. In Thailand the Prevention of Animal Cruelty and Provision of Animal Welfare Act was enacted in 2014. This was Thailand's first law focused on preventing animal cruelty, and it protects domestic pets, working animals and animals being kept for food. The UK continues to work with the Thai authorities to promote international welfare standards, to see whether others can adopt our methods and those adopted by other nations doing more than, for example, Thailand in this space—as my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood suggested, we are having influence in that soft-power way.

We can see that the work being done in this House is driving change elsewhere, but in addition the Government commend the work undertaken by non-governmental organisations such as Four Paws, which is doing a lot of very good work—I was horrified to hear about the video that my hon. Friend referred to. Humane Society International is also doing very good work, as is the

[Rebecca Pow]

International Fund for Animal Welfare and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, building support for animal issues and driving change.

The Government have made a clear manifesto commitment that in all our trade negotiations we will not compromise our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards. The UK is rightly proud of our high-quality food and animal welfare standards. We will stand firm in trade negotiations to ensure that any future trade deals live up to the values of our farmers and consumers across the UK.

We will be introducing an animals abroad Bill in this Session, which will focus on encouraging high animal welfare and conservation standards internationally. My hon. Friend will be very interested in that Bill. It will drive forward our manifesto commitment to ban the import of hunting trophies from endangered animals, to ensure that UK imports and exports of hunting trophies are not threatening the conservation status of species abroad. The Bill will also look to ban the import and export of detached shark fins and ban the advertising and offering for sale of specific low-welfare practices abroad. We will introduce the Bill as soon as parliamentary time allows.

As an independent trading nation, we have a great opportunity to work with other global trading partners to promote animal welfare standards internationally. We will build on those opportunities, many of which have now arisen because we have left the EU. We can go out there to really work on this agenda, to make animal welfare standards a key priority, in line with our domestic standards.

My hon. Friend touched on wet markets. There has been a lot of talk about that, and the suggestion of a potential covid link. We have been very clear that a transparent,

independent and science-led investigation must be an important part of the international effort to understand how covid-19 started and how it spread. Phase 1 of the World Health Organisation convened covid-19 origins study was always meant to be the beginning of the process, not the end. We are working with partners to support a transparent, evidence-based, expert-led phase 2, including, as recommended by the experts' report, studies in China. It is vital that phase 2 does not face the same delays as phase 1 and is given full access to the data necessary for the next part of the work—I think my hon. Friend will agree that is very important. It is not about blame; it must be about learning what can be done to better manage any similar outbreak in the future.

Further afield, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office will continue its work to raise concerns about the welfare of animals with other Governments and international authorities, as my hon. Friend is encouraging. It does that at every suitable opportunity, including as part of the post-covid recovery. Using that soft power is important, and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) also raised that point in his intervention. I hope I have given some assurances that that is exactly what this Government are doing.

I am personally very proud of the example we set here in the UK in promoting animal welfare at home, but also of the measures taken to help abroad. We will use all levers on the world stage as we continue to combat the world trade in eating dogs and cats. I hope that what I have said gives assurances. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood for securing the debate and for constantly raising the issue, which so many people agree is very important.

Question put and agreed to.

11.23 am

Sitting suspended.

Climate Change: Wales

[PETER DOWD *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the hybrid arrangements. Timings of debates have been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made for the next debate. There will also be suspensions between each debate. I remind Members participating virtually that they must leave their camera on for the duration of the debate, and that they will be visible at all times, both to each other and to us in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should email the Westminster Hall Clerks at westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk. Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and as they leave the room. I would also like to remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered measures to combat climate change in Wales.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd.

Despite being confronted with a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic, climate change remains the single largest existential threat to people across the world. The UK has a responsibility, as one of the first industrialised countries, to combat climate change and take a progressive, proactive approach to mitigate and reverse its effects.

In Wales, we are extremely fortunate to have access to natural resources that can provide cutting-edge alternatives to curtail our reliance on fossil fuels. How we deal with these issues in the next few years will have a defining impact on future generations and their wellbeing. Changing climate will cause huge problems across the globe and lead to massive population displacement and challenges for food production in many parts of the world. Rising water levels, loss of biodiversity and extreme weather events have already been seen in many places, and we must take urgent action to tackle that.

Wales is a small country, but it can play a big part in the solution. The Welsh Government are taking a progressive and proactive approach to mitigating and reversing the effects of climate change. I am proud that the Welsh Government have gone further than the target set by the Climate Change Committee for the UK and committed to a net zero target by 2050. That is an ambitious target, but one which we have to reach if we want to tackle temperature rises.

When I was granted this debate, I was contacted by the excellent parliamentary digital engagement team and asked if I would like them to use their channels to engage with the public on this issue. The responses that came in were varied and really thoughtful. I would like to thank everyone who got in touch with ideas and comments. There were 168 replies to questions on a wide range of topics, such as reducing consumption, changes to transport use, and housing. There are too many excellent contributions to mention them all, for which I am really sorry, but I would like to pick out a couple and respond to them.

Wendy, along with others, said that we should:

“Retrofit or convert housing stock to passive housing to maintain human health while reducing dependence on energy sources to warm or cool homes”.

The Welsh Government are making £13 million of funding available through the innovative housing programme. The aim of that programme is to make 1,800 homes across Wales more energy-efficient. As well as helping to reduce energy bills for residents, optimised retrofit will help reduce the carbon footprint of each home. There are currently around 1.4 million homes across Wales that need to be made more carbon efficient to help with the 2050 net zero target, so getting retrofit right and making it happen by delivering the skills and training needed will be key to building a strong future economy and helping to tackle the climate emergency.

Several respondents to the consultation highlighted the importance of restoring nature. Both Joshua and Jools suggested that there should be targets for nature restoration and tree and woodland planting. I am happy to say that just this week, Lee Waters, Deputy Minister for Climate Change in the Welsh Government, announced that Wales will plant 86 million trees in the next nine years.

To achieve our net zero target, we need to plant 43,000 hectares of new woodland. Planting those trees will not only help avoid catastrophic climate change, but create jobs and address the nature emergency, increasing wellbeing and mitigating floods and air quality issues. Hon. Members can find out more about that scheme and the support for individuals, organisations and companies that want to get involved in planting on the Welsh Government website.

As part of that, Wales is also putting in place a timber strategy. Using timber in construction has a number of benefits, including the capture of CO₂ during growth, acting as a carbon store for the lifetime of the structure, and it can be used again after the building is no longer in use. The Welsh Government want an increase in off-site manufactured homes as a way of reaching net zero, and the timber industry will play a big part in that.

In Gower, we have one of the most efficient storers of carbon, our fabulous salt marshes. They are a haven for wildlife, with more than 20 species of salt marsh plants, which in turn support insects. They are also used by juvenile fish, and many different birds roost in them. Protecting and, in places, expanding salt marshes could store millions of tonnes of carbon and offset emissions.

I pay tribute to the National Farmers Union, which is encouraging farmers across the UK to take positive steps to make their farms net zero by 2040. We celebrate their positive actions leading up to COP26, to be held in Glasgow in November. There are so many farmers and growers, not only in Gower but across Wales, who are positively demonstrating that they are committed to taking net zero measures on their farms, to help the sector reach the 2040 ambition. I saw that at first hand recently, when my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) and I visited the farm of NFU Cymru president John Davies. To see that vision in action and discuss the future of Welsh farming was very positive.

Climate change does not respect borders. We all know that the only way to tackle climate change is to work with other countries. That collaboration is sadly lacking in the relationship between Wales and the UK Government. Having promised to electrify the main

[Tonia Antoniazzi]

line to Swansea, the UK Government decided to go only as far as Cardiff. After the big fanfare around the Swansea bay tidal lagoon, the Government decided not to go ahead with the project. That decision meant that, instead of becoming a world leader in tidal technology, we will now have to rely on other pilot projects to pave the way. I believe that Swansea bay will get a tidal lagoon but, instead of being able to export the associated expertise and technology, someone else will do that. We have got to push forward for Swansea and I commit to doing that.

There are many more subjects I could have covered, from halting all new road-building projects, to reducing our reliance on private cars, to buying local produce to reduce food miles. I thank everyone who got in touch with me about the debate; I will pass on all their comments to the Welsh Government. I want to finish with a quote I heard yesterday in Lee Waters's speech. Mark McKenna, of the wonderful Down to Earth Project in my constituency of Gower, said:

"The solutions are there, we need to invest and we need to plan."

I am pleased that that is what the Welsh Government are doing.

2.38 pm

Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for securing this important debate.

The UK Government have been a world leader on this issue, with a 10-point plan presenting a vision for the UK that is green and more prosperous, and at the forefront of the industries of the future. The UK Government and the devolved Administrations have to work together to implement measures that will combat climate change.

In my constituency of Bridgend, an increasing number of residents are contacting me about air pollution, which concerns them a lot. They are worried about high levels of pollution outside schools, in particular from idling vehicles. They fear that that can be a cause and aggravating factor of many respiratory diseases, and action is needed. With little thought for wider infrastructure to support communities and a lack of investment in safe routes to schools, the local authority in Bridgend aids that growing epidemic of idling vehicles and worsens the pollution around our schools.

It is reprehensible that our Welsh colleagues in Cardiff Bay have halted plans for the M4 relief road to ease congestion in south Wales. That would also help with the levels of pollution around Newport. We agree with the Welsh Government that decarbonising the transport sector presents a key challenge to overcome to reach net zero, but rather than halting the development of necessary infrastructure, the UK Government's vision for a net zero Wales includes accelerating the shift to zero-emission vehicles. Electric vehicle infrastructure funding schemes such as the on-street residential charge point scheme, the electric vehicle home charging scheme and the workplace charging scheme are examples of the Government helping to achieve 100% zero-emission cars and vans by 2035.

Wales will also benefit from further funding to aid our movement towards a greener economy, including the £289 million industrial energy transformation fund,

the £250 million clean steel fund, the £240 million net zero hydrogen fund and the £1 billion carbon capture and storage infrastructure fund.

Decarbonising the UK steel industry is fundamental to our ambitious green industrial revolution. A movement to lower-carbon iron and steel production is essential to meeting our net zero goals. To do that, we must invest in new technologies and processes. Although the Tata Steel site is in the neighbouring constituency, in Port Talbot, many of my constituents work there, and it is concerning that they would struggle with the movement to the more mature technology of carbon capture, but a movement to hydrogen power, rather than coal power, could be a way forward.

The clean steel fund will support the British steel industry through the challenges of decarbonisation while ensuring that we hit the net zero target in 2050. We must also invest in the development of new technologies that can help ease our movement to net zero emissions and assist in combating climate change. I am proud that my constituency is home to some of the industry leaders that are developing those technologies. One such company is Cenin Renewables. It is at the forefront of visionary thinking: it purchased the first Tesla battery in Europe and is an early adopter of photovoltaic power production. It was recently awarded the Queen's award for sustainable development, and its pioneering Solcer House, developed in conjunction with Cardiff University, is a blueprint for the carbon-negative and energy-positive home of the future.

A lot of constituents contact us about this issue. There are a number of people with a range of views on how best to proceed. Working together is in everyone's best interests and in the best interests of our long-term future.

2.42 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I am very pleased to speak in the debate. It is about an issue of great importance to many Newport West residents, and this afternoon I am giving voice to their concerns and calls for action.

It is no longer a surprise to any of us that we face a dangerous and very real climate emergency. We cannot sit back and watch our country burn, flood or, indeed, collapse without taking action—and we need to take action now. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for securing this debate on measures to tackle climate change and for all she does, including in this place, to preserve our planet and protect our environment in Wales.

As well as being the Welsh Labour Member of Parliament for Newport West, I am the shadow Minister for the natural environment and air quality in Westminster. While many of the departmental responsibilities relate to powers devolved to the Welsh Government, measures to tackle climate change in Wales are very much at the top of the agenda. We need to implement bold, ambitious and proactive measures to tackle climate change in all four nations of our United Kingdom.

Like so many of my constituents, I very much welcome the bold commitments of the Welsh Labour Government to tackle climate change. Those commitments are exemplified by the creation of a Minister and a Deputy Minister for Climate Change. That is a reflection of how important the battle to save our planet is to Welsh Labour and to the First Minister.

In recent years, there has been sterling work in Wales that has seen more innovative ways of developing renewable energy and that ensured Wales is one of the top three recycling nations in the world. We have also seen more than 800,000 trees planted and more than 843 water refill stations installed. These are tangible and pragmatic policies that carry the people of Wales with them and that mitigate the worst effects of climate change. However, for all the positive steps taken in Wales—and there are many—there is still so much more to do. With the horrific flooding in Wales last year, we saw that we have far more to do to stem the unbeatable flow of physical effects triggered by climate change.

As the shadow Minister for the natural environment and air quality, I also have the delight of covering waste and recycling. Those are two important areas that see me often looking to Wales for inspiration. It is a case of, “Where Wales goes, so go the rest of the nations.”

I am pleased about the steps being taken in Wales to develop a national forest, which will give us the ability to offset emissions. I support the plans to ban 10 of the most common single-use plastics, such as straws, stirrers and plastic cutlery. I am proud that Wales currently has the third highest recycling rate in the world. Last year, 65% of all household waste across Wales was recycled, and back home in Newport West we recycle 66% of waste, which saved over £5 million and prevented 21,000 tonnes of polluting emissions.

The Welsh Labour Government are committed to achieving a carbon neutral public sector by 2030 and to co-ordinating action to help other areas of the economy to make a decisive shift away from fossil fuels, including academia, industry and the third sector. We need rapidly to expand our ability to produce energy from renewables and I pay tribute to the companies developing offshore wind turbines in the Celtic sea and other areas. We also need to develop energy sourced from tidal and wave power. We need to ban plastics that cannot be recycled or composted, and I pay tribute to companies like TIPA that are developing compostable plastic packaging, which is another way of limiting our waste production.

I am gravely concerned that Tory inaction in England could have an impact in Wales. Indeed, the Welsh Labour Government may have difficulty taking the actions the people of Newport West want to see. For example, the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 means that the Senedd may be limited to banning just three plastic items to align with the low aspirations of England. Put it this way: level up with Labour in Wales or get left behind with the Tories.

Like so many of my constituents back home in Newport West, I urge this Conservative Government, from the Prime Minister down, to wake up and smell the coffee. We have no time left to waste. If they do not want to act, if they lack ambition and do not want to take the steps necessary to preserve our planet and protect our environment, they should get out of the way and let Labour lead.

2.46 pm

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for securing this debate. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones), who is a

fellow member of the Welsh Affairs Committee, where we have heard from witnesses and discussed in great detail climate change and renewable energy in Wales.

I grew up in rural Wales at Lake Vyrnwy, a few miles south of my constituency, and there I experienced a community that had a healthy balance with nature. Our water came from a small reservoir above the hotel that my father ran in the hills and was filtered through a sand bed. A few years before we moved there, the electricity was still generated by the hydroelectric unit in the Vyrnwy dam, and I hope one day it can be back in action.

This highly formative experience has played a key part in my championing renewable energy schemes in Clwyd South, such as the hydroelectric potential of the River Dee in Llangollen. I warmly welcome the decision by members of Llangollen Town Council in April to set up a task-and-finish group to investigate the feasibility of using the site of decommissioned hydro units in the town.

Further up the River Dee in Corwen is the perfect example of a community energy project, namely the Corwen community hydro power scheme. People came together as a community to build a 55 kW, high head hydro scheme in the town. The scheme is 100% owned and run by the community. The success of this first project has led to a second, larger project in Bonwm, near Corwen, where work is expected to start this autumn on building a 100 kW hydro scheme, which will be completed ahead of the end of feed-in tariffs in July 2022.

The Corwen projects have benefited significantly from the support of the local landowner, Lord Newborough, whose Rhug estate has put sustainability firmly at the heart of its business mission, particularly through its own renewable heat and power generation. That has led to the recent announcement that Rhug has won a net zero award from the North Wales Mersey Dee Business Council.

There are many other examples of fantastic measures to combat climate change taken by residents and organisations across Clwyd South, including Wrexham and Denbighshire Councils, community councils, local companies, farms and voluntary organisations. I am delighted that the UK Government are pursuing dynamic and effective policies to support these local measures at a national level.

Spanning clean energy, buildings, transport, nature and innovative technologies, the UK Government's 10-point plan for a green industrial revolution will mobilise £12 billion of Government investment to unlock three times as much private sector investment by 2030, level up regions across the UK and support up to 250,000 highly skilled green jobs. The plan presents a vision for a UK that is greener and at the forefront of industries for the future. Through it, we will position the UK to take advantage of export opportunities in new global emerging markets in low-carbon technologies and services, providing jobs, supporting levelling up, and reinvigorating our industrial heartlands in Wales and across the rest of the UK.

Specific examples of the plan are many, but I will just mention one. That is the investment of £582 million in plug-in vehicle grants to incentivise take-up of zero or ultra low emission vehicles. Of course, this is as applicable to Wales as it is to the rest of the UK. Also, the cross-Government net zero strategy will be published

[Simon Baynes]

ahead of COP26. Work is already under way across Whitehall to help inform the ambitious plans across key sectors of the economy. The strategy will set out the Government's vision and how they will meet its ambitious goals as we transition to net zero emissions by 2050.

In conclusion, I am proud of the measures being taken by the UK Government to combat climate change, and their reflection in many exciting projects under way in Clywd South. I am also pleased that the Welsh Government are being closely engaged in this policy making and strategy, as we work together to create a greener and more prosperous Wales.

2.51 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: It is great to be under your chairpersonship today, Mr Dowd, and it is a pleasure to join this debate, which was secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi).

I will just remind us of the scale of the problem that we face. Global temperatures are now 1.2 °C higher than the 1850 base rate and are rising at 0.1 °C a year, so by 2025 the world will breach the Paris limit of 1.5 °C. In fact, the temperature is already plus 2 °C over Europe and plus 3 °C over the Arctic, because of differential impacts. That means that for every second of this debate, 8,500 cubic metres or 8,500 tonnes of ice will melt from Greenland.

In particular, we have seen a massive escalation in the Chinese production of carbon. China now produces more carbon than Europe and the US combined—7 tonnes a person, compared with 5.8 tonnes in the UK. However, on a consumption basis, the UK produces 8 tonnes a person. The reason I mention this is that the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 committed to measuring our consumption as well, because we cannot simply subcontract out all our manufacturing and reduce our carbon footprint but then import it all.

That is particularly the case for steel, because Welsh steel has 50% less carbon than Chinese steel. What is needed is a carbon border tax. It is being initiated by the EU, it will be agreed at COP26 and is certainly supported by Wales, so that we have fair trading and do not have a situation where the Chinese are allowed to continue producing more and more carbon. China's carbon production will not peak until 2030; it already has 1,037 coal-fired power stations and is planning another 300. Closing our coal-fired power station in Wales, at Aberthaw, accounts for 55% of the Welsh reduction in carbon. We need to think very globally about this issue, as well as taking our own initiatives. I am proud that the Welsh Assembly Government are the only Government, not only in Britain but across the world generally, to have sustainable development as part of the country's constitution and the Assembly's founding principles.

I welcome the initiative for the national forest. Clearly we need to plant trees—everybody knows that—because they store carbon, but we also need to use trees in our buildings as carbon stores, in place of concrete in particular. If concrete were a country, it would be the 13th biggest producer of emissions.

It is important that the UK Government back that approach and, indeed, stop the burning of wood. We have a ridiculous situation where we are importing millions of tonnes of wood, in particular hard wood,

which we are simply burning. That wood could have been made, with minimal effort, into a pulp that could be used to insulate buildings, and it would remain as a carbon store.

I welcome the roads review: we cannot keep on building roads. That is not to say that we will not build any more roads, but we need to halt and think about whether we can plan differently. On that basis, I very much welcome today's announcement by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which is calling for HS2 to be an England-only scheme. That makes a lot of sense, because obviously HS2 does not run through Wales: it is more beneficial to Scotland than to Wales, and the UK Government tell us that it will displace jobs from Wales. I welcome that proposal, which should unleash a fair share of funding: in the same way that Scotland gets the money, this should unleash billions of pounds for Wales. I very much hope that will mean that we can make good the promises of David Cameron about railway electrification, and that we can get a high-speed frequent link to Bristol so that Bristol-Cardiff-Swansea, which is 3 million people, has the same level of service as Manchester-Leeds, for example. That has about eight services an hour; we have one.

I also welcome the move to reconsider how we improve and increase home working after the pandemic, and conversations at both a UK and, in particular, a Welsh level about local procurement to reduce our carbon footprint and help local jobs. Indeed, the Development Bank of Wales has a criterion that says, "If you want investment, you should ideally be contributing to net zero. You should be contributing towards economic growth, and you should have local involvement and inclusion in jobs creation." I welcome that approach, as well.

In Wales, of course, we are blessed with wind, waves and solar, and I hope that—as my hon. Friend the Member for Gower has mentioned—we see the lagoon project delivered, perhaps with extra added value through the new proposals that have been put on the table. That will bring with it a mixed bag of other benefits, as well as energy.

I hope that we will work in partnership with the UK Government and that, when the Welsh Government come forward with new ideas, the money will follow to serve all our interests in helping to contribute towards a more sustainable world. Again, that includes the contribution at COP26. It will be interesting to hear from the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, who will be winding up this debate for the Government: he is a former climate change denier, but I think he may have suddenly seen the light and agreed that we need to combat climate change. Obviously, this is an issue on which we might have wanted to hear from a Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Minister or a COP26 Minister as well.

Turning to the issue of plastic, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) mentioned that we have a problem with the Internal Market Act, in that we will not be able to recycle as much plastic as we would like. I very much welcome the fact that the Welsh Government's initiative to tax plastic bags has been taken forward. I welcome taxing plastic, but the UK Government's planned level of £200 per tonne is far below that of the EU, which is £685 per tonne. We need to increase that to reduce the amount of plastic used, because frankly, there is going to be more plastic in the sea than fish by 2050 on current United Nations projections.

We do need to work together, and I am pleased that the Welsh Government have said that, from a public sector point of view, their planning and ambition is to be carbon neutral by 2030 by using a combination of net zero buildings—that would include wood, as I have mentioned—confronting mobility and transport, more electrification and hydrogen-generated transport, and better land use, including the woodland plan.

Finally, we on the Welsh Affairs Committee have heard that British Airways has been buying up large tracts of land, in Ceredigion in particular, by way of carbon offset. The Government need to do something about that. These schemes were meant to preserve the Amazon rainforest, not to put Welsh hill farmers out of business with no net impact on the climate. Let's all work together. Well done to the Welsh Government, and let's have the UK and Welsh Governments working together so that we can focus on COP26 and provide a shop window to the world on best practice for all to emulate.

2.59 pm

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr Dowd. I first of all pay tribute to the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), both for securing the debate and for the tone in which you opened it. Your tone made me rip up half my speech, and I appreciate that balance. I also echo your comments on digital services and the engagement around this debate, which I think is terrific.

I could touch on the comments of other Members but, in the good old tradition of Welsh Westminster Hall debates, the Welsh Government are good and for the UK Government are bad, unless the Member is a Conservative, in which case the UK Government are good and the Welsh Government are bad. We have approached this debate in the usual fashion. I will try to break that down a little bit. I appreciated a lot of the global context that the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) introduced. I was taken aback today at Prime Minister's questions when it was noted that 52% of the world's urban global greenhouse gases come from 25 cities, of which 23 are in China. Clearly, the pressure on COP26 this year is immense.

There is excellent best practice coming out of Wales, and there is excellent best practice coming from Powys County Council and the Welsh Labour Government. There is also a huge amount of work, finance and regulatory change coming out of the UK Government, and it would be churlish of Labour Members speaking after me not to at least acknowledge that, if those before me have not. It is absolutely fascinating to see the pace of change. I will touch briefly on an issue that I have a little bugbear with the Welsh Government about—I have been nice, but I will have a little bash—and that is new road building.

Montgomeryshire is blessed with clean air and low emissions. The one thing that has helped Montgomeryshire more than anything to tackle emissions and improve air quality is the Newtown bypass, with Welsh Government studies and independent studies unquestionably showing that emissions have dropped around Newtown—the biggest town in my constituency—and the quality of air has improved. That is to be hugely welcomed.

In conjunction with the banning of new petrol and diesel cars, that means that road building in the future will be very different. The vehicles on the roads of the

future will emit very different pollutants, if any. It is old-fashioned and traditional thinking to see road building in the traditional sense—that the roads will have heavy-polluting vehicles on them. They will not. Clearly, that is demonstrated by the ban on petrol and diesel vehicles. Clearly, that is demonstrated by great companies such as Riversimple in Powys investing in hydrogen cars. Clearly, that is demonstrated by the huge investment in hydrogen production and electric car production in this country. I hope there is time for a pause for thought. I welcome that this is a review and not a blanket ban, but road building projects in the future should not be judged on the environmental effects of the past. That is incredibly dangerous thinking as we see smaller, better, cleaner cars emerging on to our roads.

Equally, I want to be nice: Wales has led. The plastic bag tax is hugely welcome. To give credit where credit is due, the Welsh Government led on that issue, and now the UK Government are following. We must do that more in future: where there is best practice across a border—in Wales, Scotland, England, Northern Ireland or across the channel into Europe, or even further—we need to share best practice. We should not be shy in stealing ideas; after all, I read *Hansard* regularly and we normally steal each other's speeches, so we might as well share each other's policies.

In closing, I will draw the private sector into this. Of course, there is a lot of public money and regulatory change, but tomorrow I will visit Garth Holiday Park in Machynlleth, in the middle of Wales, to celebrate its private investment in electric vehicle charging on the site. A huge amount of EV charging facilities are going in now. Wipak in Welshpool—if you pick up a pack of Cathedral City cheese in this country, the packaging comes from Welshpool, in the middle of Wales—is investing hugely. It is a European-based company that manufactures in Wales, and it is investing millions over the next years to improve its production and to help us achieve our net zero ambitions.

If we do this together—the UK Government, with their sheer scale and international leadership, the Welsh Government, with their devolved powers and regulatory functions, and the private sector as well—we can achieve it. I fear that if we continue with a dogmatic, narrow vision of, “We are bad, you are good. This is right, this is wrong,” we will not get anywhere near the achievements that we need, and we will do a great disservice to the constituents that really care about the issue.

Mr Dowd, I have added to the greenhouse gases with my six minutes, so I will sit down, but I very much welcome this debate.

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): I remind Members not to use the second person singular unless addressing me. I call Jessica Morden.

3.5 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Dowd, for allowing me to leave early to go to another Committee; it is much appreciated. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) on securing this timely and important debate ahead of COP26 this autumn.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones), I was reminded of the proximity of the conference this week when my hon. Friend and I welcomed

[Jessica Morden]

and spoke at an event for the Young Christian Climate Network, which was stopping in Newport as part of an epic 1,000-mile relay on its way to the conference in Glasgow, not only to raise awareness of climate change, but to raise awareness of the UK Government's promises to tackle climate change. It really did typify the dedication to climate justice shared by so many young people across our society—a generation that will really help to define the future of the planet left to them, so I thank them.

I also want to point out that in Newport East we have two of Wales's 12 youth climate ambassadors, Maham Aziz and Poppy Stowell-Evans, who very much reflect that passion for a sustainable future. Members can hear more from Poppy, who will speak virtually at the all-party parliamentary group on youth action against climate change next week, so watch this space. The youth climate ambassadors' campaigns are around making businesses in Wales more responsible for their carbon emissions, and they focus on the amount of plastic that people use. Those are initiatives that we would all like to get behind.

There are lots of volunteers and organisations across my constituency doing great work to restore local habitats and biodiversity, which goes hand in hand with the fight against climate change. I want to thank the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds for its work in the Newport wetlands, the Gwent Wildlife Trust in Magor Marsh, the Rogiet wildlife-friendly village team, the Woodlanders, and the Bee Initiative at Penhow. As the young marchers we met last week said, "This is a critical decade for action to prevent climate change and for action to prevent future harm to our planet."

The Senedd Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee's third assessment report was published last month. It highlighted that in our children's lifetime, Wales will experience wetter winters with drier, hotter summers and sea level rises of up to 2½ feet along our coast. I have looked at the maps and I have a coastal constituency, which is why it is so important, as other hon. Members have said, that the Welsh Labour Government have set a legal and ambitious commitment to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, and are pushing to get that ambition even sooner. Ambition is critical. Inaction is not an option; nor is doing the minimum.

We were the first country in the world—I was here at the time, along with the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies)—to pass a Climate Change Act in 2008, and under the Welsh Labour Government we were the first country in the world to enshrine in law the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, ensuring that any decision that our Government make must serve the needs of our children and grandchildren, including on environmental issues. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gower said, we have a Minister and Deputy Minister for Climate Change, too.

Others have highlighted our national recycling rate, which is at an all-time high of 65%. I say to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) that the UK Government could learn from that as we are the third best recycling nation in the world and the best in Europe. I thank Wastesavers at Newport Council for its work, and I look forward to the new youth centre in Magor opening shortly. As others have mentioned, we

also have the national forest for Wales to improve air quality and remove harmful greenhouse gases from the community.

Others want to speak, so I will finish here. There is clearly much more to do. Lots of hon. Members have mentioned decarbonising steel. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) was right about the dangers of importing steel, which can make things worse. UK steel should be right at the heart of a green recovery, in terms of jobs and new skills, but also in terms of providing steel for solar energy, the tidal lagoons and for electrification. Green jobs for the future in new industries are important to us, too, as are transport, housing and energy efficiency—all of which are in Labour's green recovery plan.

Wales and Labour have shown a lead on environmental issues, which the UK Government would do well to follow. As the host of COP26, the UK Government must strain every sinew to keep the possibility of limiting global heating to 1.5°, in line with the goals of the Paris agreement. We owe that to the young people who are out there campaigning for that this week.

3.10 pm

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in this debate, which has been brought forward by the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), and to follow the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden). The debate enables me to highlight the opportunities that my constituency of Ynys Môn has to contribute to the Government's net zero 2050 target and to tackle climate change in Wales.

There is no doubt whatsoever that Wales and my constituency in particular could be fundamental to tackling climate change, not just locally but globally. Anglesey stands on the brink of becoming a centre of excellence for energy production. Morlais and Minesto are honing in on tidal energy and wave production, with innovative operations planned off the coast of the island. This month, the National Nuclear Laboratory has established a new office in M-SParc. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Welsh Government are seeking to establish a thermal hydraulic facility on Anglesey. There are currently only two such facilities worldwide—one in Italy and one in the US. In the March Budget, the Chancellor and this Government committed £4.8 million to develop the Holyhead hydrogen hub. And there is, of course, Wylfa Newydd.

Wylfa Newydd offers the best new nuclear power site in the UK, possibly the world. Anglesey is known already as energy island, but in all honesty it feels like we are treading water. To truly tackle climate change and to achieve our 2050 net zero targets, the UK needs a base-load generating capacity that can only be met consistently and within the timescales offered by new nuclear. Wylfa Newydd has the potential to power 2 million homes. It offers Wales's biggest single contribution to tackling climate change. Not only that; it is a site that has the support of local people and would offer 8,000 construction jobs, 1,500 long-term, permanent, skilled, well-paid careers and thousands of supply chain roles across north Wales.

Wylfa Newydd would not just tackle climate change but transform the economy of north Wales, give our young people the opportunity to stay in their communities and keep the Welsh language alive for generations to come. I simply cannot overemphasise how important Wylfa Newydd is to Wales.

The UK Prime Minister has declared himself a “fervent supporter” of the project, but to make this happen we need a catalyst, and that catalyst is freeport status. A freeport would turbocharge Anglesey’s energy island credentials and give Wales a step change in its route to achieving net zero. This year, as we host COP26 and commit to building back better and greener, let us take a stand and show the world that Wales and the UK are truly committed to tackling climate change. Let us find a way to make Wylfa Newydd happen. We need the UK and Welsh Governments to work together to bring a freeport to Anglesey. Climate change is real and we cannot afford to delay when we have hard targets to achieve. Every day of delay is a day of irreversible damage to our fragile globe.

I end by echoing the wise words of my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams). Now is the time to cast aside our differences and work together, for the communities of Anglesey and the future of Wales, our Union and our children’s future in the world.

3.14 pm

Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for securing this debate.

We are in the grip of a climate emergency. My constituency of Cynon Valley has in recent times seen some of the worst effects of climate change. Last year, Storm Dennis had a devastating impact on it, and it was followed by a heatwave and further flash flooding. We worry about the future for our children and grandchildren. The Committee on Climate Change’s recent report on Wales’s progress on tackling climate change was damning and sobering. It found that 26 of the 61 climate change risks have increased in severity over the past five years, and that more action is required on 32 of them. It concluded that current plans are not sufficient and that the Welsh Government need to take urgent action.

Words are not enough. We need urgent action now at the local, national and international levels. I am pleased to say that in Cynon Valley and Wales, we are stepping up. Tackling climate change was one of my key pledges when I was elected, and since then it has underpinned everything I do. I have worked and continued to work alongside local people and groups in my constituency to do everything we can to tackle climate change.

We are taking a grassroots, bottom-up approach to bring about positive change. I am currently holding a series of climate assemblies in my constituency, involving a range of individuals and groups, on green jobs, transport and energy. I thank all the groups that have participated. We have our next one on transport next week. Speakers on those topics have included Member of the Senedd Lee Waters, future generations commissioners, Professor Calvin Jones of Cardiff University, and the Wales TUC, to name a few. The speakers are followed by a discussion in which people can put their ideas for change. We are going to produce a summary report of recommendations, called a Cynon climate action plan, which we will disseminate widely.

Local people have the power to force change from the bottom up, but leadership and sound decision making is needed from those in power. It is a two-way process. We all have a part to play, but there are major decisions and actions for the Government to take.

As I say, the Welsh Government have stepped up. I remain extremely proud that we were the first nation in the world to declare a climate emergency. I very much welcome the renewed energy, determination and urgency shown by the Welsh Government since the Senedd elections in May to address climate change. Mark Drakeford, our First Minister, said:

“The environment will be at the heart of our decision-making...In my new government, the environment doesn’t just have a seat at the Cabinet table, it will be a consideration in all we do.”

The Welsh Government’s recently published programme for government contains a raft of policies to help achieve that, from a clean air Bill to a target that 45% of journeys must use sustainable modes by 2040. As others have said, a new climate Ministry has been created to turn those words into action. The Welsh Government are not afraid of taking action—sometimes difficult and contentious action—in a short period of time, including a freeze on new road-building projects while a review is undertaken, which I very much support. Only yesterday, Lee Waters MS announced a national call to arms to plant more trees, which others have already spoken about.

The same cannot be said of the UK Government, who have paid lip service to climate change but remain hellbent on spending £27 billion on their new road-building programme, despite the findings of the Transport Action Network that it breaches the UK’s legal Paris agreement commitment to tackle the climate crisis and critically undermines the country’s standing ahead of the COP 26 summit. They have given themselves the power through the internal market to undermine some of the Welsh Government’s progressive determinations, as my hon. Friends have already mentioned.

That is why we will continue to take local action and mobilise to bring about change. Our Cynon climate action plan will be submitted to COP 26. I will take the recommendations to Parliament and push for change in all forums, including the Chamber and the all-party parliamentary climate change group, of which I am a member. I will also continue to support the climate and ecological emergency Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). I will continue to call on the UK Government to give Wales our fair share of funding to enable us to fulfil our climate ambitions. We could be a world leader in moving towards a carbon-neutral economy. We have the resources in this country to do so much more.

Fundamental changes in society are required if the climate crisis is to be avoided. We cannot stop the acceleration of carbon emissions unless we change the way society works. As Professor Calvin Jones of Cardiff University has said, capitalism is bust. We must end the exploitation of fossil fuels, tackle multinational corporations, and instead put people before profit. Naomi Klein and Professor Tim Jackson both feel that we cannot sustain the current way of organising the world economy, exploiting all natural resources in the name of profit.

In conclusion, as one of my constituents, Morien Morgan, who has taught me so about climate change, has said,

“We can’t let future generations down and say, ‘It’s too late now. We’re on the Titanic so let’s open the drinks cabinet, strike up the band and dance until the end.’”

[Beth Winter]

This is bigger than any party political stance. In Morien's words, "This is existential", and as another constituent said to me:

"We don't own this planet. We only borrow it from our children and I want to leave it in a state that they can enjoy and benefit."

3.20 pm

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I am very grateful to my good and hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for securing this important debate. It is also a pleasure to follow my constituency neighbour, my good and hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) Valley. Sadly, like her, my constituency of Pontypridd and Taff Ely has seen at first hand the devastating impact of the catastrophic flooding events and climate change.

In a matter of hours in February 2020, more than 300 homes in my local area were impacted by the worst flooding in a generation. In an instant, millions of pounds' worth of damage had been caused to businesses, homes and local infrastructure. Indeed, the national lido of Wales, a wonderful space right in the heart of my constituency, was closed for more than a year after being absolutely devastated by flooding. Now, more than a year on, people are still feeling the effects of the floods, including through challenges getting access to home insurance, and there are also those who, sadly, are struggling with the long-term mental health impacts of flash flooding.

Communities such as mine are, sadly, not alone. Up and down this country, both in Wales and beyond, there are cities, towns and villages that have been devastated by the effects of climate change. The sad fact of the matter is that, left unchecked, climate change will lead to more catastrophic climate events such as floods, not just in Wales, but around the world too.

It will come as no surprise that I have genuine fears about the UK Government's commitment to supporting those at risk. Colleagues may be aware of the real fight that I and other Rhondda Cynon Taff representatives, including my hon. Friends the Members for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and for Cynon Valley, had to put up to secure funding for Wales following the devastating flooding last year.

Although I am pleased that the UK Government eventually came up with some cash to help communities like mine, it is clear that only the Labour Government in Wales really understand and are truly committed to taking flood prevention seriously. Alongside our fantastic local council in RCT, they have acted quickly to support those hit hardest by the floods, both through emergency financial support and in bringing forward flood resistance measures for at-risk homes.

The Welsh Government have also recently committed to funding additional flood protections for more than 45,000 homes across Wales. Rather than spending funding on bureaucratic reports, they are focused on making real, lifelong changes that will support and protect communities.

Colleagues may be relieved to know that I also want to use my brief time today to show support for a number of other ambitious measures in which the Welsh Labour Government are investing to tackle climate change. In 2019, the Welsh Government introduced

mandatory regulations on new housing developments to help reduce flood risk and improve water quality. Sadly, the important topic of sustainable urban drainage systems is not spoken about often enough, but the science really does speak for itself. Despite evidence showing that SUDS address flooding in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner, the UK Government have completely failed to introduce such regulations in England. I therefore look forward to hearing from the Minister what consideration the UK Government, particularly the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, have given to the possibility of introducing mandatory SUDS in England, too.

The Minister will also know that the Welsh Labour Government are leading the way on tree planting, as other Members have said. The creation of a new national forest stretching from the north of Wales all the way to the south is a vital step forward, not just in creating a sustainable timber industry for the future, but in supporting local communities by creating new cultural and recreational opportunities across Wales.

When we discuss climate change, it is absolutely vital to consider the impact that our actions and our Governments' actions across the devolved nations are having on the lives of future generations. I have regularly been inspired by the fantastic engagement shown by young people in my community on the question of climate change. From plastic in our oceans to littering in our green spaces, climate change and environment policy is brought up time and again on school visits and on my social media channels.

A few weeks ago, I visited Tonyrefail Community School in my constituency to hear from young people about the issues affecting them. We talked about everything from recycling centres to single-use plastics, air pollution and overfishing, and their fears about the impact of climate change on the future. It is clear that young people in my community understand the scale of the challenges that we face, yet the Tory Government are doing everything in their power to make it harder for the Labour Government in Wales to take steps to address climate change.

The United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 and this Government's shameless attempt to undermine devolution and the democratic rights of the Welsh people are having an impact on the Welsh Government's ability to legislate on issues such as single-use plastic. The Welsh Government reaffirmed in the 2021 elections their commitment to abolishing a number of single-use plastics, but they now face an unnecessary uphill battle to put that into action. On air pollution, yet again the Welsh Labour Government are setting and meeting far more ambitious targets than those at UK level. The UK Government voted down on multiple occasions attempts to include World Health Organisation clean air targets in the Environment Bill, despite clear evidence of the impact of air pollution on the health of the most vulnerable. But thankfully, all of us representing communities in Wales can breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that the Welsh Labour Government have confirmed that they will be legislating to set the highest international standards for air quality in law through the forthcoming clean air Bill for Wales.

Lastly, it would seem remiss of me not to refer to the coronavirus pandemic, which obviously is having an ongoing impact on all our lives. That is particularly true

for our manufacturing and aviation sectors, which are both vital employers in my local area. As we see changes in manufacturing and industry across the UK, the Government have an opportunity to make radical interventions to ensure that skilled jobs are available across the whole country. We need proper, coherent policy from the UK Government to create jobs in green manufacturing. Labour's plan for an electric vehicle revolution is one such plan. We have to ensure that electric cars are affordable for everyone and, crucially for communities such as mine, we need to ensure that charging points are accessible all over the UK and not just in London and the south-east.

I urge the Minister, if he is as committed to the Union as his party claims to be, to particularly work with and learn from the Welsh Government. The impacts of climate change are happening now for us all to see, and the Minister is in a position of real power to create positive change. I sincerely hope that he and his colleagues across the Wales Office and in DEFRA are listening. Diolch, Mr Dowd.

3.26 pm

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for what I think is the first time, Mr Dowd. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) on securing today's debate and on her excellent and passionate speech laying out the challenges in front of us. Today's debate has on the whole been very consensual and positive. I think that nobody in this room or, hopefully, across Parliament would underestimate those challenges. The fact that, as my hon. Friend mentioned, there were 168 replies to the online consultation regarding this debate demonstrates the level of public concern about these important issues.

During the debate, we have heard about, and my hon. Friend highlighted, the actions of the Welsh Labour Government. This week, there was the announcement about 86 million trees being planted over the next few years. It was also highlighted that, unfortunately, the electrification of the railway line to Swansea and the Swansea bay tidal lagoon are two examples that demonstrate a lack of action from the UK Government.

The hon. Member for Bridgend (Dr Wallis) talked about decarbonisation, electric vehicles, the new technologies in his constituency and the opportunities to work together across his area. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) rightly said that we cannot sit back; we have to take action, and urgently. She also commended the pragmatic policies of the Welsh Government, including the national forest and the ban on single-use plastic—albeit with the challenges that are in place around that—and the fact that Wales has the third best recycling level in the world. I particularly liked her comment about levelling up with Labour in Wales—or not, as the case may be.

The hon. Member for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes) talked about his experience, in formative years, with hydro projects in his area and about measures across the constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), who is particularly passionate about these issues, talked very eloquently about the scale of the problems facing us, the global challenges and global temperatures. He also talked about the need to look closely at supporting the Welsh steel industry against cheaper imported Chinese steel, and he particularly

welcomed the Welsh Affairs Committee report with regard to HS2 being an England-only project and the need for a positive impact on funding in Wales.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) talked about pollutants and the plea to follow best practice, wherever that may be. He commended the Welsh Government on the plastic bag tax, and referred to the challenges around road building and the cleaner vehicles of the future, which will be a positive step forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) talked about young people in Newport and the work that has been done by the voluntary sector, including the wetlands trust, the Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Newport Wastesavers. Having spent time in a previous life working in the voluntary sector in that area, I know how passionate the voluntary sector is across Newport.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) talked about the opportunities in her constituency and that BEIS and the Welsh Government are looking at a thermal hydraulic facility, which will be the third of its kind in the world, if it comes about.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) talked about the challenges of flooding caused by Storm Dennis, the need to step up and the importance of grassroots, the power of local people and a bottom-up approach. I am sure we all look forward to seeing the Cynon climate change plan in due course. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) talked about the flooding challenges of Storm Dennis and the required flood prevention works that are being taken forward by the Welsh Government and local authorities.

A number of hon. Members mentioned that climate change is one of the most important and talked-about topics among children and young people during school visits. That demonstrates a positive view of the future. That young people care about these issues so passionately should give us hope that these issues will be taken forward. One thing that has stuck with me is the strapline from the Rio summit in 1992: "Think global, act local". That stuck with me, as I was quite a tender age at that point—well, tender-ish. We can all do our bit locally, which is the important message. We can all do our bit in our communities and schools, and add our small contributions together to make an impact across the country and the globe.

We know that our planet and way of life, in this country and around the world, is facing an existential threat from climate change. In the past few weeks, we have seen record high temperatures in the Pacific north-west, and we are increasingly familiar with extreme weather events closer to home, including the floods that affected my constituency and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Cynon Valley, for Pontypridd and for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), as well as other areas across south Wales and other parts of the country. I think it was the wettest February on record.

All that underlines the fact that this is not a challenge that can or should be left to future generations; it is one that we must face now, together. I, too, am proud that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley highlighted, the Senedd was the first Parliament in the world to vote to declare a climate emergency in 2019. That is why the Welsh Labour Government have brought

[Gerald Jones]

forward measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Wales, with a target of net zero emissions by 2050. That target is vital to protect our planet's future. It is an ambitious one that will require concerted effort from all of us: Governments, industries, communities and individuals.

Of course, Governments must take a lead. Through the warm home scheme, the Welsh Government have installed energy-efficiency measures for more than 60,000 households experiencing fuel poverty. They have also invested in major renewable energy infrastructure projects, including the Awel y Môr offshore wind farm and the world-class centre for marine engineering at Pembroke dock. All the while, they have taken action to combat and limit those technologies that threaten our climate and environment in Wales, including opposing fossil fuel extraction and maintaining a ban on fracking. Wales has reached the milestone of generating more than 50% of the energy we consume from renewable sources, up from 19% in 2014.

Of course, there is more that must be done for us to meet the 2050 target and ensure a sustainable future for all communities in Wales. Colleagues will know that, as highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West and others, the Welsh Labour Government have recently established a new ministry for climate change, under the leadership of Welsh Ministers Julie James and Lee Waters. It is fair to say that this bold decision to bring housing, transport, planning and energy policy together under one roof is a clear signal that the Welsh Government will use all the levers it has to tackle the climate emergency. The Senedd and the Welsh Government will expand renewable energy generation by public bodies and community groups in Wales, working towards challenging targets in the public sector and community renewable energy capacity by 2030.

The transition to a fully green economy requires difficult choices. In Wales we are embedding the concept of a just transition through social partnerships, bringing together Government, trade unions and employers to consider the action that must be taken. These are just some of the measures that are being taken in Wales to combat climate change and I hope that there can be close co-operation with the UK Government, something a number of Members have called for this afternoon, as we focus all our attention on hitting that 2050 target.

The UN climate summit COP26, which this country is hosting in Glasgow this year, is a critical moment for our planet and for our country. The eyes of the world will be upon us and I hope that Ministers across Governments will use the opportunity to provide the meaningful leadership that we and our planet need. I hope the Minister can provide us with some of those necessary reassurances today.

3.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): Thank you for your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I join the congratulations for the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) and it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones). He just said that this is a positive and consensual debate, and all I can say is that it probably is. You should see us in Wales when we are disagreeing with each other, Mr Dowd—but that is another matter.

The UK is the first country in the world to have enshrined legally binding carbon budgets into legislation. We are now into our fifth carbon budget and have recently committed to a sixth, which will set the UK on course to achieve a 78% emissions reduction by 2037, having achieved 40% so far, which is no mean achievement. This target is consistent with the Paris agreement, and the goal is to limit global temperature rises to well below 2 °C and pursue efforts towards 1.5 °C.

The hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) made a point about the fact our contribution is not going to count for much unless the rest of the world follows. He is quite right and this is one of the rare occasions when I agree with him. I want to put in context the rest of what I say, because it will be easy enough for hon. Members to say, "Well, you could be doing more." The point is that if we want the rest of the world to follow us, we had better do what we are doing well and we had better do it without there being an obvious, drastic cut in living standards for everyone in this country as a result of the actions we are taking. If we saw living standards cut and people being thrown out of work because of action we were taking, the rest of the world, particularly countries like China, most certainly would not follow us and therefore we would defeat the whole object of what we are doing.

It is estimated that four times more low carbon power generation will be needed by 2050. We cannot predict what the balance of energy generation technologies will look like, but we can take bold steps now to build the foundations of a low carbon system that is mindful of the need to keep costs as low as possible for consumers and the taxpayer, for the reasons I have just mentioned.

The next contracts for difference auction in December will aim to support up to 6 GW of renewables across Great Britain, which is enough clean low-cost energy to power up to 10 million homes. That mechanism has already played a key role in driving up the terms of renewables while driving costs down. The next auction will include revenue support for floating offshore wind, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) and which has significant deployment potential in the Celtic sea, where wind speeds are particularly strong. The Secretary of State for Wales and I have been to Pembroke Dock to look at the infrastructure there. We had a virtual meeting yesterday with one of the companies that is looking to deploy renewable technology there, and very exciting technology it is, too.

Some of the Swansea Bay city region growth deal projects were mentioned in passing as being funded by the Welsh Government, which of course they are, but hon. Members seemed to overlook the fact that they are also being 50% funded by the UK Government. We are very proud to be supporting those projects, including the Pembroke Dock marine programme, which is developing innovative floating offshore and wind technology.

We are also very well placed for marine energy generation more widely, providing it can offer clear value for money. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy ran a call for evidence on marine energy last year, and we are considering policy related to wave and tidal stream energy as a result of the submissions we received. A few weeks ago, I visited the Morlais Menter Môn project in Ynys Môn, which has been championed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie). Although that project is still being put together,

from what I have seen it is well advanced, and I am confident that we may well see that project going ahead. Obviously, that depends on the business case, but it is an exciting and innovative project.

The hon. Member for Gower mentioned the Swansea bay tidal lagoon project, and I chaired the Select Committee inquiry into that with a Labour Member. There is a legal case going on at the moment, so I am not going to say too much about it, but I urge anyone interested in that project to look at the transcript of the meeting in which we heard from the developers. Since then, I have met Swansea Council to discuss the Dragon energy island proposal, and I can tell the hon. Member that I have a great deal of confidence in the competence of the council. That scheme is in its early stages, but neither I nor my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has any problem at all with the principle of tidal lagoon development.

Tonia Antoniazzi: I thank the Minister for the positive comments he has made about Labour-run Swansea Council and Dragon Energy Island. In any conversations that he has with other Ministers, the shadow Secretary of State for Wales or the Prime Minister, I urge him to push that agenda forwards for the future of Swansea.

David T. C. Davies: All I can say is that it has a lot of potential. The figures that were put to us by the leader of Swansea Council were very positive, but obviously the council has to make its case to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. It is certainly not something that we have any problem with in principle.

We are developing a business model to support the application of carbon capture, usage and storage technology to the power sector. That, along with a range of other measures that we are taking, is of particular relevance to Wales, because of the higher proportion of electricity that Wales has historically generated from fossil fuels. We are taking the next important steps to cultivate next-generation nuclear technologies, committing £385 million for small and advanced modular reactors and £222 million for the UK's first fusion power plant. Both actions align well with Wales's advanced nuclear ambitions across fission and fusion technologies. I know my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn is particularly interested in those schemes.

That leads me to make another point: a lot of the actions that we are taking need the support of all those who care about the environment. One of the problems we have had with nuclear power is that those people who have clamoured loudly for electricity to be generated from carbon-free sources have not always been willing to commit themselves to technologies such as nuclear, which delivers just that and does so in a predictable fashion that allows the national grid to function properly. The regulation of the electricity network is a matter for Ofgem, and £2.7 million has been earmarked for investment in the distribution networks across Wales and Merseyside for the period from 2015 to 2023.

Turning to business and industry, I am sure hon. Members will welcome the Government's commitment of £21.5 million to the south Wales industrial cluster, matching £18.5 million committed by industry. South Wales is the second largest industrial cluster in the UK in terms of greenhouse gas emissions—hence the need for targeted action in the region. That funding will enable the cluster to undertake detailed engineering

studies into hydrogen and carbon capture infrastructure and to develop a strategic decarbonisation plan. I was very pleased to be in Swansea last week, discussing the region's low-carbon growth deal projects. Those tie in with the aims of the cluster and are, of course, being supported financially by the UK Government.

All parts of Wales have the opportunity to benefit from funding through the £289 million industrial energy transformation fund, the £250 million clean steel fund, the £240 million net zero hydrogen fund and the £1 billion carbon capture and storage infrastructure fund.

In addition to our funding commitments, we are working to establish policy frameworks to support our industrial partners to make the transition to net zero. We have confirmed a new and ambitious UK emissions trading scheme to create the world's first cap and trade market for greenhouse gas emissions and, as announced in the recently published industrial decarbonisation strategy, we are encouraging low-carbon fuel switching and growing the market for low-carbon industrial products. Meanwhile, we are developing business models to financially incentivise the take-up and usage of key decarbonisation technologies such as carbon capture and hydrogen.

Turning to transport, as my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) pointed out, we will end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030. All cars and vans will be 100% zero-emissions from the tailpipe by 2035. Between 2030 and 2035 all new cars and vans will be required to have a significant zero-emissions capability, which would include some plug-in and full hybrids. That will of course entail a lot of changes for consumers, and it is only fair that we bear that in mind.

I share my hon. Friend's disappointment at the blanket decision to stop building roads across the whole of Wales, because the roads of the future will not throw out the emissions of the roads of the past. He mentioned one in his constituency. The problems of congestion in Chepstow are appalling. We are seeing World Health Organisation guidance being breached. We know what the solution is: a bypass. At the moment, it cannot happen because the Welsh Government have halted all road building. That is a matter of great disappointment to many of us.

The measures that we have taken on transport send an unequivocal signal on the direction of travel that we are pursuing in partnership with industry towards a zero-carbon transport future, but as well as top-down market creation we also need bottom-up technological innovation. In that field, Welsh innovators are ahead of the pack, following in the footsteps of the fuel pioneer from Swansea Sir William Robert Grove, who I looked up on Wikipedia last night. He had a very interesting background.

We are looking to attract at least one gigafactory to Wales. We are supporting the development of electric heavy vehicle trucks in Cwmbran, in the factory that I know as Lucas Girling because I was one of the subcontractors there for many years. It is now known as Meritor, and we backed it with £15.9 million. I am looking forward to going back and visiting, and meeting some of my old friends on goods outward again.

Innovative companies such as Riversimple, which His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales visited last week alongside the Secretary of State for Wales, are developing hydrogen vehicles. Riversimple took me out for a spin in

[David T. C. Davies]

one recently in Monmouth, and good fun it was too. That is being supported by £1.3 million. In the Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced £4.8 million for the Holyhead hydrogen hub—another scheme that was championed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn. It is a proposal that aims to supply hydrogen fuel to the heavy goods and maritime vehicle markets on Ynys Môn. I am also aware of the exciting opportunity presented by the LanzaTech proposal to develop sustainable aviation fuel in south Wales, which came up during my visit in Swansea last week—[*Interruption.*] You are looking at me purposefully, Mr Dowd. I wonder whether I am exceeding my time limit.

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): No, I just want to clarify that if people have a proxy vote we can carry on. If not, we will have to suspend for 15 minutes for the Division in the House.

David T. C. Davies: I am on a proxy, Mr Dowd, so I am happy to carry on.

Those projects and more show that Wales is leading the way when it comes to low-carbon transport innovation, and they will play a key part in the UK-wide effort to decarbonise the sector, which we will say more about as we publish the transport decarbonisation plan. The plan focuses on the challenges that we need to overcome to reduce transport emissions and ensure that the UK reaches net zero by 2050. It will also review the existing forecasts of future transport emissions from each mode of transport and set out a range of actions to drive further decarbonisation.

The Government are taking a range of actions to put our homes, which comprise a tenth of Welsh emissions, on a pathway towards clean power. A comprehensive overview of the key near-term actions that we will take will be set out in the heat and building strategy, which we expect to publish soon. The strategy will set out a range of policy levers to encourage consumers and businesses to make the transition to clean heat and improve the energy efficiency of buildings. We have already announced our intention to consult on the territorial scope and a key market mechanism to support the delivery of 600,000 heat pumps per year by 2028. Hydrogen will be considered as a potential decarbonisation option for heat, and we will be assessing the case for encouraging or requiring new gas boilers to be readily convertible to hydrogen in preparation for any future conversion of the gas network. We will continue to work with the Health and Safety Executive to enable up to 20% of hydrogen blending in the gas network by 2023, subject to the success of testing and trials.

We recognise that different areas will have different heat decarbonisation requirements. Heat networks are one of the most cost-effective ways of reducing carbon emissions from heating, and their efficiency and carbon-saving potential increases as they grow and connect to each other. We have already provided £7.9 million to the heat networks in Cardiff, and I was very pleased to be able to visit them virtually back in April. There is another one in Bridgend, which I hope to see shortly—not virtually, but in reality. Backed by £36 million, the Active Building Centre in Swansea is one of Wales's most promising innovation projects, working to transform

the way in which buildings are designed, constructed and operated by integrating power generation technology into the fabric of the building itself, and of course there is a growth deal in the Swansea area, which is focused on retrofitting buildings. Again, that will be supported by the UK Government.

Central Government clearly have a leading role to play in the net zero transition. We can set regulations, help to incentivise the adoption and development of net zero technologies, and provide further funding for strategic projects. However, in Wales we are seeing our local partners rise to the climate challenge as well, through the city and growth deals and backed by £790 million of UK Government funding. Our colleagues in north Wales are paving the way for tidal energy and new nuclear technologies. Swansea's low-carbon growth programme is pioneering hydrogen, marine energy and low-carbon buildings. I have been very pleased to visit those regions and see at first hand the innovative projects they are looking to deliver. Cardiff has identified energy and the environment as one of its priority sectors, and I am absolutely certain that, as the mid-Wales growth deal develops, it too will be pursuing net zero projects as part of the development.

Our job is to deliver a green industrial revolution that has reducing emissions as its core objective. It is also about jobs and levelling up: the infrastructure we build and the technologies we develop to reach net zero will spur on a whole new wave of economic development. It is estimated that delivering the net zero infrastructure required by the south Wales industrial cluster alone could create up to 5,000 jobs. Depending on the extent of local supply chain engagement, Rolls-Royce estimates that 40,000 jobs could be created across north Wales and the north-west of England if the production of small modular reactors reaches its peak. The Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult forecasts that the first Celtic sea floating offshore wind projects could deliver 3,000 jobs across south Wales and the south-west of England, an opportunity that would support the Government's target of reaching 60% of UK content in UK wind projects. Driving up prosperity and driving down emissions is the approach we are taking to confront two Government priorities simultaneously: levelling up across the UK, and fulfilling our obligations to reduce dependency on fossil fuel.

To conclude, the Government are in no doubt about the need to take bold and ambitious action to rise to the challenge of climate change. We have made significant progress, with emissions 40% lower now than they were in the 1990s. We do understand the need to go further, and we will work with local communities, partners, businesses, the Welsh Government, and international partners to do so. This is a collective effort in which we all have a role to play, and I thank hon. Members for their contributions today.

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): Thank you, and I apologise for my virtual—and then actual—interruptions.

3.54 pm

Tonia Antoniazzi: I thank the Minister for his detailed response, and all Members present for participating in today's important debate. I want to reflect on a few things that have been said, particularly the words of the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones), who spoke about

thinking global and acting local. That is so important, because so many of the community councils have been making really great progress in my constituency.

In Mumbles and Pennard, they have a plastic-free mission. There is a wonderful place called Pennard Stores. If hon. Members ever go down to Three Cliffs, they should go to Pennard Stores—Jamie runs it—because it is carbon neutral and everything there is just magnificent. These are small actions that local businesses and councils are taking, and it even goes down to the individual. There is a young boy called Sonny, who goes every day to do a litter pick, and we have two-minute beach cleans across Swansea bay. These things make a difference to climate change in Wales.

I thank hon. Members for their excellent contributions to the debate. One of the things that the Minister did not mention, though, was the electrification to Swansea, which was one of the Tory Government's big promises to constituents in Swansea. That is a massive disappointment.

David T. C. Davies: The hon. Lady is quite right to say that I should have mentioned that. I was on the Welsh Affairs Committee—and she may have been as well—when this issue was looked at. The reality is that the costs of electrification from Cardiff to Swansea were absolutely extortionate and had gone up and up. The journey times were not going to decrease in any way, so there was no benefit to the consumer. If we recognise that we have a certain amount of money to spend on such projects, it would have been better—this is what the Government felt—to spend it somewhere where we were actually going to have more of an impact on carbon dioxide emissions.

Tonia Antoniazzi: I, too, was on the Committee, which is why it is really interesting to see the money going into HS2. It would not have been beyond the wit of man to realise back in 2015, when those promises were made, that it was going to be a challenge, and it is a challenge. The Minister makes a valid point, but it is still a lost dream now, and that is what is disappointing about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) said that inaction is not an option, and I think that all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate agree that that is the case.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered measures to combat climate change in Wales.

3.57 pm

Sitting suspended.

Children and Families: Cross-Government Strategy

4.5 pm

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice to support the hybrid arrangements. Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and as they leave the room. I also remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered developing a cross-Government strategy for improving outcomes for children and families.

First, I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as a serving councillor and unpaid vice-president of the Local Government Association. I also put on the record my thanks to the LGA and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, whose research I will draw on in my speech.

The NSPCC's report, "Bringing the global to the local", suggests that the UK continues to have a child protection system that is among the best in the world. However, a good childhood goes beyond effective protection from harm; we need to consider how we support children to thrive. Child protection is a good example of where cross-Government co-ordination is required. I very much welcome the Home Secretary's recent comments about corporal punishment and hope that the Minister can press colleagues across Government to consider bringing England into line with Wales, Scotland and most of our international allies with a reasonable chastisement rule—something that is well evidenced in the research for another NSPCC report, "Equally Protected?"

However, the key thing for all Government policy is that it works well in practice. For most children, the key things in their life will be education and healthcare, and on the whole these things work extremely well at giving our children a great start. The challenges arise when we start to address more complex issues in areas such as public health, child poverty, enrichment activity, financial education and preparation for the world of work, and almost every Government Department has an impact on children and their welfare.

I particularly commend the Minister for her work on the programme to support children during school holidays. It has been a great illustration of both how complex but also how effective cross-Government co-ordination can be, with Departments, including the Department for Education, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, all having a direct stake in both the process and the outcomes for the children involved. This programme, as strong as it has been, has not highlighted something that is simply a covid issue; it has demonstrated a challenge that has existed for decades, which covid has brought into even sharper focus.

So why is it timely to consider the cross-Government co-ordination of children's policy now? First, this is an opportunity to consider how we articulate our ambitions—what we as a country want to achieve for our children. Secondly, today I will make the case for the boring but absolutely essential task of sorting out what one might

[David Simmonds]

term the plumbing of the system—the complex web of budgets, policies, markets and providers that we need to support our children as effectively and efficiently as possible. Many across the sector argue that we need to think about what our plan looks like for the future.

I will consider first the question of ambition. The purpose of this debate is to press the case for a clear sense of cross-Government ambition for children. All political experience shows that government—manifestations of the state such as local authorities, schools, health authorities and police forces—is very good at fulfilling the specific tasks it is given by legislation. That is why, for example, councils have prioritised their legal obligations under our child protection system in response to the tough choices driven by financial pressure.

However, the downside to that is that by keeping our policies for children in a state of “just about managing” across some parts of government, we forgo the opportunity to make the strategic decisions that bring about the long-term benefits we want to see, which I have heard the Minister and others articulate their desire for. Many of those things have lifetime cost implications for the state, as well as significant human consequences.

It is right, for example, that the Government have set out a cross-departmental strategy on the environment and climate change. The focus brought by COP26 has enabled us to see all parts of government thinking about how our actions contribute to achieving those climate goals and working with all kinds of stakeholders on the action that they need to take. In the same way, I call for a clear, cross-government strategy for children that sets out what we want to achieve for the health, education and wellbeing of our youngest constituents. On the whole, we have a system that supports children well, but it remains inconsistent in some respects. From early years health and nutrition to entry to university, we still have some distance to travel before we can say that our youngest constituents are able to make the best of the opportunities that our country seeks to offer.

I turn briefly to the specifics. Our children would benefit from a clear set of national outcomes—a list, perhaps—starting from consistent, high-quality antenatal support, as argued for by some, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom) in her recent review, through to access to vaccinations, early education, the financial benefits from the Treasury relevant to childhood, accountable education providers with a restless ambition for every child, and a clear national offer on enrichment to engage all young people in the opportunities and responsibilities of our society.

That brings me to the heart of the issue. As the Local Government Association publication “Rewiring Public Services” highlighted, setting out ambitions is all very well, but unless we think through how to fulfil them, we are setting ourselves up to fail. The research base emerging from the network of What Works centres brings together a good deal of evidence in this respect. It highlights how the best value for the taxpayer is often achieved through programmes, such as the troubled families programme, that move away from specific, legislatively mandated actions to locally co-ordinated interventions.

We need to consider that schools are the one place where the state has eyes on almost all children. They have a unique opportunity and responsibility in all aspects

of a child’s life. Too often, our system has prioritised institutional performance rather than the outcomes for every child. We need to think, across all life stages, how we maximise the achievement of every participant—something that remains a legally mandated responsibility of local authorities, but which currently relies on a complex web of often conflicting interests across different providers. We need to ensure that regulation supports the delivery of those national priority outcomes. Anecdotal examples of high-performing institutions are clearly not a proxy for the rigorous pursuit of ambition for all.

We need to bolster the power of our local authorities to fulfil their statutory role as champions for children. Public health is a clear example of this. In practice, many councils have been pushed to accept mixed-quality contracts passed on from historic NHS providers. We need to ensure that NHS bodies welcome the scrutiny of accountable local colleagues and welcome the opportunity to reconfigure services so that, for example, child protection and health visiting become a seamless experience from the point of view of a vulnerable child, rather than a process of navigating an internal market.

Finally, we need a clear process across government for driving these ambitions. Ofsted would not accept a local authority’s saying that it cannot fulfil a priority because it is someone else’s department. We must apply the same principle in Whitehall. A Government with a substantial majority, ambition for levelling up, the support of great Ministers with experience in the area—all these things are an opportunity for setting out a new ambition for what it means to grow up in the UK in the coming decades. That cannot simply be about addressing deficits and failings; it needs to be about having that sense of ambition. Too often, deficits and failings are patched up—with great, but often piecemeal initiatives—and long-term challenges still need to be addressed.

Growing pressure on the special educational needs and disability system is pushing education budgets to breaking point in many areas. Department for Education figures suggest that there is more than £1.4 billion in school surpluses, and many schools on the Department’s radar have excessive surpluses. Councils are criticised for spending on child protection rather than early intervention, but the law of the land makes this inevitable. In respect of refugee children, the Home Office owns the national transfer scheme, designed with the Department for Education and local authorities to improve capacity, but market failure in the system sometimes means a lack of placements for willing local authority participants to procure.

In conclusion, we need to apply the excellent research base that has developed—from many organisations, including those funded by the Department—to build on the depth and strength of the experience of our local authorities and our schools. We also need to set out across government that clear vision of our national priorities for our children, so that we have a system that consistently supports all our children to thrive and make the most of the opportunities that our country has to offer.

4.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Vicky Ford): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I congratulate my hon. Friend

the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) on securing this important debate about how we work across Government to improve outcomes for children and their families. I am also grateful for the focus on this topic through the Lords Public Services Committee. The Secretary of State for Education is the lead Cabinet Minister for families and has spoken about the critical importance of families in ensuring the best start in life for children and young people. The Government have been clear that providing the right support for children and families is a priority across policy and decision making, particularly for those with vulnerabilities. We all share an ambition to ensure the system works and delivers the best outcomes.

Over the past decade, we have worked consistently to improve outcomes for every child. For example, I am proud that through the work of the Department for Education, alongside schools, the attainment gap has narrowed at every stage of education. However, we know the pandemic has thrown up additional challenges, and families and children rely on policies and programmes owned across Government. For example, that means being able to access a good school and early education place; the welfare support system being there when families need it; providing first-class child and family health provision through our NHS; and, where families need more support, ensuring that the right, targeted services are in place through children's social care, early help, special education needs and disabilities services, and multi-service providers, such as family hubs.

Departments must keep families front and centre of all they do, and I am proud of the progress the Government have made in joining up services for children and families. I assure my hon. Friend that Ministers and officials have never worked more closely together than over this pandemic period. I have had frequent meetings at the Home Office with the Minister for Safeguarding, at the Department of Health and Social Care with the Minister for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care, the Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health and the Minister for Care, at the Department for Work and Pensions with the Minister for Welfare Delivery, at the Ministry of Justice with the Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State, the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and Lord Wolfson, and at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis). All these meetings have brought us together to better our approach to protect the most vulnerable children and young people.

At official level, Departments continue to partner to deliver the cross-Government vulnerable children and young people's programme, which has reported to the Cabinet Office since April 2020—right at the beginning of the pandemic. This approach has cemented strong cross-Government working and includes both central Government Departments and agencies, such as Ofsted, Public Health England and NHS England. Cross-Government work has been essential to ensuring children and young people continue to have access to the critical services they need and deserve, even over the challenges of the past 16 months. These services have continued to operate, thanks to the dedication of frontline workers, including health visitors, NHS mental health service providers, social workers, school teachers and staff.

To support local services, we have co-ordinated across Government an increase to funding for councils. An additional £4.6 billion of un-ringfenced funding in 2020 to 2021 went to councils for both children and adult social care, with another £1.5 billion-plus this year. My Department is providing an additional £3 billion for education recovery, which comes on top of investment of over £14 billion in schools over the three-year-period, compared with 2019 to 2020. The schools budget will be over £52 billion next year.

When schools were closed to most pupils, we provided £450 million for the national voucher scheme to support pupils eligible for free school meals when they stayed at home. However, many children missed out on opportunities to have fun with their friends, and parents had little respite from caring for their children. That is why we have also expanded our holiday activities and food programme this year and are making up to £220 million available to local authorities across the country to co-ordinate free holiday provision, including healthy food and enriching activities. The Department for Work and Pensions has provided more than £400 million in local authority welfare schemes, including the covid local support grant, which is to support families and individuals to stay warm and well fed. The primary focus of those grants is children and their families.

David Simmonds: I very much welcome the Minister's commitment to enrichment, and I highlight the particular benefits that flow from that approach in policy terms. I am sure that, as constituency MPs, we have all heard from headteachers, school governors and parents in our areas that one of the striking features of the pandemic has been not so much the loss of learning, but the loss of learning skills. There is a real concern among those involved with education about the impact that will have on young people's ability to return to full engagement. I commend the Minister's position and promise to do anything I can to strengthen it and drive forward that approach to enrichment, which is absolutely crucial in making up for those lost learning skills.

Vicky Ford: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Another thing that our young people have missed out on is having fun and gaining the confidence to meet new friends. They gained that in previous years, when we piloted our holiday activities and food programmes. To take him up on his offer, I ask him to please visit and support the holiday activities and food programme in his constituency and encourage others to do so. Perhaps I can encourage you to do so too, Mr Dowd.

This is about children getting confidence back when they have missed out on so much. They have been amazing and have given up so much. In doing so, they have saved the lives of others. We owe it to them to help them rebuild and have the fun that is such an important part of childhood and the teenage years.

Beyond the pandemic, there are many ways that Governments can come together to improve outcomes for children and families. Often, that is through the delivery of local services, which I have described already. That will be overseen by national Government.

We in national Government take an active role to shape and influence delivery, ensure it aligns with national priorities, and support co-ordination across departmental boundaries. For example, MHCLG's supporting families programme helps families experiencing unemployment,

[Vicky Ford]

domestic abuse and mental ill health, and supports other priorities, including school attendance and reducing crime. But it is not the only programme to use strong collaboration between services and Departments to help families with that wide range of issues. The reducing parental conflict programme works with all English local authorities to help them integrate help to reduce parental conflict in their local support for families. Violence reduction units are bringing together local partners in the 18 areas most affected by serious violence to deliver an effective and joined-up approach to tackling violent crime and its drivers, especially when it affects children and young people.

We are also tackling youth crime by addressing the risk factors for offending at an early stage. That includes boosting investment in local multi-agency youth offending teams, which provide holistic support to children who have committed offences or are at risk of offending. We must continue to work in those strong partnerships to improve outcomes for our children and families, especially the most vulnerable.

The pandemic has shown us just how important it is to get this right, but there is much more to do to ensure that families, parents and carers benefit from services, and that the services are seamless and built around their needs. That is why we are doing a SEND review and a care review, and are working with my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom) to support the implementation of the early years healthy development review and all those recommendations. That is why we are improving children and young people's mental health support with significant reforms and investment.

The public commitments that we set out in the joint Green Paper are only one part of the story. I have been working with ministerial colleagues, the Department of Health and Social Care and across Government more widely to produce the covid-19 mental health and wellbeing recovery action plan and to see that delivered. It includes extensive actions we are taking to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

We are also leading a cross-Government approach to champion the family hub model, providing more than £14 million of investment and working with DHSC, DWP, MHCLG and the Ministry of Justice. Family hubs bring those services together and aim to secure greater impact from those services for children and families.

David Simmonds: I welcome the Government's initiative on family hubs. We often still hear that mental health is a Cinderella service, especially for teenagers at the point of transition to adulthood. I have had examples of constituents being told by the children's side of the service that it is unwilling to take them on at the age of 17 because they will not be seen before they become an adult, and adult services saying that it will not see them until they pass their 18th birthday. Does the Minister agree that that is an example of the kind of area where rigorous accountability is needed, to ensure that the ambitions rightly set out by Government are fulfilled in practice?

Vicky Ford: I thank my hon. Friend for his support for family hubs. I have a little bit of constituency pride—my family hub, the Essex Child and Family

Wellbeing Service, which supports the mental health of teenagers and young people, was recently the regional award winner in the NHS Parliamentary Awards. I am very proud of them.

It is so important that teenagers can also access that type of support. It is exactly those sorts of transitions that we have been looking at most deeply, not only with the Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health, but through the mental health action group, which brings together a broad range of expertise on young people's mental health and is chaired by myself and my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities. We have been looking at how we can support young people through, for example, the transitions from primary to secondary school and from secondary education on into higher education. At key transition points, they need additional help, especially at this time.

As we continue to take steps towards recovering from covid, we must not lose any of the benefits that have come to us by the close working relationships that have been strengthened in the pandemic. I know I speak on behalf of all my ministerial colleagues when I say we are committed to continuing to work together to ensure that we grow those relationships further. Just before the pandemic, we made changes to multi-agency working. We strengthened the duties placed on police, health and the local authority to work collaboratively to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children. It is clear that multi-agency arrangements are needed.

The recent Ofsted review on sexual abuse in schools and colleges was a prime example of bringing young people's departments, local services, charities and parent groups together to identify the issues and deliver those cross-societal solutions to ensure that our children do not grow up thinking that harassment and abuse are just a normal part of their childhood. My Department, the Home Office and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport are all working really closely to ensure that we interweave our responses into the Ofsted review, the violence against women and girls strategy and the online safety Bill, to maximise the collective response and make that deep-rooted change. We have to reset the dial and we only do that by working together.

We have recently published revised statutory guidance on keeping children safe in education. We are working with local authority safeguarding partners and the sector on tightening the statutory guidance, to interlock all those wider efforts to best support our children and young people.

The pandemic has strengthened local partnership working between schools and colleges and local authorities with social care and other services to identify and support vulnerable children and ensure their regular school attendance. Those multi-agency safeguarding partners are continuing to work in their committed partnerships to keep children in care safe and to keep them well. Yes, there is a lot more to do, but I am so proud of what we have achieved to make life better for children and families.

I want to take a moment to thank all my colleagues nationally and locally for their efforts, and to reiterate my personal commitment to work across Government, across programmes and across initiatives in order to place the needs of children and families at the heart of everything the Government are striving to achieve,

and to ensure that we work with our partners in local government to make sure that they also can help to achieve this.

Question put and agreed to.

4.30 pm

Sitting suspended.

Space Debris

4.50 pm

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the hybrid arrangements. Timings of debates have been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made for the next debate. There will also be suspensions between each debate. I remind Members participating physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of debates, and are expected to remain for the entire debate.

I also remind Members participating virtually that they must leave their camera on for the duration of the debate, and that they will be visible at all times, both to one another and to us in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should email the Westminster Hall Clerks' email address, which is westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk. Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and before they leave the room. I also remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn.

4.51 pm

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con) [V]: I beg to move,
That this House has considered space debris.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. If the covid pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we can no longer take the unexpected for granted. The lesson that we must learn is that we need to look elsewhere for other seemingly unfathomable scenarios, recognising that they sadly may come true one day. Already the pandemic has hastened our awareness of other looming catastrophes. Heat domes over Canada and the western United States, combined with rapid glacial Arctic ice melting, have demonstrated the need for urgent action on reducing carbon dioxide emissions, but where else might the next catastrophe occur?

One answer, I believe, is staring straight above us in the skies. After being reshuffled out of Government, I found myself promoted to spending much more time with my three-month-old daughter. Obviously, my working patterns were slightly different, and I would often find myself at 3 o'clock in the morning comforting a baby in our downstairs living room, and staring up at the skies under our conservatory roof. Without sounding too middle-aged, I do not remember ever being able to spot so many shining pinpricks of light, each one a satellite making its swift but steady path across the Earth's orbit, when I was a child.

It turns out that my early morning thoughts were not just the product of sleep-deprived delirium. We are living in a boom age of satellite production. According to the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, UNOOSA, as of April 2021 there were 7,389 satellites in space—a 20% increase from April 2020. That is welcome news in terms of telecommunications, but who pays—not for the satellites themselves but for the risk that the proliferation of such projectiles poses for the sustainability and, indeed, future viability of the Earth's orbit?

I believe that this is a threat that we must wake up to before we find ourselves in a catastrophe that has the potential to cause equal, economic devastation as

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—if not than worse than—the pandemic. By way of a history lesson, the question of who is responsible for what we send up into space has long been debated. The Magna Carta of space law, the outer space treaty, was signed at the 1,499th plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on 19 December 1966. For the most part, it is the primary piece of international legislation that guides how nations operate in space. Within that landmark text, article VI states:

“Parties to the Treaty shall bear international responsibility for national activities in outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, whether such activities are carried on by governmental agencies or by non-governmental entities, and for assuring that national activities are carried out in conformity with the provisions set forth in the present Treaty.”

Therefore, national Governments are now, as then, held responsible for the activities of companies, public or private, that operate in space, yet this has not prevented an accumulation of dangerous space debris, which is littered across our orbit and for which no one seems to have been held accountable.

Currently, there are an estimated 34,000 objects greater than 10 cm in diameter in orbit, 900,000 objects of between 1 cm and 10 cm in diameter in orbit, and a further 128 million objects of between 1 mm and 1 cm in diameter in orbit, and all are capable of seriously damaging or destroying vital satellite equipment. As the British astronaut Tim Peake observed, it takes only an object the size of a paint fleck to crack the windows on the international space station. Those numbers are beside the number of defunct and non-operational satellites—currently 2,900—that have sadly led to collisions, such as the Iridium-33 collision with the derelict Kosmos-2251, which caused a significant dispersal of debris. We also have the case of the Ecuadorian NEE-01 Pegasus satellite, which collided with a discarded Soviet fuel tank in 2013, seriously damaging that nation’s only satellite. Those are just two of an estimated 560 satellite break-ups, explosions, collisions or anomalous events resulting in fragmentation.

The risk of a collision in space is still low, but conjunction warnings and collision avoidance manoeuvres are becoming commonplace for satellite operators and the international space station. Most recently, in March this year, the EU’s Galileo satellite GSAT0219 was forced to perform a collision avoidance manoeuvre in response to the predicted impact of tracked space debris, which turned out to be an old Soviet rocket that had been in orbit since 1989. The international space station has been forced to conduct 27 collision avoidance manoeuvres since August 2020, with manoeuvres becoming ever more common. Apparently, it is not the harshness of space, the distance from their families or even illness that is cited by astronauts on the ISS as their greatest fear; it is getting hit by a piece of untracked debris flying past them at 40,000 km per hour.

The threat of space debris is also apparent in the increased militarisation of space and the testing of anti-satellite weaponry, most recently by the Russians and Chinese. When we talk of military satellites, we automatically think of cold war-era spy satellites, but anti-satellite weaponry has now advanced from the realm of star wars under Reagan to become a very real and dangerous issue. In 2007, China’s intentional destruction

of the Fengyun-1C decommissioned weather satellite through the use of a ballistic missile was a success, because the satellite operated at the same height as many American and Japanese satellites. It was destroyed, but it caused a massive dispersal of debris, which is still a problem today. That single explosion has accounted for 10% of all catalogued debris. Should anti-satellite battle strategies continue to be developed, we will fail to prevent Kessler syndrome, whereby an exponential splintering of satellite debris leads to further collisions, from developing.

That concern is not simply confined to missiles, as Russian satellite operators have engaged in anti-satellite proximity operations, positioning satellites in harmful trajectory of critical western satellites. In 2014, a Russian satellite named the Luch was purposefully moved into proximity to both Italian and French military communications satellites. Additionally, in July 2020, the Russian military satellite Kosmos-2543 released a high-speed projectile from its main body, causing the American Space Force to declare that the activity was “consistent with a test of a new anti-satellite capability.”

Although the projectile failed to collide with another satellite, the capability to shoot down satellites from satellites has now been proved feasible. The test occurred after an April 2020 test of the Russian Nudol system, which is designed to engage satellite targets in low Earth orbit. More recently, from July 2017 to December 2019, the Chinese satellite SJ-17 made a series of manoeuvres with other Chinese satellites that took them past the UK Ministry of Defence’s Skynet 5A satellite.

The issue is important because it puts everything, from our military satellites to our global navigation satellite system services and environmental Earth observation satellites, in danger. Manoeuvring satellites around others is exactly the kind of misguided bravado that could cause a cascade of debris to form and then cut off our use of satellites—and future satellites—for our low and medium Earth orbits. Unfortunately, there is painfully little international agreement that prevents nations from recklessly using their satellites or even equipping their satellites with weapons that are not weapons of mass destruction or nuclear weapons.

The Russian Government’s choice to fire a projectile from Kosmos 2543 proves that the interpretation of article IV of the outer space treaty, which prevents nations from putting WMD or nuclear weapons into space, applies only to WMDs or nuclear weapons. We have a gap in the treaty.

As so often in international affairs, we have a problem that is growing in a less than adequate direction from current international treaties, and a global response that can only be described as lacking. Yet that has begun to change, as the recent G7 leaders’ summit in Cornwall proved with a joint statement on space debris, giving some much-needed leadership in an area that is vital for the continuation of human development, both in space and on Earth. In the joint statement, G7 leaders pledged to promote a

“safe and sustainable use of space to support humanity’s ambitions”.

The statement went on to

“recognise the growing hazard of space debris”,

highlighting the fragile nature of our planet’s upper atmosphere and promoting the desire for nations to co-operate in the safeguarding of space. Additionally,

the G7 agreed on the importance of continued international collaboration and the promotion of both public and commercial efforts to clean up our low and medium Earth orbits.

Increased awareness, investment and specific regulation will be vital for a path forward to prevent the increase in space debris, removing what is currently a problem, and preventing irresponsible satellite activities in future. The joint declaration from the G7 was a strong step forward towards building strong space regulation and fostering the continued international partnerships between nations and private enterprises. However, more must be done to hold all space-capable countries and companies accountable for the shared good of our Earth orbit.

This problem will continue to be more apparent as the number of satellites, space missions and even commercial flights to the edge of space increase. I am sure we were all at the edge of our seats on 11 July last week when Sir Richard Branson came home after successfully visiting the edge of space during Virgin Galactic's first commercial flight. I congratulate Virgin Galactic on that achievement. Although that milestone should be celebrated, Virgin Galactic's mission success highlights the increased interest and ultimately the increased accessibility of space.

Additionally, missions to provide satellite broadband to the world, including the 3 billion people who do not have broadband access at the moment, by companies such as SpaceX, OneWeb and the many state-owned Chinese aeronautical companies, will require the deployment of thousands, if not tens of thousands, more satellites. Those mega constellation projects have already begun, as there was a 28% increase in satellites from 2020-21.

SpaceX's Starlink constellation has already launched 1,730 satellites as of May 2021, with a total of 42,000 planned over the next few decades. Truly, we are living in a second space age of which we can all be proud, and thankful for the development of this remarkable technology, but the dramatic and continued increase in the number of satellites being launched means that we need to have an awareness of the increase in the amount of space debris and the real danger that it will pose to our modern world.

Many of the satellites that we rely on provide services for GNSS, also known as GPS. That is classified as an invisible utility, and for good reason, because without GNSS nearly every branch of critical national infrastructure would be in obvious jeopardy. Communications, emergency and hospital services, finance and transport all rely on GNSS to operate smoothly, and all rely on satellite services.

To put the importance of GNSS into perspective, a 2017 report by London Economics calculated that the economic impact on the UK of a five-day disruption to the network would put thousands of jobs at risk and cost around £5.2 billion—a major disruption to every aspect of modern life not even being counted in that figure. A disruption of that magnitude is not out of the question, and we need to face the reality. With more satellites comes more debris, and more opportunities for a serious accident to occur, as space travel becomes commercialised and access to space becomes ever more possible.

Should we continue largely to ignore the issue of space debris, we risk developing a situation where the upper atmosphere becomes completely unusable—that Kessler syndrome that I mentioned of an hypothesised

scenario, where due to the amount of junk in space, pieces begin to collide with each other on a far more regular basis, causing a cascade of debris, effectively cutting off use of our lower orbit.

This growing number of satellites are becoming dependent on support technologies to avoid not only the increasing debris we are inevitably creating but other satellites. According to Holger Krag of the European Space Agency, today 15% to 20% of all satellite-avoidance actions involve manoeuvres away from other active satellites. That means that there is an increasingly established process of satellite operators contacting each other and co-ordinating actions to avoid collisions.

All that takes time and resource, contingent on fuel levels, satellite response times and successful co-ordination from operators. Because there is no universal system, such as an air traffic control for satellites, we are wasting fuel, decreasing response times and lowering the lifespan of satellites. International standards and agreed regulations will be incredibly important, moving forwards into this new space age. Thankfully, the UK, even though it is not a tier one space power, much as I would like it to be higher up that agenda, has been leading the way on space debris, by using our brilliant diplomats to push for an updated international legislative framework, aimed at modernising space law, and creating consistent legal frameworks that will help create sustainable space development.

The UK was among the first international partners to join the US-led Operation Olympic Defender, an effort to build closer co-operation with allied nations in securing and protecting space. The UK has also worked with the UNOOSA to encourage the development of space debris removal technologies. In addition, space domain awareness is a critical enabling capability, if the UK is successfully to manage the threat posed by space debris, including its removal.

The UK military recognise the need to understand this rapidly evolving and dynamic landscape in order to protect, defend and regulate the UK's space interests, and to mitigate the threats posed to the UK's assets and critical national infrastructure, and to play its part in assuring safe and responsible behaviour in space.

In January this year, a new space domain awareness software capability, known as Aurora, went live for operations and was successfully deployed into the Defence Digital's MODCloud ICE internet connected environment. The software was designed, developed and deployed by CGI in partnership with the Royal Air Force and the UK Space Agency, as part of work to enhance the current UK Space Operations Centre.

Space is inherently dual use in nature, with congestion and debris an issue for both military and commercial satellite operators alike. The UK has a long-standing heritage in space domain awareness, and arguably has one of the best space domain awareness sensors in Europe in the form of RAF Fylingdales. Current and planned defence radars can contribute to space domain awareness through the inherent sensitivity, range resolution and discrimination capabilities. They benefit defence and wider Government objectives, and should be progressed at pace. RAF Fylingdales is also renowned for its whole-force approach to space operations, working with industry partners to develop this capability. British company Serco has been working with the RAF and now Space Command to deliver the RAF Fylingdales orbital analysis

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servers and sensor support for over 55 years. Serco is now exporting this heritage and skillset to support US Space Command with deep space surveillance.

Commercial space operators also have a large part to play, and a vested interest, in creating a sustainable space environment. Last week, in a speech at Space-Comm expo in Farnborough, which I attended, Rajeev Suri, chief executive officer of Inmarsat, set out a vision for “an unrelenting commitment to sustainability in space”.

Mr Suri also highlighted the need to pay close attention to the potential risk of collision and the growing challenge of atmospheric pollution posed by deorbiting satellites, particularly during the recent rapid expansion phase of mega constellations, which I have spoken about.

The UK already has fast-growing capability in debris removal technology. The UK team at Astroscale are leading the mission operations for the world’s first commercial debris removal mission, ELSA-d, which is currently in low Earth orbit, preparing for the capture of a dummy defunct satellite, using a magnetic-capture docking-plate mechanism, in the next few months. This mission will be a milestone moment for the deployment of debris removal services, including Astroscale’s next phase partnership with OneWeb, via the European Space Agency Sunrise programme, to develop the technology to remove multiple pieces of space junk in a single mission and to demonstrate the commercial viability of a future service, ELSA-M.

At the same time, the UK is witnessing a surge in start-up space companies that are placing sustainability and environmental concerns at the heart of their missions. For example, Black Arrow, which plans to become the first net-zero launch company, is investigating the innovative use of new, environmentally friendly propulsion fuels and recoverable and reusable rocket launchers, to demonstrate to the space industry that we can chart a new net-zero course for space.

We need not invest in clean-up missions and sustainable space technologies simply out of altruism. It is important to recognise the potential growth that the space sector can provide for UK plc. Figures released in May by the UK Space Agency showed that sector income rose by 5.7%—from £14.8 billion to £16.4 billion—between 2016-17 and 2018-19. I would wager that it has risen higher still over the past two years. Over the same timeframe, employment in the sector increased by 3,200, to 45,100 people, and supportive research and development technology investments relating to space activities increased by 18%, to £702 million.

In short, the space industry in the UK is in a good position to not only do the responsible thing and help solve a growing problem, but to be successful while doing so. The UK needs to build itself a space-centric education pipeline to properly capitalise on the growing environment of the successful UK space industry. Investing in R&D technologies such as robotics, autonomous systems, quantum computing and satellite technologies will help the UK capture a space industry market share that is bigger than it already is. Currently, the in-orbit servicing sector is estimated to be worth \$4.4 billion, and, should we act fast and invest in the best bets when it comes to space debris removal, we should be capable of capturing at least \$1 billion of this market by 2030.

Central funding will be a key solution to this technological problem, and the UK Space Agency, via the UK Government, has been leading the way in helping develop new and innovative technologies for cleaning up space. In 2020, the UK Space Agency allocated £1 million to companies to assist tracking space debris. In addition to awarding £2.5 million to Astroscale UK in May 2021, only a few weeks ago the Government invited space firms to apply for a share of up to £800,000 in funding for the purpose of cleaning up space. For this initiative, the UK Space Agency is seeking to fund additional debris removal feasibility studies and develop debris removal mission concepts and system designs. Due in part to this renewed funding, the number of jobs in the UK space sector has increased, and overall income in that industry continues to rise. Continued funding, paired with internationally recognised regulation, will be the key to ensuring that we can tackle space debris as a nation.

For the UK to take the much-needed serious step in global leadership and position ourselves as a leader in space sustainability and debris removal, we must continue to encourage the development of environmentally sustainable space assets. The ELSA programme from Astroscale is a strong start, but we must continue to invest in our UK space assets and our cutting-edge R&D programmes in this field. By encouraging the commercialisation of space debris removal, we will also be fostering a financially lucrative industry that can be driven by the UK and create future UK jobs. This can be accomplished by increasing the scope and financing of the recent UK Space Agency phase A study, which is aimed at supporting space debris removal proposals. I urge the Minister to look at that study.

We can also take a leadership role globally by ensuring that regulation keeps up with industry development, and specifically by making it mandatory for companies to develop satellite sustainability contingency plans and encouraging partnerships with companies such as Astroscale for satellite end-of-life services with the use of docking plates. Regulation can also aim to ensure that low Earth orbit satellites have the capability to undertake collision avoidance manoeuvres and encourage the development of a space traffic control system. By establishing a “pay now or pay more later” system to encourage companies to prepare satellites for removal or face serious costs later if they are forced into collision avoidance manoeuvres, we will encourage companies to establish sustainability plans. Consistency and transparency in these matters will encourage space industry investment.

We must also remember that as global Britain, we need to leverage our international alliances with global partners such as the United States, Australia, Japan and India to establish agreed regulation and resist aggressive actions from other countries, such as China and Russia. With these partners and more, we can help establish a “net zero space” sustainable development goal to face this growing challenge in our lower and middle Earth orbits over the coming decades.

Two years ago, when I was an Energy Minister at the same time as being Space Minister, I signed net zero into law, committing the UK to becoming the first major nation and the first G7 country to state that we would have net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Two years on, 75% of the Earth’s land mass has now committed to a net zero target ahead of COP26 this year, which

just goes to demonstrate the leadership role that the UK can play globally. We can demonstrate to the rest of the world what can be achieved, so let us now take this opportunity to show leadership on space debris internationally, and to push for a net zero space environment and lead the world in the sustainable use of space.

5.18 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd. I thank the right hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) for having secured this important debate, and I pay tribute to him for his work as the vice-chair of the parliamentary space committee and thank him for his analysis of the issues around space debris, as well as the space history lesson. Space is such a fascinating topic, and every time we discuss it in this House, it never fails to inspire awe and excitement. Britain has a proud history of space exploration. In fact, to add to the history that the right hon. Gentleman set out, the British Interplanetary Society is the oldest space advocacy organisation on Earth; there may be other, older ones elsewhere of which we are not aware.

Here on Earth, as we aim to enter, as the right hon. Gentleman set out, a more socially conscious era of green growth, protecting and keeping our Earth and seas clean is commonly discussed, but rarely do we look up and think about how clean the sky beyond the Earth's atmosphere is. That is one reason why this debate is so important—because we are addressing an under-discussed topic on which the Government have failed to provide direction, and exploring the opportunities, as set out so eloquently by the right hon. Gentleman, that may arise from the need to address space debris.

I will not repeat all the statistics that the right hon. Gentleman set out, but it is striking that there are more than 900,000 objects currently orbiting the Earth, with 23,000 of those being pieces of man-made debris larger than 1 cm. Since 1957, there have been 10,680 satellites launched into Earth's orbit, with around 6,250 still in space, which is impressive, but only 3,700 are still functioning. If any two were to collide, the result could be catastrophic, creating thousands of new pieces of dangerous space junk, as the right hon. Gentleman set out. These objects could stay in orbit for hundreds of years, putting at risk working satellites that people depend on for everyday services.

The threat is not only far above our heads. In May this year, an 18-tonne chunk of metal that was once the core stage of a Chinese Long March 5B rocket crashed down to Earth, narrowly missing the island of the Maldives. Last year, research for the International Astronautical Congress revealed that the 50 most dangerous objects currently in orbit were all large rocket boosters, mainly from Russia, left drifting around our planet.

As the right hon. Gentleman suggested, the removal of hazardous materials on Earth or in space presents a significant commercial opportunity. A joint venture between the UK and Japan, the Tokyo-based firm Astroscale, which has control centres in Oxfordshire, launched two rockets to begin the process of cleaning up some of the 9,000 tonnes of space debris. I am pleased that it is leading the way. What discussions has the Minister had with Astroscale, and what steps is she taking to support the British-based clean-up firms of the future? I am pleased that at the G7, as the right hon.

Member for Kingswood alluded to, the UK joined our allies in Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the EU and the US to take action to tackle space debris. Those nations agreed that we need global standards on space debris and committed to the long-term sustainable use of space. However, what will that look like in real terms? Can the Minister tell us when we will see a long-term, sustainable plan for space debris? For that matter, can she tell us when we will have a space strategy?

The space industry generally is worth more than £14.8 billion per year and has grown at a rate five times greater than the wider economy since 1999. The success of this sector helps to drive prosperity across the UK. UK space businesses spend around £750 million annually, with around 1,500 UK suppliers based across every region of the UK. Many of the jobs created in space manufacturing are also highly productive, with the average salary of an Airbus UK space employee, for example, standing at £51,000—nearly 50% higher than the UK national average. The UK's proud history in space exploration, research and development makes us an excellent launchpad for future growth and for leadership in the space debris domain.

The UK and its place in the world are changing. We have left the European Union, which meant turning our back on the Galileo project that we did so much to bring about, at an estimated cost of £1.2 billion to the taxpayer. The Government then U-turned on plans to develop a rival, sovereign GNSS system, at a cost of a further £60 million. Can the Minister tell us the status of our sovereign satellite navigation capability? The right hon. Member for Kingswood set out the possible impact on our economy of space debris reducing or stopping GNSS services.

The Secretary of State has decided to take control over strategy and policy away from the UK Space Agency, handing the almost £600 million budget directly to the Government. Yet, as I have mentioned, we remain without a long-term, specific space sector deal and have not received an update on the space growth partnership since its launch in March 2018. Will the Minister tell us what progress has been made by the Space Growth Partnership in achieving its stated aim of the UK making up 10% of the global space market by 2030? What role does she see space debris clean-up playing in that partnership and in that growth? What analysis will be conducted of the market risks and national security risks that the right hon. Member outlined?

The Government talk excitedly about global Britain, but Labour wants to see an interplanetary Britain, powered by a booming space sector. Space is not just for the stars; it impacts every household in the country. From climate change and rural broadband to transport and agriculture, from our smartphones to our credit cards, the UK space sector helps us all prosper. The satellites at risk from space debris are central to providing those services.

The Government have failed to come forward with a clear, long-term space strategy to fully unlock the potential of the sector. Without such a strategy, the hard work of our space sector—developing spaceports, rocket launchpads, space domain awareness projects, military grade software and satellite projects that are critical for our vital infrastructure—cannot be fully realised. If we are to ensure the success of those programmes, we must understand whether we have the industrial capability to

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do so. Part of unlocking the potential of our space industry is knowing how we utilise our industrial base to achieve our goals, and in turn where we need further investment and finance to encourage outward investment by UK businesses.

There is no strategy for external investment or for skills—in particular, diverse skills. The space sector needs the skills of everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, region or age, and it is not as diverse as I am sure the Minister would like. There is no strategy for that. There is no strategy for industry and manufacturing, for sovereign navigation satellite capabilities or for whether and how we will compete with SpaceX and others. Instead, we have the manifesto of a Government who have their heads in the clouds—they certainly do not have a strategy for space. Down on Earth, the sector is still waiting to hear about the future of the new regulations introduced under the Space Industry Act 2018, particularly those dealing with administrative burdens and liabilities.

Nothing better illustrates the lack of strategy and transparency than the purchase of OneWeb despite the advice of experts and the concerns of the UK Space Agency. First we were told that it would be a part of our sovereign GNSS programme, but then it was not. We still do not know what the Government have planned for OneWeb. We heard that it may be part of our approach to space debris. We do not know whether that huge investment will ever support jobs in the UK space sector if the satellites continue to be manufactured in Florida. I would appreciate it if the Minister gave some clarity on the space strategy generally and specifically on OneWeb.

The space sector provides the UK with many opportunities to grow our economy, push technological boundaries and boost our soft power by developing strategic interdependence with our allies, which I very much support. I am pleased that the right hon. Member for Kingswood secured this debate, but as the Minister for Space until 2019, he oversaw and was responsible for many of the policies that he referred to and the lack of an ongoing, sustainable strategy, or indeed any strategy, for our space sector.

A year ago, UKspace set out the urgent need for a coherent, cross-Government space strategy, and we have still not seen one. Labour would seek to support our sovereign capability in the space age and build on the UK's proud history of technological innovation and space exploration. Labour is passionate about the long-term future of the space sector and its potential to provide high-skill, high-paying jobs across the UK and step up to deliver a long-term sustainable strategy for managing space debris, with UK businesses and our national security at the heart of this interplanetary clean-up.

5.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Amanda Solloway): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) on securing this incredibly important debate and on continuing to champion our space sector throughout his time as a Minister and in this House. I know that he recognises how important to the UK the risk of space debris is, as he noted in his

excellent piece in *The Times* this morning. It is always a great pleasure to hear from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah). I share her passion for the amazing space sector.

Over the past decade, the space industry has become one of the UK's fastest growing sectors. It currently employs more than 45,000 people and generates £16 billion annually. The UK has grasped the opportunity by encouraging space sector growth, facilitating the development of space ports to launch satellites from the UK and investing in the OneWeb satellite broadband constellation. But it is important to recognise that space is getting crowded. Although space may seem vast, the orbits around Earth are a limited natural resource, and we must use them responsibly and protect them for future generations, including my granddaughter. It was interesting to hear my right hon. Friend talk about staring at the stars with his daughter.

The growing issue of orbital congestion and space debris could limit the benefits that we get from space and, in the extreme worst case, prevent our use of it altogether, so where does that leave the United Kingdom? Space debris is a global challenge that requires an international effort to remedy, as has been said. Nearly 3,000 working satellites share those orbits, and it is estimated that there are 130 million pieces of debris, about 30,000 of which pose a significant threat.

In the next decade, we expect to see growth to more than 10,000 active satellites in orbit, and we do not want a similar growth rate of debris. The UK has active partnerships in multilateral, intergovernmental forums, including the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its sub-committees, and the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee. We continue to lead in those forums, working with international partners to agree best practice, develop guidelines and support initiatives that enable and promote sustainability and limit the potential for accidents in space. To ensure that UK space operators meet international guidelines, approaches to space debris mitigation are a key part of UK spaceflight regulation that are considered during the licensing of their activities.

At the G7 in Cornwall last month, the UK facilitated an agreement between nations to strengthen our collective efforts to ensure the sustainability of space for all. That includes how we limit the generation of new orbital debris. We are not only talking; we are investing in technology to address this issue. Currently, our main mitigation against collisions between satellites and debris lies in our ability to detect, identify and track objects in space and take evasive action.

The UK Space Agency is working in partnership with the Ministry of Defence to improve our capability to monitor and warn of hazardous space events. In January, working closely with the UK Space Operations Centre, the UK Space Agency began piloting national collision warning services to enhance our national space surveillance and tracking capabilities. Also, joint civil and military space domain awareness helps to protect UK satellites in orbit and our critical national infrastructure, which is reliant on space services. However, as the amount of debris and the number of active satellites increases, accurately predicting potential collisions becomes harder.

The risk of collision and the number of false alarms can be minimised with better tracking and through the use of emerging and innovative new technologies, such

as artificial intelligence, to sort through the mountains of data. However, if the volume of debris and the number of satellites in space continues to increase, as we expect, this action alone cannot fully mitigate the risk. Protecting longer-term UK interests in space will mean reducing the debris population and preventing the creation of new debris. We must look to tackle the cause of the problem, rather than just addressing the symptoms.

Space debris removal is not yet a common capability. However, space agencies, including NASA and the European Space Agency, have launched innovative programmes to combat debris, and the UK has played a real leading role in this activity. In 2019, we invested £80 million, through the European Space Agency, in debris and clean space activities, including research into detecting and tracking debris, lessening the burden of collision avoidance, limiting the production of more debris and cleaning up existing debris.

Working with Switzerland and through the European Space Agency, we are contributing to a satellite mission that will be able to capture and deorbit large pieces of debris. And recently, I had the great pleasure of meeting Astroscale to discuss its privately funded ELSA-d satellite, which right now is demonstrating technology that removes different satellites from orbit. In fact, it was absolutely fantastic to see. Both these missions are looking to utilise the operation centre that we built in Harlow precisely to manage and operate such innovative missions.

There is a commercial opportunity emerging in orbit servicing and in managing the safe disposal of satellites once they are no longer useful. Just last week, Edinburgh-based Skyrora announced a challenge to find and remove Prospero, the first British satellite to have been launched successfully by a British rocket.

Businesses across the world, but particularly in the UK, are developing the innovative technology to address this market, which is estimated to be worth over £2 billion over the next 15 years. We want UK industry to lead when it comes to the sustainable use of space. Last year, we awarded £1 million in grant funding to support projects led by United Kingdom companies, focused on mitigating the effects of harmful debris. This year, we will award a further £1.2 million to continue to develop the enabling technology and £800,000 to study the feasibility of a national mission to remove debris from orbit.

However, we recognise that UK leadership in this area can only trigger change if it is supported by international regulatory standards that require companies or nations to remove debris, in order to create a commercial market. Therefore, we should lead global discussions on the right safety and security norms, and ensure compliance with international obligations in space debris mitigation, while we invest in the research and development to best capture that commercial market of the future.

With significant strategic opportunities ahead, the UK needs to be the shaper of this evolving landscape. By taking leadership in space sustainability, the United Kingdom can drive national and international capability development, and regulatory advances. We can lead international action to establish rules governing the sustainable use of space through close working with allies and multilateral engagement. We must also continue to protect our industry and critical national infrastructure, and better understand the orbital environment through joint civil and military space domain awareness.

I can assure the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central about our imminent space strategy, which we will launch in due course. Timely and sensible Government support will allow us to grow our industrial and academic capability, in order to support UK industry in taking opportunities in the emerging orbital market. This activity could quite literally provide a rocket boost to the economy.

We have an excellent opportunity to secure a leadership role in space sustainability, and with it a bright, sustainable future for the space and satellite application industry, which will deliver benefits for generations to come.

5.39 pm

Chris Skidmore [V]: Thank you, Mr Dowd, for your chairmanship of the debate. I thank the shadow Minister and the Minister for their contributions. It is clear that we share an equal passion for the importance of the future of space sustainability and what role space debris removal can play in that sustainability.

This is the first debate that has ever been held in Parliament on space debris, despite it being an issue that has been known about in the space community for more than 55 years, since the signing of the outer space treaty. The UK has a unique opportunity to show international leadership in this area, backed by future investment. I hope that space debris is part of the UK space strategy that the Minister outlined—it has every right to be so.

I have been contacted by a wide number of industry and academic experts. I am delighted that the Minister has met Astroscale, but I hope she might attend a roundtable of experts on space debris that I might organise in the future, with people from industry and academia, including Imperial College, the Open University and Leicester University. It is amazing how many people have been working on this subject.

We have the opportunity, just as we do with net zero, to set out a vision of net zero space. Let us be the country that does that, in the same way that we are the country that has led the charge on net zero. Net zero is so important now for setting out the future vision of our green economy. Setting out a future for our space economy can be built around a sustainable space environment, in which the UK can lead the way.

The Minister is doing a great job and I would urge her to think about how this issue can fit into her wider vision on space, and to attend the roundtable that I might organise as a result of this debate. I thank everyone for attending and speaking in this first debate on space debris and setting out why it is such an important and critical issue to resolve for our future, to avoid any future scenario where we are unprepared. The unexpected can be anticipated if we expect it, and I hope this debate has woken us up to the risks that space debris could cause if it is not tackled for the future. I hope it places a marker in the ground—a sustainable marker, which can be removed, of course—that demonstrates that we can act, we need to act and we need to act fast in order to prevent collisions in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered space debris.

5.43 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 14 July 2021

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Green Workforce

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): As we look ahead to publishing our comprehensive net zero strategy and hosting COP26 in the autumn, we must focus on how we invest in the UK's most important asset—our workforce—so that people have the right skills to deliver the net zero transition and thrive in the jobs it will create. This builds on the Prime Minister's 10-point plan for a green industrial revolution set out in November 2020—the first step in capturing the once in a lifetime opportunity to lead the charge and pursue a global green recovery, level up the country, and support jobs throughout the UK as we accelerate on our path to reach net zero by 2050.

Today, together with the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), we welcome the publication of the independent Green Jobs Taskforce's report. The report brings together evidence on the skills needed in the green economy and sets out their independent recommendations for how the Government, industry and a wide range of stakeholders can work together to meet the important challenges and grasp the opportunities they have identified.

We are also pleased to announce the formation of a cross-cutting delivery group to maintain the momentum generated by the taskforce and drive action across the green skills agenda.

BEIS and DFE convened this taskforce of 17 individuals from diverse backgrounds in industry, academia, unions, and the education and skills sector to come together to advise the Government, industry and the education sector. The Government will now consider the taskforce's rich evidence base and comprehensive recommendations ahead of setting out, later in the year, our net zero strategy.

But we are taking the first steps to ensure that green jobs are good quality, that they can be accessed by people of all backgrounds and in all parts of the country, and that workers in sectors and industries undergoing change can reapply their skills and expertise towards this new challenge.

In England, the reforms to the skills system set out in the recently published Skills for Jobs White Paper provide the foundation on which we can build. This programme of reform, which placed employers at the centre of our technical education system, includes the introduction of new T-levels, flexible apprenticeships, skills bootcamps and occupational traineeships. Earlier in the year, we marked a major milestone in the lifetime skills guarantee, with the roll-out of almost 400 qualifications which are now available and fully funded for any adult who has not already achieved a level 3 (A-level equivalent) qualification.

We will ensure that these programmes are directed to support more people to get the skills they need to move into green jobs, and consider where we might need to go

further or faster to fill skills gaps identified by the taskforce. We are already making progress—skills bootcamps will, from July this year, support flexible training in key green sectors such as construction and nuclear; a green apprenticeship advisory panel is identifying existing apprenticeships that best support green career pathways; our free courses for jobs offer is supporting more adults to study fully funded qualifications in subject areas crucial for green jobs, such as construction, forestry and engineering; and a new emerging skills electrification project will identify cutting-edge skills in the battery/electrification sector, develop short, modular content to meet the needs of employers, and upskill the teaching workforce.

This report also highlights how supporting people to develop the right skills to thrive in this transition cannot be the responsibility of the Government alone. We want to see businesses step up and invest in training the green workforce, and so we urge them to reflect on the taskforce's work and use it to inform how they can benefit from and contribute to the green industrial revolution.

The Government will continue to work closely with industry to ensure the employer-led skills system we are building through our ongoing reforms meets employers' needs and reflects the fast changing shape of the UK labour market.

[HCWS176]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Publication of the Online Media Literacy Strategy

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinenage): I am pleased to inform the House that the Government are today publishing our "Online Media Literacy Strategy". This strategy is a complementary measure to the proposed Online Safety Bill and will play a critical role in allowing us to meet our ambition of making the UK the safest place in the world to be online.

Through this strategy, we want to improve media literacy across the country by providing direction to the sector. We also seek to highlight the challenges that all citizens face in navigating an increasingly complex media landscape, with an amplified focus on vulnerable and disabled users.

The strategy sets out our plans to ensure a co-ordinated approach to online media literacy education. We have established a media literacy framework that enumerates the skills we want citizens young and old to learn in order to navigate the online media landscape safely. We set out the key user groups on which we will direct particular focus to ensure an inclusive approach to media literacy. We lay out six media literacy challenges to provide direction to the media literacy sector. We also highlight the specific issue of misinformation and disinformation, and the potential for media literacy by design to assist media literate online behaviour.

We have engaged with a broad range of stakeholders from academia, regulators, civil society and industry, drawing upon their expertise to inform the strategy. This is only the beginning of our engagement with the sector, and we will look to work even more closely with these organisations and more to ensure the maximum possible impact from media literacy activity.

As our attention turns to delivery of the strategy, we will focus on taking forward a number of different initiatives. Alongside the strategy we are publishing the first annual Online Media Literacy Action Plan for the Financial Year 2021-22. The action plan sets out a number of initiatives to enact the strategy, from establishing a cross-sector media literacy taskforce, to working with teachers to help embed media literacy in schools, to collaborating with the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Administrations through a UK media literacy forum.

It will be important that we work productively with other key stakeholders across the sector. Ofcom has an existing statutory duty to promote media literacy. The Government's efforts in the media literacy landscape will play a supportive and complementary role to that of Ofcom, by providing focus for organisations across the sector. We will continue to engage closely with Ofcom where there is a potential to increase the impact of our efforts.

Media literacy is a devolved policy and so the initiatives contained in the strategy will only apply directly to England. However, we are working closely with the devolved Administrations and intend to establish a UK media literacy forum to engage with our counterparts in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast and ensure we are achieving the greatest possible impact across the whole UK.

A copy of the strategy will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS175]

EDUCATION

Level 3 Qualifications Reform

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Gillian Keegan): Today, I am pleased to announce the next stage of the Government's reforms of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England.

Reforming post-16 education and skills is at the heart of our plan to build back better and level up the country by ensuring that students everywhere have access to qualifications that will give them the skills to succeed. We have already improved the quality of level 3 study by reforming A-levels, redeveloping apprenticeship standards and introducing T-levels. This work is vital to the reforms and will create a coherent system in which all classroom based qualifications that sit alongside A-levels and T-levels are good quality.

These reforms build on the Skills for Jobs White Paper, which set out our ambition to improve the opportunities for young people and adults to progress into skilled employment by linking technical qualifications to employer-led occupational standards. These standards form the core of new T-levels and the reforms published today will ensure that this will also be the case for other technical qualifications on offer at level 3.

High-quality qualifications are essential to helping everyone, whatever their age, to get good jobs and realise their ambitions. Whether they want to go into skilled employment or into higher education (HE), achieving a level 3 qualification will be an important stepping stone. The system also needs to be adaptable, so that we train people for the jobs of the future.

We are grateful for the thoughtful contributions to our second-stage consultation on level 3 qualifications, and for the high level of interest in these important issues. Though our goal of a slimmed-down, higher-quality system remains the same, we have listened carefully to feedback on the range of qualifications that are needed. Our policy statement sets out where we see the value in qualifications that can be taken as part of mixed study programmes alongside A-levels, as well as the limited range of subjects where it is justified to take specialist alternatives, such as in performing and creative arts.

Our reforms are bold and will lead to significant change from the current system. We continue to be unapologetic about both the need and our commitment to raise standards in technical education, as we have already done for GCSEs, A-levels and apprenticeships. It is vital that in a fast moving and high-tech economy technical education closes the gap between what people study and the needs of employers. We are proposing to put many of these changes into law through the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill.

We will streamline and improve the quality of the level 3 system. We are strengthening the pathways to progression, creating clearly defined academic and technical routes with qualifications leading to academic study, and/or skilled employment. This clarity of purpose will allow students to see more easily how their study will help them to progress.

We will ensure that all qualifications sitting alongside A-levels and T-levels provide progression for learners, respond to the needs of employers and meet rigorous quality standards. Funding approval will be removed for technical qualifications overlapping with wave 1 and 2 T-levels from 2023, and with wave 3 and 4 T-levels from 2024. We have listened carefully to feedback on the pace of implementation of these reforms and will phase the introduction of reformed qualifications, starting with a digital pathfinder for introduction from 2023, scaling up in the following year and completing the reforms by 2025.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the institute) and Ofqual will work to ensure that qualifications approved for funding are high-quality, meet the needs of employers, and stay up to date with our evolving economy. The Education and Skills Funding Agency will continue to have overall responsibility for funding decisions.

We also recognise that getting a quality offer at level 2 and below is key to making sure that students have clear lines of sight to level 3, apprenticeships, traineeships, and directly into employment. As a result, we want to improve study at level 2 and below alongside our reforms to level 3 qualifications. We are considering feedback to the call for evidence which ran from 10 November to 14 February and will consult on proposals for reform later this year.

[HCWS177]

TRANSPORT

Transport Decarbonisation

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): Transport decarbonisation is a dull way of describing something much more exciting and far-reaching.

Because transport is not just how you get around. It is something that fundamentally shapes our towns, our cities, our countryside, our living standards, our health, and our whole quality of life.

The Transport Decarbonisation Plan that will be published today, the first in the world, is not about stopping people doing things: it is about doing the same things differently. We will still fly on holiday, but in more efficient aircraft, using sustainable fuel. We will still drive on improved roads, but increasingly in zero emission cars. We will still have new development, but it will not force us into high-carbon lifestyles.

Transport is the largest contributor to UK greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), with road transport alone accounting for almost a quarter of our total emissions in 2019. We must deliver a step change in the breadth and scale of our ambition to reduce transport's GHG emissions to reach net zero. In March 2020, "Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge" committed to bring together a transport decarbonisation plan to deliver transport's contribution to carbon budgets and net zero across all forms of transport.

The plan published today is genuinely high ambition—technically and feasibly—for all areas of transport and notes that decarbonisation will rely, in part, on future transport technology, coupled with the necessary behavioural and societal change. Because of the pandemic, we are already seeing some of these changes in behaviour happen much faster than expected. We have seen homeworking change traditional commuter and leisure trips, video conferencing has changed business travel and we have seen a rise in cycling and walking all of which could save thousands of tonnes of carbon themselves.

In the 16 months since March 2020, we have published ambitious policies to transform England for cycling and walking with an investment of £2 billion and more than 300 cycling and walking schemes already being delivered. We have published plans to fundamentally reshape our bus network along public service lines and have created Great British Railways to make services easier to use, to grow the network and build on the huge acceleration of electrification we have already seen since 2010.

The commitments set out today include linking local infrastructure funding to solutions that cut emissions—aligning that investment to our net zero programme, improving public transport, increasing support for active travel so mass transit and cycling and walking play a bigger role than ever, a net zero rail network by 2050, net zero domestic aviation emissions by 2040 and leading the transition to green shipping.

The plan also sets out a world-leading pledge to consult on the end of sale of all new, non-zero emission road vehicles by 2040 at the latest.

As a major step towards that, alongside the plan we have published a consultation on phasing out the sale of all new non-zero emission heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) by 2040, demonstrating our commitment to tackle the second largest source of domestic transport carbon emissions and furthering our ambition to decarbonise UK roads.

This comes with a Green Paper, which will set out options for a new regulatory framework requiring vehicle manufacturers to improve the efficiency of new road

vehicles. This will allow us to meet our phase out ambitions whilst creating new jobs for the automotive sector and delivering certainty to drivers.

To underpin our petrol and diesel phase out dates and help achieve them, we are also publishing a 2035 Delivery Plan today. This plan brings together all of our committed funding streams and measures for decarbonising cars and vans, from across Government, into a single document. It outlines the key timelines, milestones and how we will monitor progress towards our commitment to deliver mass ownership of zero emission cars and vans.

Leading by example, our decarbonisation plan will increase the level of ambition for the whole central Government fleet, moving the target date for the 40,000-vehicle fleet to be fully zero emission forward to 2027.

Today we are also publishing the Government's response to the Electric Vehicle Smart Charging consultation. The response commits to laying legislation later this year to ensure that all private EV charge-points meet smart charging standards. The transition to EVs is central to Government's net zero commitment but will also increase demand on the electricity system. Smart charging can help mitigate these impacts. This legislation will play an important role in driving the uptake of smart technology, which can save consumers money on their energy bills.

We also intend to tackle the challenges of decarbonising the aviation and maritime sectors head on. Today, we are also launching a Jet Zero consultation that commits the aviation sector to a net zero emissions target by 2050 and sets out our approach and principles to achieve this. The consultation focuses on the rapid development of technologies in a way that maintains the benefits of air travel and maximises the opportunities that decarbonisation can bring for the UK.

The decarbonisation plan sets out further commitments for our maritime sector, establishing our 'Course to Zero', consulting on how we get more ships plugging in to our decarbonised grid, exploring how we phase out emissions from vessels, and considering how we take advantage of the UK's strengths in the maritime sector to support growth in green technology and shipbuilding.

The Government are also publishing their Rail Environment Policy statement, which will set the direction for the rail industry on environment issues and inform the forthcoming sustainable rail strategy. The document will look at traction decarbonisation, air quality, decarbonising the rail estate and a range of other environmental-related issues on the railway, including biodiversity and waste.

This suite of announcements marks a major leap forward in delivering ambitions to decarbonise transport and we are the first country in the world to do this, taking a firm leadership position as we host COP26 later this year.

The plan is ambitious, consumer friendly and world leading. It will create economic growth, new industries and jobs and help us build back better and greener.

[HCWS174]

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