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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Monday 9 June 2025

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

KING'S SPEECH (ANSWER TO ADDRESS)

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported to the House, That His Majesty, having been attended with its Address of 17th July, was pleased to receive the same very graciously and give the following Answers:

I have received with great satisfaction the dutiful and loyal expression of your thanks for the speech with which I opened the present Session of Parliament.

CHAIR OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

I have received your Humble Address praying that I should re-appoint John Pullinger CB as the Chair of the Electoral Commission with effect from 1 May 2025 for the period ending on 30 April 2029. I will comply with your request.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR ADMINISTRATION AND HEALTH SERVICE COMMISSIONER FOR ENGLAND

I have received your Humble Address praying that I should appoint Paula Sussex CBE to the offices of Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England. I will comply with your request.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

New Unitary Authorities

1. **Gregory Stafford** (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to help prevent new unitary authorities from requiring exceptional financial support. [904467]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Angela Rayner): Local government reorganisation will lead to better outcomes for residents and save a significant amount of money that can be reinvested in public services and improve accountability. It is for councils to develop robust, financially sustainable proposals that are in the best interests of their whole area.

Gregory Stafford: The rushed local government reorganisation means that Waverley borough in my area will be forced to join other authorities that are debt-ridden, such as Woking. What will the Secretary of State do to ensure that residents in my area do not pay a financial price for the woes of other authorities?

Angela Rayner: As set out in the invitation letters, and as with previous restructures, there is no proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation, but the Government accept that Woking and Thurrock councils hold significant unsupported debt that cannot be managed locally in its entirety. We have committed to providing an initial amount of debt repayment support for these councils in 2026-27 ahead of the reorganisation. This is unprecedented Government support.

Lauren Edwards (Rochester and Strood) (Lab): I have been contacted by constituents who are concerned by media comments over the last week that suggest that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill may render sites of special scientific interest protections meaningless. Will the Secretary of State clarify the Bill's position on this and outline what protections there will be for SSSIs like Lodge hill in my constituency with its important nightingale population?

Angela Rayner: I am sure that those on the Conservative Benches have an interest in areas of natural beauty as well, and I am sure that the Minister for Housing and Planning will address this point when we discuss the Planning and Infrastructure Bill later today. We take natural beauty and history seriously, and we think that the Bill will be able to do nature recovery and enable us to build the houses that we desperately need.

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind Members to look at the question on the Order Paper and make sure that their supplementary question is related to it.

Leasehold Reform

2. **Chris McDonald** (Stockton North) (Lab): What steps she plans to take to reform the leasehold system. [904468]

11. **David Pinto-Duschinsky** (Hendon) (Lab): What steps she plans to take to reform the leasehold system. [904478]

24. **Ms Julie Minns** (Carlisle) (Lab): What steps she plans to take to reform the leasehold system. [904491]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): The Government continue to progress the implementation of the reforms to the leasehold system that are already in statute, while at the same time undertaking the work required to bring forward the wider set of reforms necessary to end the feudal leasehold system for good. We remain on track to deliver our ambitious leasehold and commonhold reform agenda, as set out in the written ministerial statement that I made on 21 November last year.

Chris McDonald: I thank the Minister for his positive engagement with me on the issue of a safe crossing at roads on the Wynyard and Queensgate estates in my constituency, but can I also bring to his attention the issue of service charges at the Willow Sage Court estate?

Does he agree that our leasehold reforms must ensure fair service charges? I can send him further information about this case if he wishes.

Matthew Pennycook: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point, and I would like further information on that case. The Government recognise the considerable financial strain that rising service charges place on leaseholders and tenants. Overcharging through service charges is completely unacceptable. We intend to consult in the very near future on the measures in the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 designed to drive up the transparency of service charges to make them more easily challengeable if leaseholders consider them to be unreasonable.

David Pinto-Duschinsky: I congratulate the Government on the bold action they are taking to end the feudal leasehold system for good, which will ensure that future flat owners will never again be treated as second-class homeowners. But as the Minister is well aware, there are millions of existing leaseholders, including thousands in my constituency of Hendon. Will he update the House on the work the Department is doing, building on the path forward outlined in the commonhold White Paper, to strengthen protections for existing leaseholders, including on the conversion of leaseholds, ground rents and right to manage?

Matthew Pennycook: The Government remain committed to providing existing leaseholders with greater rights, powers and protections over their homes. We commenced the right-to-manage measures contained in the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 on 3 March. We remain firmly committed to tackling unregulated and unaffordable ground rents, and we will deliver that in legislation. We will set out further detail on our proposed approach to enabling the conversion of existing leaseholds to commonhold in our draft leasehold and commonhold reform Bill later this year.

Ms Minns: Inflation-busting estate management fees for little or no service plague residents across the country, including those of the Brackenleigh, Greymoor Meadows and Denton Mill estates in my Carlisle constituency. What assurances can the Minister give my constituents and those of other hon. Members that the Government's actions will curb those atrocious practices by estate management companies?

Matthew Pennycook: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point; I recognise that many hon. Members across the House are affected by this issue. The Government remain committed to protecting residential freeholders on private and mixed tenure housing estates from unfair charges. We will consult this year on implementing the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act's new consumer protection provisions for the millions of homes subject to the charges affecting my hon. Friend's constituents, and we will bring measures into force as quickly as possible thereafter.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I am glad to see the Government starting to tackle some of these issues. Will the Minister assure me that people on freehold housing estates with covenant issues in places like Basildon and Billericay will also be included

in any legislation? They often face service charge increases of tens of per cent every single year, and they need that same assurance being provided to leaseholders that the Government will think about that and take action.

Matthew Pennycook: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the Government are thinking about the plight of residential freeholders alongside leaseholders. As I just said, we will consult this year on implementing the provisions in the 2024 Act, which provides those residential freeholders with new consumer protection provisions. They will have that immediate safety to come in, as we look at how we reduce the prevalence of such arrangements in the longer term.

Josh Babarinde (Eastbourne) (LD): Leaseholders at South View on Upperton Road in Eastbourne face an extortionate bill of up to £40,000 each to repair unsafe balconies. The communication from Morgans and Stredder Pearce, who are both responsible for fixing that, has been woeful, and delays are leading to costs spiralling further. Will the Minister urge those organisations to improve the speed and responsiveness of their communications to protect South View's leaseholders from further costs?

Matthew Pennycook: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that case. I recognise the problem that he alludes to. We want to bring in as soon as possible measures to standardise service charges in particular and make them more transparent. I wonder if he might write to me and the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North and Kimberley (Alex Norris), who is responsible for building safety, with details of that case so that we can look into it further.

Robin Swann (South Antrim) (UUP): Developers are now creating facility and management companies, with new homeowners and tenants finding themselves as shareholders without their consent. Will the Minister look at that issue across the country to protect those homeowners?

Matthew Pennycook: If I have understood the hon. Gentleman correctly, he pointed to how a variety of arrangements can be put in place under freehold estates; we need to capture that variety across the country. That is one of the challenges in looking at what measures we might bring forward to reduce the prevalence of such arrangements, and we certainly intend to do that.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): The last Government passed the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act, supported by the then Opposition. Labour said in the King's Speech that it would go further with reform and quickly. Then, the Minister said that would take the whole of this Parliament. Now, the secondary legislation needed, as well as the consultation pending, mean that leaseholders are unlikely to see any reform quickly. Last week, the Government said that primary legislation may now be needed without implementing the law already passed. Is that not just another example of the Government promising one thing but now flailing around, delaying and breaking key promises they made, while leaseholders across the country suffer?

Matthew Pennycook: I must say that the shadow Minister is developing a bit of a habit here; he seems to have conflated a number of separate issues. The Government have a very clear commitment to ending the feudal leasehold system within this Parliament. That requires a wider set of reforms than switching on the powers that are already on the statute book via the 2024 Act, though we are going to do that and are doing so at pace. If he cared to look at the written ministerial statement where I set all this out in a lot of detail, he would see that we remain on track with implementing our reform agenda.

Council Housing Repairs: Funding

3. **Will Stone** (Swindon North) (Lab): If she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the funding model for the repair of council housing stock. [904469]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): The Government recognise the strain placed on housing revenue accounts as a result of changes in rent policy, inflationary pressures and increased costs associated with investing in existing stock. The principle of self-financing remains the right one, but we are committed to working with councils to overcome the pressures on their HRAs so that they can invest in new and existing stock.

Will Stone: Will the Minister join me in praising Swindon borough council for its fantastic vision in investing in fixing our council stock—something the previous Conservative administration failed to do for 20 years?

Matthew Pennycook: I certainly will. My hon. Friend is a fantastic champion for council housing and highlights that Swindon borough council is putting significant investment into its housing stock over the next five years. The Government recognise that councils, like other registered providers, need support to build their capacity. That is why we consulted last year on a new five-year social housing rent settlement and have allowed councils to keep 100% of the receipts generated by right-to-buy sales. We will set out details of further investment in the forthcoming spending review.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): In Kendal on Friday afternoon, I came across a constituent in a Home Housing property who had been the victim of a house fire several months ago. Although they were still living in the property, it had not been fully restored or fixed. I am on the matter personally and dealing with the casework issues; if I share the details of this case with the Minister, will he take a personal interest in it, and does he agree that it is outrageous for someone to have to live in a fire-damaged property for five months without it being properly restored?

Matthew Pennycook: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that case. It does sound outrageous; if he writes to me, I will certainly look into the matter further.

Support for High Streets

4. **Matthew Patrick** (Wirral West) (Lab): What steps she is taking to support high streets. [904470]

6. **Noah Law** (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): What steps she is taking to support high streets. [904473]

15. **Michelle Welsh** (Sherwood Forest) (Lab): What steps she is taking to support high streets. [904482]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Alex Norris): The Government are committed to rejuvenating high streets by empowering local communities. Through the £1.5 billion plan for neighbourhoods, we are providing flexible funding to support our most challenged communities. We are also tackling vacancy with high street rental auctions and legislating for a new community right to buy to support community ownership.

Matthew Patrick: Heswall in my Wirral West constituency is a brilliant place to live and deserves a thriving high street, but unfortunately for too many years now beloved shops have closed and decline has felt inevitable. The people of Heswall deserve better. I appreciate the Minister's answer, but will he go further in explaining exactly how my constituents can take back control of their high street, so that it can thrive once again and deliver growth and opportunities for them?

Alex Norris: This Government understand the unique challenges that Heswall faces, including as a coastal community. That is why we are driving power and funding out of Westminster to ensure that no community is left behind. Just last week my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced £1.6 billion in funding for the Liverpool city region, including £100 million to upgrade the bus network, which is vital for connectivity to my hon. Friend's community. I understand that those upgrades will begin in the Wirral next year, and I encourage Wirral council, as I do all local authorities, to take advantage of the new powers the Government have introduced to reoccupy the empty shops that are such a blight on our high streets.

Noah Law: I was elected to this place on the back of a pledge to revitalise the towns in my constituency. With the high street in St Austell in a sorry state, I am delighted to have been able to take the first steps towards revitalising it by ending the impasse at the site of the now derelict General Wolfe pub and moving my constituency office back into town at the other end of the street. However, the fact remains that the high street is on its knees, and many residents feel that our once great town could do much better. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that significant resources are available, beyond just the plan for neighbourhoods, to revitalise towns in constituencies like mine?

Alex Norris: I can say to my hon. Friend's constituents that he is making good on that election commitment, because we have had this conversation on multiple occasions. Like all future funding, the Government will set out their long-term vision for local growth at the multi-year spending review; but in this year, the recently communicated UK shared prosperity fund announcement included more than £47 million for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly—a mixture of revenue and capital funding to ensure that places can get going and kick-start economic growth locally, bringing towns such as his into play.

Michelle Welsh: In my Sherwood Forest constituency, high streets are the beating heart of towns such as Ollerton and Hucknall. Ollerton is set to receive record funding from this Labour Government, and I thank the Minister for that. However, Hucknall was badly let down by the previous Government, with false promises of funding that quite simply did not exist. Will he meet me to discuss how this Labour Government can support the future of Hucknall, enabling it to be the glorious high street it once was?

Alex Norris: I fully share my hon. Friend's anger about the unfunded commitments to Hucknall from the previous Government. I know how disappointing that has been locally. I am pleased we have been able to reprioritise some funding within extremely tight budgets to give the support that she talks about. As she knows, I live only two tram stops from Hucknall, and of course I would be keen to pop on the tram and see her—and if we meet in the Plough, I would be doubly keen. Either way, I will be making sure I get to see her.

Rishi Sunak (Richmond and Northallerton) (Con): In 2017, I met parents of children with severe disabilities in my constituency. A lack of suitable toilets and changing facilities made it almost impossible for those families to enjoy a day out, and I have been inspired to campaign for more Changing Places toilets ever since. I recently opened a Changing Places toilet just off Leyburn High Street, which will improve accessibility across Wensleydale. Will the Minister join me in thanking everyone involved and commit to supporting more Changing Places toilets across the country, so that families can have both the opportunity and the dignity that they deserve?

Alex Norris: I share the right hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for Changing Places toilets, which have their roots in Nottingham. Frankly, people will not be able to access the amenities on their high streets if they do not feel they can leave their home without those facilities. I share his enthusiasm and commend him and his community. He sells himself slightly short, however, because I recall that when he was a Minister in this Department, he changed the rules and building regulations to make it easier to develop such toilets, and as Chancellor he made funding available for more as well. I would like to take this opportunity to recognise that and to praise him and the community of Wensleydale.

Lewis Cocking (Bloxhorne) (Con): Houses in multiple occupation throughout Bloxhorne—on our high streets in particular—are causing my constituents lots of issues. What will the Minister do to review the powers that my local councils of East Herts and Bloxhorne have to stop HMOs where we do not want them?

Alex Norris: This is a really important question. The future mix of our high streets will undoubtedly include, yes, traditional retail but also leisure and accommodation. That footfall can be a good thing, but if this is not well planned or well organised, and if communities are not brought along, it will not succeed. I am conscious that we have the Planning and Infrastructure Bill proceedings ahead of us today, and I am sure the hon. Gentleman will find an opportunity to make that case to the Minister for Housing and Planning.

Dr Al Pinkerton (Surrey Heath) (LD): In 2025-26, Surrey Heath businesses will contribute more than £30 million in business rates to Surrey borough council, but because of central Government tariffing, only 2.5% of those business rates will be retained locally. There is a reasonable expectation that locally raised taxes should remain local, so with local government reorganisation on its way, could the Secretary of State and the Front Bench team reassure Surrey Heath businesses that they might have a chance of retaining more of those business rates that should be invested back into our high streets?

Alex Norris: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the changes we have made to ensure that there are discounts on business rates for certain businesses this year, with further commitments to come at the Budget. He makes the right point. Of course I cannot announce that outside the Budget, but we will consider those points carefully.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): Our high streets and small businesses have been hammered by this Government, with big increases in the cost of business rates and national insurance contributions. Can the Minister tell the House what measures he and the team have put forward to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to help our small businesses and high streets in the spending review?

Alex Norris: The hon. Gentleman offers me two opportunities there. First, we talk about challenges on the high street, but I remind the House of the more than a decade of starved demand because the economic policies of the Conservatives and all the impacts that had, followed by—[*Interruption.*] The stag do on the Opposition Front Bench are making their rattle as usual, but they were all present during that disastrous fiscal event that led to the increased costs that we are still coping with now. The second temptation the hon. Gentleman gives me is the opportunity to resign by leaking details of the spending review here first. Sadly, I will give no succour there.

Mr Speaker: Every high street needs a Chorley market. That is the answer.

New Homes: Minimum EPC Rating

5. **Charlotte Cane** (Ely and East Cambridgeshire) (LD): What steps she is taking to ensure that new homes meet the minimum standard of EPC C rating. [904472]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): The December 2021 uplift to energy-efficiency standards means that most new build homes already achieve EPC ratings of A or B. As recently announced, the Government intend to introduce future standards in the autumn that will set more ambitious energy-efficiency and carbon emissions requirements for new homes to ensure that they are net zero-ready.

Charlotte Cane: As well as energy, water is an important utility. In Ely and East Cambridgeshire, we suffer drought and floods. What is the Minister doing to encourage new builds to have proper rainwater harvesting and dual piping, so that we can use rainwater to flush our toilets and for other non-drinking water uses?

Matthew Pennycook: We are looking at how we might make household water use more efficient, as well as a range of other interventions in my hon. Friend's part of the country to ensure that we make the best use of water and that the necessary infrastructure is put in place to accommodate housing growth.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): In Hartlepool, 24,000 existing homes have an energy performance certificate rating of D or below. That means too many homes are too cold and have bills that are too high. What can the Minister do to accelerate the improvement of those homes to ensure warm homes for Hartlepool constituents?

Matthew Pennycook: My hon. Friend tempts me into the responsibilities of another Department, but I will get the relevant Minister from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to write to him to set out what measures are being put in place as part of the warm homes plan.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): In 2010, just 12% of homes had an EPC C rating or above, so those homes were too cold and had bills that were too high. It was 60% by 2024 when we left power. Will the Minister share with the House the ambition and give us a number for the percentage of homes that we should expect to have that basic EPC C rating by the end of this term, which I hope will be the only one the Minister has, so he should make a difference while he can? [*Laughter.*]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Angela Rayner): That's a bit harsh.

Matthew Pennycook: The right hon. Gentleman is certainly not charitable. As I made clear, I recognise the December 2021 uplift in energy efficiency standards means that most new builds that come through achieve an EPC rating of A or B. Off the top of my head, though I stand to be corrected, I think about 84% of new homes meet those standards. But as I said, we have announced that we want to introduce future standards this autumn, which will drive even more ambitious energy efficiency and carbon emission requirements for new homes.

Alistair Strathern (Hitchin) (Lab): Having long campaigned on the need for much tougher regulations for solar panels on new homes, I was delighted to hear the Government announce last Friday that we will bring forward requirements to do exactly that. That will not just boost EPC ratings, but save new homeowners thousands of pounds in bills, all while reducing energy usage. How can we ensure that we move at speed so that as many of the new homes we build over the course of this Parliament as possible will benefit from our ambition here?

Matthew Pennycook: My hon. Friend has been a champion of ensuring that we get more solar panels on to new build homes and other types of building. As I said in answer to a previous question, we want to move at pace to put future standards in place. We are looking at this autumn, and that will ensure more of the new homes coming forward meet those more ambitious standards. It will mean, as he is aware, that the vast majority of new build homes have solar panels on them as standard.

Regeneration Funding: Scotland

7. **Melanie Ward** (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the potential impact of UK Government regeneration funding on towns in Scotland. [904474]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Alex Norris): The Government's defining mission is delivering economic growth and driving up living standards. That is why we are investing up to £200 million across 10 Scottish towns over 10 years to support regeneration, tackle inequalities and unleash their full potential. That will empower local communities, improve public services and create new opportunities. That is, of course, alongside the shared prosperity fund, which is investing £4.4 million in Fife this year.

Melanie Ward: Many times I have raised with the Minister, as well as with Business and Treasury Ministers, the need for regeneration funding for Kirkcaldy High Street. The brilliant people of our town deserve a modern town centre that makes the most of our incredible seafront and all it has to offer. Ahead of the spending review this week, can the Minister assure me that my message has been heard? Will he also join me in congratulating Davy Russell, Labour's newest MSP and a strong campaigner for his high street? The people of Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse have chosen well.

Alex Norris: I can assure the hon. Lady, her constituents and the House that I do not think a week has gone by without her pushing me on Kirkcaldy town centre. She knows that I cannot run ahead of any multi-year spending review that may be upon us soon, but the point she made, and always makes to me, is a good one. I of course associate myself with her comments about Davy.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. I will just say that supplementary questions should aim to relate to the original question. This is about funding in Scotland, so I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's question will be purely about that.

Jim Shannon: The Minister is right to point out the need for regeneration for towns in Scotland. Last week, the Government agreed in this Chamber to funding for England and Wales. That leaves only one part of the United Kingdom left out: Northern Ireland. [*Laughter.*] What will be done to ensure that Northern Ireland gets the same as the other three Administrations?

Mr Speaker: Just answer the Scotland bit please, Minister.

Alex Norris: The hon. Gentleman knows that I talk with my counterparts in all the devolved Governments, including Scotland and Northern Ireland, and I will continue to do so. The shared prosperity fund is a sign of our commitment in that direction. We will, I am sure, see future plans shortly.

Construction Sector Specialist Apprentices

8. **Alison Hume** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): Whether her Department is taking steps with independent training colleges to train construction sector specialist apprentices to support house building targets. [904475]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): The Government recognise the need to expand and upskill the construction workforce to meet our ambitious plan-for-change milestone of delivering 1.5 million safe and decent homes in this Parliament. We are working closely with industry to provide high-quality house building training opportunities, and we welcome the £140 million industry investment late last year in 32 pioneering new home building skills hubs, which will create up to 5,000 more construction apprenticeships per year.

Alison Hume: The construction skills village in Scarborough is an innovative real-world training environment for the specialist trades that we desperately need to build homes. Does the Minister acknowledge the importance of independent training providers in our plans to build 1.5 million new homes, and will he meet me to discuss how we can ensure that ITPs, which deliver the specialist skills that the construction industry is asking for, are included in our plans to train 60,000 new construction workers?

Matthew Pennycook: The Government are investing significant amounts of money to train more construction workers. We appreciate fully the importance of independent training providers in training the workforce needed to deliver more homes across England. I suggest that my hon. Friend and I find time to meet Baroness Smith from the Department for Education to discuss matters relating to ITPs, including the CSV in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): I welcome the Minister's commitment to supporting skills training in the construction sector. Does he agree that skills training needs to be particularly focused on the sustainable skills, and will he join me in congratulating the low-carbon technology training centre in my constituency, as well as the new university in Hereford—its first cohort of engineers graduated just last month? Does he welcome such initiatives, and will the Government put more funding into supporting the construction and engineering skills that our building sector will need?

Matthew Pennycook: I hope that the hon. Lady recognises that we are putting significant amounts of investment into construction skills. In the spring statement, the Government announced a £600 million investment that will recruit an additional 60,000 construction workers by 2029. I am more than happy to recognise the contributions made by initiatives of the sort that she mentions in her constituency. We absolutely need skills across the built environment to meet our targets.

Social Housing Supply

9. **Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford) (Lab): If she will take steps through the spending review to increase social housing supply. [904476]

10. **Baggy Shanker** (Derby South) (Lab/Co-op): What steps she is taking to build more social and affordable homes. [904477]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Angela Rayner): In our first eight months in office, we have announced £800 million in new funding for the affordable homes programme and £2 billion as a down payment on future investment. The previous Government handed back precious cash for social and affordable homes. This Government will get those homes built. The Chancellor will set out details of new investment at the spending review.

Rebecca Long Bailey: I very much welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to social and affordable housing. I know that she will be concerned by the new analysis by the National Housing Federation, which finds that local authorities in England with the most severe shortage of social housing now have waiting lists exceeding 100 years for a family-sized social home. With nearly 6,000 people on the waiting list in Salford alone, will she outline what support she will give local authorities and the social housing sector to deliver desperately needed social homes?

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have a housing crisis in this country, and it is felt particularly acutely by those who need social and council housing. That is why we have been absolutely clear that we want to deliver the biggest increase to social and affordable housing in a generation. We have already outlined a number of measures, including allowing councils to retain 100% of right-to-buy receipts and making long-term funding settlements for rents. We have set out the investment that we have put into the sector, but we will say more at the spending review.

Baggy Shanker: Having access to a safe and secure home is a basic human need, but the Tories absolutely ignored this when they cut Government funding by £4.8 billion in just five years, and Derby has suffered the consequences. Last year, waiting lists for social housing in our city reached record highs. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to lift people stuck on these waiting lists out of limbo and into good social housing?

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend is a great champion for Derby and many Members across this House can understand the acute pressures he mentions. The fact is we have not been building enough homes, and we certainly have not been building enough social homes. Therefore, we have already set out some steps, as I mentioned briefly earlier, around the right to buy receipts, and we are consulting on new long-term rent settlements to give providers confidence to build, and we will be investing billions of pounds into social housing. I cannot pre-empt the spending review this week but the Chancellor will set out more then.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): When a developer pledges to build 40% minimum of affordable housing and obtains outline planning permission on the basis of that pledge, and then, less than 20 months later, seeks to reduce the 40% to 0%, is that acceptable?

Angela Rayner: I am not going to stray into individual cases, but what I will say is that since gaining office this Government have confirmed the changes to the national planning policy framework, in particular around

section 106, to ensure that when developers seek planning permission and pledge that they are going to do something, they are kept to those pledges.

James McMurdock (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Reform): My constituency is seeing approximately 60,000 new homes being built across the Basildon and Thurrock areas. Basildon hospital is consistently running at 98% capacity, and a school I visited today, which I was very proud to see in such a good state, has roughly 1,100 pupil applications for 300 available spaces each year. Along with housing, my constituents are deeply concerned about the level of infrastructure being developed and the state of the existing infrastructure. What reassurances can Ministers give them about those concerns?

Angela Rayner: Coming back to the point that we do need housing, including social and council housing, we have been clear in the changes that we have been making, including in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, to ensure that that infrastructure is there, because that is one of the barriers leading to people rejecting some proposals because the transport connectivity and the facilities are not available. Therefore this Government are committed to ensuring we get the right type of development that supports local need and also, importantly, has the infrastructure alongside it.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): The Deputy Prime Minister has repeatedly stuck to her commitment that 1.5 million homes, including social homes, will be built over the lifetime of this Parliament despite everybody knowing that she will not achieve it. And today, the latest people to say she will not are Savills, who have forecast that the true number she will build over this Parliament is just 840,000, and that means fewer social homes too. Now that she has emerged from the dark rooms of the Treasury to capitulate to the Chancellor, will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that more social homes and 1.5 million new homes will be built by the end of this Parliament: yes or no?

Angela Rayner: The Opposition cannot have it both ways: one way they are saying we are failing to build the homes; and the other way they are saying we are concreting over the green belt. We said that planning reforms alone will not deliver our ambitions, which is why we have committed to delivering the biggest increase in social and affordable house building in a generation. And I say to the hon. Member, as I have said to many people in my life, underestimate me at your peril.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrats spokesperson.

Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): Jess in my constituency had all her possessions and bags put on the pavement outside the hotel and was locked out of her bedroom with her baby by hotel management—shocking behaviour on their part. With £2 billion being spent by local authorities on temporary accommodation, would it not be better to have a national target for the number of social homes that are going to be built? What steps will the Government be taking to set such a target?

Angela Rayner: I am disgusted to hear about what happened to that young person and her baby—that is absolutely terrible. The number of people, particularly children, who are in temporary accommodation at the moment is shocking, which is why this Government are committed to the biggest wave of social and affordable housing in a generation. We have not put a particular number on that, not least because we do not have the spending review results—they are coming later this week—but we are clear that we want that number to ramp up and we need that proportion to meet the target of 1.5 million new homes, so I ask the hon. Member to wait just a little bit longer.

Local Authority Funding

12. **Amanda Hack** (North West Leicestershire) (Lab): What progress her Department has made on providing adequate funding for local authorities as part of the fair funding review. [904479]

13. **Natasha Irons** (Croydon East) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to help ensure that councils are financially stable. [904480]

14. **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to help ensure that councils are financially stable. [904481]

21. **Terry Jermy** (South West Norfolk) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to ensure that councils in areas with higher levels of deprivation receive adequate funding. [904488]

The Minister for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon): The Government have delivered a settlement that begins to fix the foundations and makes available over £69 billion in 2025-26. In 2026-27, an improved approach will direct funding where it is needed most and provide certainty through the first multi-year settlement in over a decade.

Amanda Hack: Leicestershire, alongside other authorities, has been campaigning for fair funding in recent years, following 14 years of poor funding settlements by the last Government, meaning cuts to vital services. A lack of fair funding also means that schools in North West Leicestershire have some of the lowest levels of funding per student in the country. How will the Minister approach a fair funding settlement that considers the unique challenges faced by rural communities?

Jim McMahon: I thank my hon. Friend for her work in championing those issues. We are fundamentally reforming how we assess councils' relative needs and resources, to ensure that funding is distributed to where it is needed most. That includes accounting for councils' ability to raise resources locally, which the previous Government promised to do but ultimately failed to do in balancing the numbers. Targeting funding in that way will enable councils that have had to scale back services the most to be able to catch up and to ensure that everybody, across the whole of England, is able to access decent public services.

Natasha Irons: Despite an increase in council tax of 27% since 2022, £136 million in exceptional financial support this year and brutal cuts to services, Croydon council's finances remain broken. As an outer-London borough with inner-London problems, Croydon has historically not received the funding it needs to cover the costs for demand-led services like temporary accommodation, so even if Croydon's debt was wiped out, it would still need exceptional financial support. Will the Minister outline how councils like Croydon will get the resources they need to meet the complex challenges they face and provide the frontline services that our communities deserve?

Jim McMahon: The questions that have been raised demonstrate why the fair funding review is needed, and why it has to take into account all the different factors that have an impact on whether councils can provide good public services or not. I appreciate, understand and accept that pressures that were previously felt in inner London are now felt in outer London, and in rural areas too. My hon. Friend will know that in February we provided £136 million in EFS support for Croydon council, and we will continue to work with it. We have met and talked about the issues a number of times, and I know that she understands that those are not small problems to deal with.

Helen Hayes: The statutory override to special educational needs and disabilities deficit comes to an end in just 10 months. Without a plan from the Government for the end of the statutory override, more than half of all local education authorities face effective bankruptcy. The need for a resolution to the issue is now long overdue. When does the Minister expect to be able to give local authorities the certainty they need?

Jim McMahon: We are laying the groundwork now, ahead of the provisional settlement, which will be the first multi-year settlement in over a decade and will deal with a lot of the structural issues. If it is any help, the Government understand and accept that it is not right or acceptable for councils that have done everything that has been asked of them and provided good public services, particularly for young people, to find themselves at the financial cliff edge as a result. We have an absolute commitment to work through those issues.

Terry Jermy: Pockets of deprivation in many rural communities, like my South West Norfolk constituency, are often masked by more affluent surroundings. Will the Minister reassure me that financial support from the Government for local councils in rural areas reflects those concerns about isolated deprivation?

Jim McMahon: This month, we are consulting on an updated assessment of need that we will implement from 2026-27. Importantly, that includes the indices of multiple deprivation, a designated national statistic, and it will drill down to deprivation levels of between 400 and 1,200 households in each of those units. Our intention is to address the issues found in the pockets of deprivation in every community, including rural and coastal communities where they are sometimes drowned out because of the sea of affluence around them. It is important that we get to deprivation wherever it exists.

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): As an outer London borough, Havering has been hugely disadvantaged by a funding formula based on outdated population figures. We heard today that the Mayor of London himself is concerned that this Labour Government will level down London altogether. Will the Minister confirm that the fair funding review will report by this summer—I have been told that previously by a Minister—and will specifically address the disparities between inner and outer London?

Jim McMahon: I can absolutely assure the hon. Member that we are working through those issues, and we will consult the sector on them. Given all the variations that we will take into account, I hope Members accept that we have listened. We know that the funding formula is out of date and that for it to stand the test it must apply wherever Members represent, whether in coastal communities, rural communities, inner or outer London or anywhere else in between. I assure the hon. Member that we are getting on with that work.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): Shropshire council's finances have been left on the brink by 16 years of Conservative administration. It is the largest landlocked county in England, and it is struggling with about 85% of its budget being spent on social care. When the Minister does his fair funding review, will he look at the difficulty and costliness of delivering services over such a wide rural area and ensure that councils such as Shropshire, which has lost its rural services delivery grant, will be able to sustain themselves in the future?

Jim McMahon: We made available an additional £5 billion as part of the settlement, and £3.7 billion of that was for social care. We understand the pressures and we are directing money to address them, but we know that this issue will take more than one year to fix. We are on with the fair funding review—the third multi-year settlement in a decade—to begin to fix the foundations. We have definitely heard calls from rural communities and councils to take into account the additional cost for rurality and remoteness, and I assure the hon. Lady that those issues are being looked at.

Mr Peter Bedford (Mid Leicestershire) (Con): One way of ensuring that new unitary authorities such as those for Leicestershire have adequate funding is to base that funding on robust business cases. Given that the Department was five weeks late in providing feedback to the local authorities, will the Minister commit to extending the deadline to ensure that those local authorities have the time that they need to build up those plans?

Jim McMahon: In all areas, there is more than adequate time to prepare final proposals. Councils in the devolution priority programme have until September, and all others—the majority—have until November. That is more than adequate time for councils to be able to marshal and get their plans together and make an assessment on that basis.

Ayoub Khan (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): It has been reported that the Birmingham bin strikes may last until December. How can this Government claim to support workers when they refuse to fund Birmingham city council properly? This dispute boils down to cash, yet the Government are failing Birmingham's bin workers,

residents and businesses. The Government backed our steelworkers. Will they back the bin workers with extra funding?

Jim McMahon: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. On the calls that we have with MPs when we update them on these issues, his tone is quite different. We need to separate the rhetoric from the reality. The reality is that for the first time we had £600 million in the recovery grant, which was about those councils suffering high deprivation and historically low tax bases. Birmingham was the biggest beneficiary of that, receiving nearly £40 million.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): The Minister knows from his time at the Local Government Association of the impact that asylum has on the budgets of local authorities. With the Home Office's much-vaunted increase in the grant rate for asylum claims, the Government are pushing thousands of households on to council waiting lists and shunting millions in costs on to council tax payers. What additional funding and measures does he aim to secure to help to mitigate those costs, which are affecting so many of our local authorities?

Jim McMahon: Quite frankly, it is a bit rich for any shadow Minister to critique the current system when the Conservatives deliberately designed it in their 14 years in government. The question is how we go about repairing it. One thing must absolutely be put right; the disjointed system in which different Government Departments work in silos cannot carry on. One of the successes of the leaders' council is that for the first time ever, local government leaders are around the table with the Government, including in a meeting with the Home Office and our Department, to work through exactly those issues. That is the change: for the first time, those in local government are being treated as adults.

Topical Questions

T1. [904492] **Alice Macdonald** (Norwich North) (Lab/Co-op): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Angela Rayner): As the Planning and Infrastructure Bill enters its remaining stages in the Commons, I thank my hon. Friend the Housing Minister and Members across the House for their continued work on this important piece of legislation that will get Britain building again.

This weekend marks the eighth anniversary of the Grenfell tower fire. I know that I speak for all Members of this House when I say that the 72 men, women and children who lost their lives at Grenfell will never be forgotten. We have accepted the inquiry's findings, and will take action on all 58 recommendations to build a more robust and trusted regulatory system that will deliver safe, quality homes for everyone.

Alice Macdonald: Many of my constituents are concerned that too often new estates go up without the necessary infrastructure, whether that is schools, GP surgeries or

even playgrounds. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is vital to address that issue, and can she elaborate on how we will do so after too many years of inaction?

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The Government are committed to strengthening the system of developer contributions to ensure that new developments provide the necessary infrastructure that communities expect. We will set out further details in due course. Earlier I mentioned the changes to the national planning policy framework that were announced in December, and we will also support the increased provision and modernisation of various types of public infrastructure.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): As the Secretary of State has said, Saturday marks the eighth anniversary of the Grenfell tragedy. As she knows, I can confirm to her that I will work constructively with her and her colleagues to deliver remediation, building safety and the best outcomes for local communities. The previous Government committed over £5 billion for remediation; will the Secretary of State confirm that the spending review will continue to provide such financial support? Will she also confirm that she will meet the previous Government's pledge to co-fund with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea the renovation of the Lancaster West estate, and that the £85 million from central Government needed and promised to finish the works will be provided?

Angela Rayner: I thank the shadow Secretary of State for the constructive way in which he has approached this issue. We all remember what happened at Grenfell and the work that the previous Government did, and we are continuing that work, as outlined in phase 2 of the recommendations. The buildings Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North and Kimberley (Alex Norris) has been meeting—as I have—members of the community, RBKC and others to make sure we continue on that journey. I hesitate to say, though, that the previous Government made a lot of promises that are challenging. We will always put safety first, and we are working to ensure that we deliver on that.

Kevin Hollinrake: I know that the Secretary of State has had some difficult negotiations this weekend with her colleague the Chancellor. The spending review is critical for the funding of the affordable homes budget. In the past, the Secretary of State has praised the Chancellor's generosity, as she puts it, not least for providing the extra £2 billion for the affordable homes budget, but will she admit today that that budget is decreasing from previous levels under our Government? Will she say—even if it is after the spending review—exactly how many affordable and social homes she expects to deliver during this Parliament?

Angela Rayner: The shadow Secretary of State has been called a bit later than the hon. Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes), for whom I outlined the reasons we have not put an exact figure on that and confirmed that we will build the biggest increase in affordable and social housing in a generation. I say gently to the shadow Secretary of State that we are delivering for working people by banning no-fault evictions and

introducing groundbreaking protections for renters, which the Conservatives promised but did not deliver. We are introducing major planning reforms to build 1.5 million homes; they promised 1.6 million homes, but could not get anywhere. We are also delivering the largest ever single package of devolution measures, pushing power out of Westminster. We are delivering where the Conservatives failed.

T2. [904493] **Ben Goldsborough** (South Norfolk) (Lab): We are very good at growing things in South Norfolk, including food, businesses and thriving communities. However, if we want our young people to share in that success, we need to plant a new town in my constituency. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how we will achieve that?

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): I do not blame my hon. Friend for trying, but for good reason we established an independent expert advisory panel—the new towns taskforce—to make recommendations to Ministers on the location and delivery of new towns. The taskforce will submit its final report to Ministers in the coming months.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): Residents in Wellington, in Castlemoat Place in Taunton and in Agar Grove—homebuyers—are just some of a sample who have come to me, raising the scandal of house builders not properly finishing the buildings they have created, leaving them unsafe. What steps will the Minister take to bring forward measures to ensure that house builders repair and make safe their properties urgently, without people having to wait years?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Alex Norris): I am grateful for that question, which raises something mirrored in many parts of this country. The duty to make sure that homes are safe is the responsibility of builders and owners. Where they fall short, there are legal powers for the local authority and for the fire and rescue service to compel them to change. As with all hon. and right hon. colleagues across the House, I would be happy to help, if I can, with any specific examples that the hon. Gentleman has.

T7. [904498] **Brian Leishman** (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): There is no doubt about it; we face a climate emergency. What plans do the Government have to increase funding for the fire service to meet the increase and projected increases in wildfire and flooding incidents? If funding is to be increased, what will that mean for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service?

Alex Norris: As my hon. Friend rightly identifies, fire is a devolved matter. In England, stand-alone fire and rescue authorities will see an increase in core spending power of nearly £70 million in 2025-26. Those fire and rescue authorities are required to plan for foreseeable risks in their area, including wildfire and flooding, and to decide where to direct resources. On co-operation, I assure him, as I did the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), that I am talking to my counterparts in the devolved Government to make sure that we are tackling common problems and sharing that insight.

T3. [904494] **Claire Young** (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): In the light of some worrying small-site applications on previously undeveloped green-belt land in my constituency, and of concerns from the Campaign to Protect Rural England, will the Minister undertake to monitor and assess the initial impact of the new grey-belt provisions and look at refining the wording, to avoid salami-slicing of the green belt?

Matthew Pennycook: No. We are confident that the protections in place for the green belt—the tests that have to be met for grey-belt release—are robust. It is ultimately for local planning authorities to conduct green-belt reviews and to bring forward those sites as part of local plans.

T8. [904499] **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Across London, 90,000 children are living in temporary accommodation, denied the essentials of a stable home, which has terrible consequences for their physical and mental health and education. This is a scandalous inheritance from the previous Conservative Government. When does the Secretary of State believe that we will begin to see those numbers drop substantially?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rushanara Ali): We have invested almost £1 billion in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, and we have recognised the scandal of temporary accommodation, which we inherited. We are taking action to ensure that there is a cross-Government strategy to get us back on track to ending homelessness.

T4. [904495] **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Oxtun in my constituency has a newly refurbished community shop, and it exists thanks to the hard work of local volunteers. The Plunkett impact report highlights how community-owned shops are at the centre of the local economy. What are the Government doing to support the ownership of community shops?

Alex Norris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to talk about community ownership of those locally loved assets. We know such places endure during difficult times; they provide good employment for local people and they normally employ a more diverse workforce base. We were pleased in the previous round to get money out to a number of schemes through the community ownership fund. We will legislate for an improved community right to buy, too. We are very much aligned in this space on the exceptional importance of community ownership.

T9. [904500] **Noah Law** (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his previous response, and I am glad to see that Cornwall's socioeconomic challenges are reflected in the fact that 11 mission priority neighbourhoods have been identified in mid-Cornwall alone. We have talked about funding for mission critical neighbourhoods, but what steps are being taken to ensure that those mission priority neighbourhoods—deprived areas that fall just short of that mission critical definition—get adequate investment, too?

Alex Norris: In addition to my previous answer, my hon. Friend will have heard me talk about the importance of targeting resource at deprivation and need. I think that is the right approach to funding. It also goes a bit beyond funding, to power, which all communities can benefit from. Whether it is high street rental auctions, an enhanced community right to buy, local planning processes or local communities taking those opportunities to shape place, local authorities are important in that conversation. I know my hon. Friend is pushing his in that regard.

T5. [904496] **Rebecca Paul** (Reigate) (Con): It has been estimated, and reported, that billions-worth of unspent community infrastructure levy may be available at local authority level for investment in critical infrastructure. Will the Minister ensure that the money is invested in roads and drainage, so it can deliver the improvements that our residents deserve?

Matthew Pennycook: There are legitimate reasons why developer contributions can be held by local authorities—for example, so that they can complete phased development, or bring forward other sites over a period of time—but we are aware that certain local authorities hold, in some cases, significant sums, and we are giving the matter some attention.

Matt Turmaine (Watford) (Lab): The Shared Health Foundation recently published a vital report on children living in temporary accommodation, which revealed the scandalous fact that all too often, children living in such accommodation are not safe, secure or able to thrive. Does the Minister agree that it falls to this Labour Government to fix that wrong, on which there has been silence for too long?

Rushanara Ali: My hon. Friend is right. We have inherited record levels of homelessness and rough sleeping, but this Government are determined to take action and address those challenges. Through the third round of the local authority housing fund, we are providing councils with half a billion pounds to house some of the most vulnerable people in the country, and have announced an injection of £2 billion to deliver up to 18,000 new affordable social homes.

T6. [904497] **Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): I am confident that the Secretary of State loves the pub as much as you and I do, Mr Speaker, but the jobs tax and the slashing of business rate relief have delivered a hammer blow to pubs such as the Barrel in Walkington, owned by Thwaites, and to hospitality businesses such as the Beverley Arms hotel. Has the Secretary of State made representations to the Chancellor ahead of Wednesday to ensure that more landlords are not forced to call last orders?

Angela Rayner: I might like a pint; and wouldn't he like to know?

Emma Foody (Cramlington and Killingworth) (Lab/Co-op): People have lived in Earsdon View in my constituency for more than 15 years, but the estate remains unadopted due to an ongoing issue between the landowner, Northumberland Estates, and the developer, Bellway, involving the securing of sewer adoption. I continue

to press all parties to resolve the problem, but how can we ensure that people are not left in this situation for decades, often paying management fees on top of council tax, and that developers deliver?

Matthew Pennycook: My hon. Friend has been a doughty champion of leaseholders and residential freeholders in her constituency. We must start to provide the consumer protections that are already on the statute book, but as I have made clear, we are determined to end the injustice of fleecing entirely, and will consult later this year on legislative and policy options to reduce the prevalence of private estate management arrangements.

Jack Rankin (Windsor) (Con): I broadly support unitarisation on a strategic scale, but I am concerned about how historic debts will be treated in Surrey, especially those of Woking and Spelthorne councils. How will those debts be handled as our councils come together, and will the Minister assure my constituents in Virginia Water and Englefield Green, in the well-run borough of Runnymede, that they will not foot the bill for this as part of the reorganisation?

The Minister for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon): That is one of the reasons why the Surrey arrangement was accelerated. We recognised the lack of balance between the debt liability and the assets and incomes. We also recognised that the unitaries would have to be financially viable, and we are well on track to delivering that, in partnership with the local councils.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Select Committee.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the enhanced protections for tenants in the Renters' Rights Bill, but data from *The Londoner* shows that for London tenants, there is only one enforcement officer per 7,500 private rented homes. Given the new enforcement burdens that the Bill places on councils, will the Minister please ensure that they have the resources to protect private tenants?

Matthew Pennycook: My hon. Friend will know that in the Bill we have taken a "polluter pays" approach. Local authorities will be able to levy fines on landlords to raise revenue, but—my hon. Friend can check the transcript on this point—we did commit ourselves to "new burdens" funding as appropriate.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Given the environmental importance and scarcity of chalk streams, may I urge the Deputy Prime Minister and her team to support amendments to this afternoon's legislation that would protect those streams? They are vital, and they need as much protection as we can give them.

Matthew Pennycook: As the hon. Gentleman will know, chalk streams already have protections in national planning policy, but I am sure that we will continue this discussion on Report of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill later today.

Anneliese Midgley (Knowsley) (Lab): Will the Minister meet me and residents of Beech and Willow Rise in Kirby, where a combination of failed leasehold law, previous corporate entities and inadequate regulation risks leaving residents facing unaffordable costs and eviction?

Matthew Pennycook: I am always happy to meet my hon. Friend. I know she has had constructive conversations with the Minister with responsibility for building safety, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North and Kimberley (Alex Norris), but I am happy to meet her.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Three hundred social homes are at risk in my Chichester constituency, despite having outline planning permission, because developers are rejecting offers from registered providers.

Will the Minister commit to action to stop developers evading their obligation, and will he meet me to help me protect the delivery of these social homes?

Matthew Pennycook: We recognise the challenges around uncontracted section 106 units. A complex array of factors has led us to this point, but we are giving serious consideration to how we unblock the problem, and how we get those section 106 homes allocated and people living in them.

Chinese Embassy Development

3.36 pm

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government what assessment she has made of the United States Government's national security concerns regarding the proposed Chinese embassy development at Royal Mint Court.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): This Government are committed to the probity of the planning process at all levels to ensure robust and evidence-based decision making. The process includes a role for planning Ministers in deciding on called-in planning applications and recovered appeals, so I hope that the House will appreciate why I cannot comment in any detail on specific planning applications at the Dispatch Box. That said, it may be helpful to Members if I set out the process that these cases follow.

The application referred to by the right hon. Member was considered to meet the published call-in policy set out in the October 2012 written ministerial statement, so it will be determined by Ministers. The application is not yet with the Department. All decisions that come before Ministers are subject to examination by an independent planning inspector, usually through a public inquiry. The planning inspector then provides an evidence-based recommendation, and set out their full reasons for that recommendation. The inspector's report considers the application against published local, regional and national planning policy, which is likely to contain a wide variety of material planning considerations; in this case, those are likely to include safety and national security.

A public inquiry was held on this case between 11 and 28 February, at which interested parties were able to put forward evidence and make representations. Should any further representations be made that raise material planning considerations before the decision is made, they will also be taken into account. At all times, the decision will be dealt with in line with the published propriety guidance on planning casework decisions. The right hon. Member will be aware that the Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary made a joint representation to the Planning Inspectorate ahead of the start of the inquiry. That will be taken into account, alongside all other relevant matters. Once the planning inspector's report and recommendation is received, the case will be determined by a planning Minister, who will come to a decision based on material planning considerations.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: The US Government, and today the Dutch Parliament, have expressed concerns about sensitive cables under Royal Mint Court. Beijing has a recent history of cutting cables and confirmed infrastructure hacks, including embedding malware capable of disabling all that infrastructure. Surprisingly, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology said on television yesterday that this issue is "in the planning process" and could be managed. Will the Minister correct the record? The planning inquiry has concluded, and no changes at all can be made to the Chinese planning application.

I remind the Minister that the application contains nothing about cabling. Indeed, the Chinese have rejected only two requests by the inquiry—requests to which he referred; they were made by the Government, in the letter from the Foreign and Home Secretaries. That is despite Ministers regularly saying that the letter should "give those concerned comfort." Rerouting the cables would, we know, cost millions, if the Government are even thinking about that, so I ask the Minister: why did the Government strongly deny, rather than tell this House about, the presence of the cables until the White House actually confirmed it?

Chinese state media have reported that the UK has given assurances to the Chinese that the UK would allow the development, no matter what. Indeed, *The Guardian* newspaper reported in 2023 that the Chinese would not apply again unless they were given governmental assurances. Can the Minister confirm, or even deny, any of this? Speaking as one of those in the Chamber who have been sanctioned by China, I see this as Project Kowtow. There has been one denial after another, and one betrayal after another. No wonder our allies believe that this Chinese mega-embassy is becoming a walk of shame for the Government.

Matthew Pennycook: I thank the right hon. Member for those questions. I hope he will appreciate, not least because of the quasi-judicial nature of the role of planning Ministers in the planning process, that I cannot comment on the details of the application. As I have said, no decision on the case has been made, and the case is not yet before the Department.

The right hon. Member mentioned cables, but it would not be appropriate to comment on any specific national security issue. On whether the Chinese embassy issue was raised during UK-US trade talks, again it would not be appropriate to comment on the details of those talks. Suffice it to say that we do not recognise the characterisation set out in *The Sunday Times* article, in which that was referenced. It is important to emphasise that only material planning considerations can be taken into account in determining this case. As I say, I cannot comment in any detail on such a case, and this case is not yet before the Department.

Alex Sobel (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): I understand that the Minister cannot comment on this case, or any individual case, but national security is of the utmost concern to everybody in this country and in this Chamber. When an application comes before the Secretary of State, and in granting applications from foreign Governments, will national security be a material concern for the Government?

Matthew Pennycook: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. As I made clear in responding to the initial question, the inspector's report considers the application against published local, regional and national planning policy, which is likely to include consideration of a wide variety of material planning matters. In this case, that is likely to include safety and national security.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) for securing this very important urgent question. Question after question, and letter after letter, the Government have consistently treated Parliament with complete disregard on this matter. They have stonewalled legitimate inquiries about national security, ministerial discussions and warnings from security bodies. I get that the Minister is compromised, in that he has a quasi-judicial responsibility here, but his colleagues in the Home Office and the Foreign Office do not, and they could answer these questions.

As the Government know, their own cyber-security experts, Innovate UK, have warned about the threat to the City of London from the embassy. The Wapping telephone and internet exchange is surrounded on three sides by the new embassy, and there are fibre cables carrying highly sensitive information running beneath the site. The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology said yesterday that these matters could be dealt with in the planning process, but the inquiry has ended, so they cannot. If the Government are considering moving the cables, how many millions of pounds of public money will that cost? I recently sent yet another cross-party letter to the Prime Minister, signed by 59 parliamentarians, urging him to pause and reconsider. Since then, the US and Dutch Governments have both sounded the alarm.

Have MI5 and GCHQ been able to submit their own warnings to the planning inspector? Does the inspector have access to unredacted plans of the embassy, which the Chinese Government have refused to make public? Have the Government assessed the potential sinister uses of the secret basement in the so-called cultural exchange building? What discussions have taken place with the Bank of England, given its role in cyber-security regulation in the City? Why will the Government not follow the example of the US, Australian and Irish Governments, who vetoed similar embassies that threatened their national security? The Government are on the verge of making a decision that will lead to a huge risk that will persist for decades. Will they change course before it is too late?

Matthew Pennycook: I appreciate that the shadow Secretary of State's remarks were written before he listened to my response, but I could not have been clearer about the fact that no decision has been made on this case and no application is yet before the Department—[*Interruption.*] It was a question. He is pre-empting a decision that has not been made, on a case that is not before the Department. I have been very clear that, should any further representations be made that raise material planning considerations—they may, in this case, relate to safety and national security—before a decision is made, these will be taken into account. But again, as I said to the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), on matters of security it would not be appropriate for me to comment. On specific issues such as cables, it would not be appropriate for me to comment. Planning Ministers have a quasi-judicial role in the planning process and, as I have said, the case is not yet before the Department.

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): I am sure that the Minister can understand the sensitivity of how we all feel about this. China has a track

record of aggressive state-backed espionage. Surely this country cannot afford to make a massive underestimation of the risk, should this go ahead as expected. Experts warn that there could be the foreign leverage of signals, interception and monitoring of sensitive Government and corporate communications. To what extent can individuals make representations, because everyone is extremely concerned that such a massive and historic building was sold some years ago? This is pre-empted. This is how China works: it plans years ahead. We cannot not say anything in this House; we must comment on what we see. Please, understand that we must.

Matthew Pennycook: I do understand the strength of feeling conveyed by my hon. Friend and other hon. Members when it comes to the People's Republic of China. The Government are taking a consistent, long-term and strategic approach to managing the UK's relations with China, rooted in the national interest. We will always protect our national security and keep the country safe, but those are separate issues from this specific planning application. I understand why she does so, but she tempts me to speculate—again, as I have said—on a decision that has not been made, on a case that is not yet before the Department.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Luke Taylor (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): I thank the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) for submitting this urgent question.

The potential approval of the Chinese super-embassy sends precisely the wrong signal at a moment when we should be pushing the Chinese Government hard on human rights abuses and their repression of the people of Hong Kong, both in that city and right here on our streets. Notwithstanding the risk of interception of sensitive comms at the site, Hongkongers and Uyghurs are deeply worried about what it might mean for China's expanding surveillance capacity here in the UK. In March, alongside other Opposition Members, I spoke at the protest in front of the proposed site. I say the same thing to the Minister as I said that day: the Government must block it. Taking into account the scale of opposition, both domestically and by our allies, will the Minister confirm that representations made in this place will be considered as part of the planning approval process? If I may, I will also ask: considering that the original timetable for the China audit to be published has now passed, will the Minister tell the House when they expect finally to present it?

Matthew Pennycook: On the audit, the hon. Gentleman's final point, the relevant Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Friern Barnet (Catherine West), has confirmed that that will be coming before the summer. He raises two very distinct issues and I must treat them separately. On human rights, we stand firm, including against China's repression of the people of Xinjiang and Tibet. Human rights issues are raised every time FCDO Ministers meet their Chinese counterparts. On the application specifically, he asks me a very direct question. Should any further representations be made, by Members or other interested parties, that raise material planning

considerations that need to be taken into account in a decision, they will be taken into account and they will be considered before a decision is made.

Blair McDougall (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): Earlier this year I spoke at a huge demonstration outside the proposed embassy site, which was attended by thousands of British Hongkongers who fear that the hands that throttled their freedoms in Hong Kong are reaching into our society, too. I understand the Minister's point and the limitations on what he can say on the issue at this time, but this is not just a matter of national security; does he understand that it is also a matter of personal security for many of our constituents, given the increase in transnational repression emanating from Beijing?

Matthew Pennycook: My hon. Friend has been a vocal advocate for the Hong Kong community in his constituency and across the country. We will stand with and support members of that community; we have a long, shared history with Hong Kong, and many people from Hong Kong have made the UK their home in recent years. Again—I must emphasise this point, and I will continue to do so as questions on this come in—that is a distinct and separate issue from the planning application that will, in due course, come before Ministers in my Department.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Blair McDougall) today; I spoke before him at the rally to which he refers. Those of us who have been sanctioned—I know that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are among our number—are particularly conscious of the effect that the Chinese state has on our country. Do you, Madam Deputy Speaker, honestly believe that the Minister thinks that the Chinese would look at this proposal in the same way? Do we in this House honestly believe that something threatening our economic security, as highlighted by the Americans and the Dutch, should go through a bureaucratic planning process, with no ability to vary it, because, frankly, that's the orders? I do not think that is the way China would do it, and it is certainly not the way we should do it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): It is a very clever question, but it is the Minister who is responding.

Matthew Pennycook: The right hon. Gentleman's views on China are well known, and he knows my views on China, too—we have discussed the matter in the past. He raises two distinct issues. On sanctioned parliamentarians, let me take this opportunity to make it clear that the sanctions are completely unwarranted and unacceptable, and this issue will remain a priority under this Government. The Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor have raised their case at every meeting with their counterparts, including with President Xi at the G20 in November and Foreign Minister Wang Yi in February. The right hon. Gentleman tempts me to comment on the Chinese planning system. I am very glad that we have a different and more robust system than the People's Republic of China.

Mark Swards (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): I appreciate that the Minister cannot comment on individual planning applications from the Dispatch Box,

but when I speak to Hongkongers in my constituency, they are seriously concerned about the risks that come with transnational repression and that might come along with the creation and construction of this embassy. When I was speaking with Hongkongers in my constituency last week, on the 36th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre—something that can be commemorated in Leeds, but not in Hong Kong—they were seriously concerned that those with £100,000 bounties on their heads might be more at risk now because of the construction of this embassy. I appreciate that the Minister's portfolio does not necessarily cover this, but what assurances can he give on behalf of the Government that if such an embassy is built, we will do everything in our power to protect those from Hong Kong who have made the UK their home?

Matthew Pennycook: I hope hon. Members will appreciate why I will not comment on hypotheticals, again, on a decision that has not been made on a case that is not before the Department. I have made it very clear that we stand with the Hong Kong community. The Minister with responsibility for Asia and the Indo-Pacific, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Friern Barnet (Catherine West), met members of the Hong Kong community in this country, along with my hon. Friend the Security Minister. We will stand by them.

Sir James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): The Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Foreign Secretary have all had recent, high-level interactions with Ministers of the Chinese Communist party—the Chinese Government. Has the Chinese embassy been brought up in any of the meetings with those Ministers, and have those Ministers in any way corresponded with the Minister's Department on the Chinese embassy application?

Matthew Pennycook: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the details of any talks—

Sir James Cleverly: I was not asking for details.

Matthew Pennycook: The right hon. Gentleman is asking for details, and it would not be appropriate for me to comment. On the particular issue of whether representations have been made, as I made clear in answering the initial question, the Home and Foreign Secretaries made a joint representation to the Planning Inspectorate ahead of the start of the inquiry, and that will be taken into account alongside all other relevant matters.

James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab): From a response to a freedom of information request, which I have with me, we now know that just two protests at the Royal Mint Court site in February and March this year required the deployment of nearly 600 officers in total, including 101 in February and 485 in March. The FOI request reveals that the cost of policing these two protests alone amounted to £345,000. This is a staggering use of resources for a site that is not yet operational, and it reflects the serious concerns among the Hongkonger, Tibetan and Uyghur diasporas in the UK. These are communities that fear that the embassy will become a hub for transnational repression. What assessment have Ministers made of the cost implications of this proposed development on policing, and will they commit today to rejecting this super-embassy?

Matthew Pennycook: I am not going to commit to rejecting an application that has not yet come to the Department and, as I keep saying, where a decision has not been made. I have made it clear that we understand the concerns of members of the Hong Kong community and others about the potential—I make clear that it is a potential—approval of this application. When it comes to police resourcing, all I can repeat is that only material planning considerations can be taken into account in determining the case.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): I think we can all agree that we would like a decision to be made in this case that does not encourage the Chinese Government to think that we are a soft touch. Let us try another tack. National security is going to be taken into account as part of this planning decision. I ask the Minister this hypothetical question: if there is only a 1% chance that the granting of this planning application causes some detriment to our national security, would it not be better to take a risk management approach and put the embassy somewhere else?

Matthew Pennycook: The hon. Gentleman invites me, again, to consider a planning decision that has not been made, on a case that is not yet before the Department. I am clearly not going to set out from this Dispatch Box the decision-making process that planning Ministers in my Department might take to the application once it is submitted.

Lillian Jones (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): Given the serious concerns about national security, can the Minister confirm that his Department has consulted on this issue with UK and allied intelligent agencies, including those of the USA? Can he say whether a full national security review will be conducted before any planning decision is taken?

Matthew Pennycook: As I have made clear, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any specific national security issue. What I have been at pains to make clear is that the inspector's report, which will come before Ministers in my Department at the point when the case comes to us, will include a wide variety of material planning matters, and in this case they are likely to include safety and national security matters.

Dame Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): Further to the question from the hon. Member for Rushcliffe (James Naish), the Home Affairs Committee has written to the Metropolitan police asking for details of any concerns it may have about the policing of this site and any particular disorder that might occur around it. I once again put it to the Minister that he must take account of these concerns. There could be very serious and significant concerns for policing in the capital.

Matthew Pennycook: All material planning considerations that have been brought to the attention of the inspector will be taken into account as part of the decision when it is made in due course.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): National security and security is a valid planning consideration, so does the Minister accept that, in the event that the Secretary of State allows this decision to go ahead,

regardless of the planning inspector's recommendation, this Government will essentially be putting our relationship with China ahead of our security relationship with the United States?

Matthew Pennycook: That is pure speculation. As I have said, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any national security matters.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): Does the Minister believe that China will always try to exploit and infiltrate data communication in this country?

Matthew Pennycook: Widespread cyber-activity or interference in our democracy will not be tolerated and will be met with a strong response.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): Moving on from national security, according to the documentation—I have double-checked—community safety is a significant material planning consideration. In such a multicultural area, what assessment of risk to community cohesion and the safety of local people is being made? How does taking such decisions more centrally align with the Government's much-publicised commitment to devolution?

Matthew Pennycook: I do not know whether hon. Members can hear me. I keep answering the questions as posed, and I have answered that question. If the issue that the hon. Lady raises is a material planning consideration, the inspector will take it into account in their recommendation to Ministers to make a decision, once the case comes to the Department.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): China is already revelling in the Government's spectacular own goal in handing over Chagos. China looks as if it is about to benefit again. Even if the Minister cannot say what amounts are involved, will he say what works would need to be done in advance of the embassy being set up at the Royal Mail site, and who would pay for that? Would it be the Chinese, or would it be the UK Government, and which part?

Matthew Pennycook: As I said, a public inquiry was held between 11 and 28 February, and all the relevant documents submitted to that inquiry are available online. I encourage the right hon. Gentleman to go and look at them. Again, he invites me to speculate on matters that are part of the application that the inspector will have considered in making his report and recommendation—when that arrives—to the Department. I emphasise again that no case is yet with the Department.

Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV): If national security is a material consideration, will that be judged only by what is in the inspector's report? If so, how could that be adequate, since the UK's China audit will not have been published before the inspector concludes his report?

Matthew Pennycook: At the point when the planning inspector's report and recommendation is received, it will be determined by a planning Minister, who will come to a decision based on material planning considerations that have been analysed.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): I understand that the Minister cannot comment on the specifics, but does he at least agree with the principle that if there is a risk that a nation state will act nefariously against the British state's interests, the British Government should not reward that state?

Matthew Pennycook: As I have been at pains to make clear, the Government will always protect our national security and keep this country safe. There is a distinct issue from the planning application and the questions about process that have been put to me. On that basis, I cannot comment, as the hon. Gentleman has acknowledged, on a decision that has not been made, and on a case that is not with the Department.

Mr Will Forster (Woking) (LD): My constituency is home to a growing number of people from Hong Kong who have been forced to flee their homeland as a result of actions by China. I appreciate what the Minister says about this being a quasi-legal matter, and the fact that a Foreign Office Minister is sat next to him speaks volumes about how this is not just a planning issue. Does he agree that this country owes a debt to Hongkongers, whom we need to protect from the Chinese interference that they consider this super-embassy would enable?

Matthew Pennycook: I do recognise that point. As I have made clear, the Government will stand with and support members of the Hong Kong community. As I said—I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in the Chamber for this—the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Friern Barnet (Catherine West), and the Minister for Security met members of the Hong Kong community only recently. We will continue to stand with them.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): The Minister has made it clear that he will not comment on the specifics of the case, and I will not ask him to, but can he offer a view in principle on why we would ever offer a foreign state with known cyber-espionage capabilities that it deploys regularly easier access to critical cyber-infrastructure?

Matthew Pennycook: Again, the hon. Gentleman is making assumptions that I do not recognise, and thereby tempting me to comment on the case. I am not going to make blanket, in-principle statements, given the quasi-judicial nature and involvement of planning Ministers in the process.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Lee Anderson, are you bobbing or not bobbing?

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Reform) *indicated dissent.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Marvellous. I call Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker—I am somewhat thrown off there.

I thank the Minister for his answers. He will be aware of concerns that Chinese-born residents in my constituency and across Northern Ireland have about the reach, and indeed the overreach, of the Chinese Government in the

United Kingdom. I can well understand US concerns and, with all due respect—he knows I always ask my questions with respect—does the Minister truly believe that this massive embassy will alleviate the concerns of those who know best the reach of the Chinese Government's arm? Should we not be showing that, while we will accord them courtesy, as we do with other national embassies, they are not entitled to a Chinese “Vatican City” in the midst of this great nation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

Matthew Pennycook: I do recognise the concerns the hon. Gentleman raises, but—forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker—I have to repeat again that no decision has been made in this case. No case is yet with the Department. I have laid out in quite some detail the process that has been followed in how the application has been taken forward, and what needs to happen for Ministers to reach a decision at the appropriate point, when a case comes to the Department.

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): Things that seem politically and economically expedient at the time can become things that Governments regret very much in the long term, as I found when I was the telecoms Minister having to lead the £2 billion strip-out of Huawei from our 5G infrastructure. It took only a few minutes for the Prime Minister to change his position on the Chinese embassy after a call from President Xi Jinping. The Minister has said he cannot answer any questions on the substance of the issue, but on a planning level will he commit personally to having a secure briefing ahead of making any planning decision, and also to publishing and sharing with this House details of all the representations he has received on the planning application, including those from his own Government?

Matthew Pennycook: I will take the two aspects of the hon. Lady's question in turn, if I may. We will be vigilant against the full range of hybrid, cyber, space and other threats from state and non-state actors, including those emanating from China. On her specific question about the planning application, all the representations made to the Planning Inspectorate as part of that public inquiry are publicly available for hon. Members to see. Ministers, when they come to make a decision on the basis of the inspector's reports and recommendations, will do so taking into account material planning considerations.

Lincoln Jopp (Spelthorne) (Con): Is the planning officer who is considering this case cleared to receive top-secret information?

Matthew Pennycook: A planning inspector is assessing the case as part of a public inquiry. Although I recognise why the hon. Gentleman has asked the question, I am afraid it would not be appropriate for me to comment on national security matters.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): “China is likely to continue seeking advantage through espionage and cyber-attacks, and through securing cutting-edge Intellectual Property through legitimate and illegitimate means.” Those are not my words, but the words of the Government's own strategic defence review. Given the sub-threshold threat posed by China and its starring role in the SDR,

[Ben Obese-Jecty]

where it is referred to explicitly alongside Russia and Iran, why has China not been included in the enhanced tier of the foreign influence registration scheme ahead of any potential approval of its super-embassy?

Matthew Pennycook: My hon. Friend the Minister for Asia and the Indo-Pacific tells me that that particular report is coming forward in due course. Again, on the planning application, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on specific national security issues but, as I have said, material planning considerations, including those relating to safety and national security, will be taken into account.

Winter Fuel Payment

4.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Torsten Bell): On 21 May, the Prime Minister told this House that the Government wanted to extend eligibility for winter fuel payments to a wider range of pensioners in England and Wales. Today we are setting out how this will happen for the coming winter and the years ahead. This will provide certainty for pensioners and ensure that payments can be made swiftly and automatically, which is our priority. I hope this statement will also answer many of the questions that hon. Members have raised with me and others in recent weeks.

Let me set out for the House how this system will work. All pensioners with incomes up to and including £35,000 will benefit from support, as will all those on pension credit and other income-related benefits. The payment of £200 per household, or £300 per household where there is someone aged over 80, will be made to all pensioner households in England and Wales. Individual pensioners with taxable income above £35,000 will have any winter fuel payment automatically recovered via His Majesty's Revenue and Customs without the need for them to take any action. This will be via PAYE for the majority, or in their self-assessment tax return for those who already complete one. No one will be brought into tax or into self-assessment just to repay their winter fuel payment. Those that prefer not to receive a payment can opt out of receiving it. As was previously the case before July 2024, where the household is not getting an income-related benefit and there is more than one pensioner in the household, shared payments split across the recipients will be made.

This Government have had to make tough decisions. It is right to means-test the winter fuel payment—*[Interruption.]* I thought the Conservative party supported means-testing the winter fuel payment. We will find out in this debate shortly. We have had to make tough decisions because of the disaster left by the Conservative party. It is right to means-test the winter fuel payment on grounds of fairness and fiscal sustainability. Most people accept that it makes no sense to pay hundreds of pounds to pensioners irrespective of their incomes. Those on the highest incomes do not need it, and there are many other calls on public spending.

The Government have, however, listened to concerns about the level of the means test. We are acting to ensure that all lower-income pensioners receive support. The new individual £35,000 threshold is significantly above the income of pensioners in poverty, and broadly in line with average earnings. It will mean that the vast majority—over three quarters, or 9 million pensioners—will benefit from a winter fuel payment. This change ensures that the means-testing of winter fuel payments has no effect on pensioner poverty.

Means-testing the winter fuel payment in England and Wales like this will save around £450 million a year, subject to certification by the Office for Budget Responsibility, compared with the system of universal payments. It will cost around £1.25 billion in England and Wales, compared with the position last winter. Decisions about the situation in Scotland and Northern

Ireland remain for their devolved Administrations in the usual way. As the Prime Minister has previously set out, these are changes that will be fully funded at the next fiscal event, the autumn Budget. That will ensure that final costings and funding decisions come alongside the latest forecast from the OBR. We will ensure that the Government's non-negotiable fiscal rules are met.

We are setting out these changes before the summer to ensure that more pensioners receive support this winter. Regulations will be laid in the coming months to ensure that the payments are made, and tax changes will be legislated for in the Finance Bill.

I want to spell out clearly today that pensioners do not need to do anything. Winter fuel payments will be paid automatically this winter to all pensioners who receive the state pension, pension credit or anyone who has previously received a winter fuel payment. Similarly, payments will be recovered automatically through the tax system for those with an income of over £35,000.

Pensioners will also continue to receive wider support. Our pension credit take-up campaign has seen almost 60,000 awards made. I thank hon. Members on both sides of this House, local authorities and charities for their work on that campaign. Over 12 million pensioners right across the UK are also benefiting from the triple lock. The full new state pension is set to increase by up to £1,900 a year over this Parliament as a result. I commend that support for pensioners, and this statement, to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

4.14 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I feel for the Minister, sent here by his bosses to complete what must be the most humiliating climbdown a Government have ever faced in their first year in office. For nearly a year, the Conservatives have campaigned against this cut, and for nearly a year, the Government have tried to hold out. Just four weeks ago, I stood here and asked the Minister how long this tone-deaf final stand could go on for. Loyally, he held the line. He defended the cut one final time. He said their plan for pensioners was right on track. Well, today he has been sent to end that "courageous" last stand, and—unless it is coming next—he has been sent without the one thing that pensioners up and down the country deserve: an apology.

Let us be clear: the Government made a choice to cut the winter fuel payment. It is outrageous to claim that the economy has somehow improved from the day they made the cut, and they know it. In fact, by almost every metric, the opposite is true. Inflation was at the 2% target—now it is 1.5 points higher; 150,000 more people are unemployed; and growth forecasts have been slashed in half by the Office for Budget Responsibility. In the meantime, the Government have gone to town with the country's credit card. Borrowing is up. Debt is up. Who is the Chancellor trying to fool when she suddenly says she can afford this when before she could not? The fact is that last winter she gave pensioners' fuel money to the unions. Now she realises how unpopular that was, so she is pretending that everything has changed. Perhaps the most surprising thing is that she thinks anyone is taken in.

According to the Government's own analysis, 50,000 pensioners were plunged into poverty this year and 100,000 extra pensioners ended up in A&E this winter. Their mistake has hurt people, and it is cowardly not to own up to it. Just like their personal independence payment reforms, there were no consultations or proper assessments—just a self-righteous insistence that what they are doing should not be questioned. There is certainly no thought for those affected or concern for the anxiety that their government by press release is causing. This is what happens when a Government come into office with no plan, no principles, no idea what they want to achieve and no idea how to achieve it. They just bumble from one mistake to another, breaking promise after promise. Did they think they could try out new policies like trying a new mattress—unwrap it, see how it feels, sleep on it for a while, but if it causes a political backache, send it back?

This rushed reversal raises as many questions as it answers. It is clear that when the Prime Minister stood up and made his big U-turn announcement in PMQs, he had no plan and no idea how he was going to pay for it. It is a totally unfunded spending commitment. Where is the £1.25 billion needed to pay for this U-turn coming from? I note that the Minister has kicked that can down the road until the Budget. The Government claim that the change will not permanently add to borrowing, so does that mean it will permanently add to taxation?

On the plan itself, is this really the best system of means-testing that the Government could come up with? Is the Minister sure that they have thought it through, or will this unravel, too? What happens if a pensioner earns over £35,000 a year through non-taxable income? Will they have to register for self-assessment and start filling out a tax return in their 80s or 90s? *[Interruption.]* You didn't cover that.

Why should someone earning taxed income be disadvantaged? Is it fair that a millionaire pensioner and their spouse might receive a payment, but two people earning £36,000 will not? What happens if someone dies in the period between receiving the payment and having to pay it back? Will the Government go after the deceased person's relatives?

I have two final questions. After all this, the savings for the Treasury for this coming year may be as little as £50 million. Does the Minister think it is worth it, and will he apologise?

Torsten Bell: I will deal directly with two of the questions raised because it is important to provide reassurance. The right hon. Lady asks what will happen with the estate of someone who is deceased. I want to be clear that His Majesty's Revenue and Customs will never pursue any estate for the winter fuel payment alone. She also asks about the level of savings. As I set out in my statement, the savings will be £450 million a year in England and Wales. That is very clear, and it is a significant saving.

More broadly, the hon. Lady talks about an apology. She comes here representing the party of Liz Truss and lectures anybody else about apologies; she comes here representing the party of flatlining wages, rising debt and a 200,000 increase in pensioners in poverty, and asks anybody else to apologise. I have never heard such nonsense. We have listened to pensioners. For all her sound and fury—she was at her most furious today—I still

[Torsten Bell]

cannot tell what the Conservatives' policy is, 11 months on. For all the rhetoric and shouting, it sounds like she might support the means-testing of winter fuel payments. After all, that was the policy of her party's leader, who once also supported means-testing the entire state pension in one of her bolder moments.

Conservative Members say that the policy is not much comfort to pensioners, but Age UK says the exact opposite: charity director Caroline Abrahams said that this announcement is

"the right thing to do".

Martin Lewis says that it is a "big improvement". [Interruption.] There is a lot of chuntering from the Conservative Front Benchers. Maybe their Back Benchers can work out what the Front-Bench policy is by the time they get to their feet in a few minutes' time. I have no idea whatsoever what the Conservative party's policy is.

More widely, when it comes to pensioners, the Government's priorities are to raise the state pension and rescue the NHS. The triple lock will see state pension spending rise by £31 billion annually over this Parliament. Some £26 billion is being invested into the NHS because we inherited in England a disgraceful situation in which more than one in five pensioners aged over 75 were on waiting lists. There is no excuse for that legacy from the Conservative party. Neither of those forms of progress—raising the state pension and investing in the NHS—would be possible without the difficult decisions that we have had to make on tax. Those are difficult decisions that every Opposition party has opposed. Only this Government can provide that crucial support for pensioners, because we will do what is necessary to turn that support from rhetoric into reality.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): Members on both sides of the House will have had a large volume of correspondence on this matter, so I thank the Minister for his statement. This fair policy change saves our public services £450 million by ensuring that the wealthiest pensioners do not continue to receive the winter fuel payment. Does he agree?

Torsten Bell: My hon. Friend sets out the principle case for means-testing the winter fuel payment very well indeed. I do not think that anybody with common sense thinks it right that millionaires receive each year from the Exchequer hundreds of pounds towards their winter fuel payments—people have recognised that for years. The Government are making the tough choice of saying that that we will no longer pay the winter fuel payment in that way.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): Our country needs stability. I fear that this policy is from the book on how to botch running the country. Although last year's decision was wrong and this change is right—the Liberal Democrats had long campaigned against those proposals, and it is important to acknowledge Independent Age, Silver Voices and Age UK, which have all driven the change—a Government who wobble do not give us the stability we need for our economy.

Some 300,000 pensioners in Devon and Cornwall have been worried sick about the proposals, so why did the Government not implement this approach 12 months ago? The Government comms have not been clear on single pensioner households, about which there are grave concerns, so will the Minister provide clarity on that matter? What about households in which there are pensioners on higher and lower rates—how will they be treated? Finally, may I have assurances that the Government will continue to push hard on pension credit? For the poorest pensioners, it can offer a boost of £11,000 a year to their income, which is the real way to tackle pensioner poverty in the UK.

Torsten Bell: I thank the hon. Member for his comments and his welcome for this change; he called it the right change. He asked about different treatment of single and couple households; I can explain that in a bit more detail. Single households will receive the entire household's winter fuel payment to the one individual, whether that is £200 or £300. If the individual's income is below £35,000, they will keep that in full, and if the individual's income is above £35,000, that will be recouped by HMRC unless they choose to opt out. With couples, the situation for those not receiving means-tested benefits will be as it was before July 2024, which is split payments, half to each member of the household, and then they will be individually tested against the tax system.

I thank the hon. Member for giving me the chance to clarify that point. I also entirely endorse his statement about pension credit. The reason we want to see higher rates of pension credit take-up is not because of winter fuel payment per se, because that is small relative to the financial gains that come from people who are entitled to a pension credit receiving it. We absolutely must maintain the progress on pension credit take-up in the months and years ahead. As I said in my statement, I welcome the work of MPs in their constituencies, and of local authorities and charities, in driving up those rates.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for ageing and older people, I really do welcome the reinstatement of the winter fuel payment for 9 million pensioners, but since the announcement to remove it, the energy price cap has gone up £281, so will the Minister take a look at the value of the winter fuel payment and perhaps turn to the industry, which over the last five years has profited by £207 billion? Perhaps it can make a greater contribution to help our poorest pensioners.

Torsten Bell: My hon. Friend is right to raise questions about energy prices—an issue for households of all ages that have been living through the cost of living crisis of recent years. The good news is that the energy price cap will be coming down in July, although I think everybody across the House would like to see it fall significantly further. This Government have been taking steps over the last 11 months to make sure that more households are getting support with their energy bills. Members will have seen the consultation on the doubling of eligibility for the warm home discount, the work to significantly increase the spending on warm home insulation—over £3 billion this year—and the extension of the household support fund. Right across the piece, for households of all ages, not just for pensioners, we do need to make sure that this is a country where more people can afford to heat their homes.

Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): The truth is that the Chancellor made a chilling political choice last July and has now had to make a screeching U-turn following pressure from people across the House and outside this Chamber. Will the Minister take this opportunity to send an apology to all the low-income pensioners in West Worcestershire and elsewhere who had to shiver through last winter?

Torsten Bell: As I was saying, we do need to make sure that low-income families right across the board are receiving the support they need. That is why we set out changes to free school meals last week and it is why we will be coming forward with a child poverty strategy in the weeks ahead. I have already explained why the original decision was taken and set out that we have listened. The important thing is that it is right to maintain the principle of means-testing winter fuel payments but to do so with a higher threshold. As I have set out, the changes we are bringing forward today will mean that the vast majority of pensioners—over three quarters—will receive it in future.

Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I welcome my hon. Friend's announcement, because this news will not only bring more money to Scotland; it also demonstrates that this is a Government who listen. The winter fuel payment is devolved in Scotland, as it was at the time of the original announcement, and the Scottish National party's current policy robs poorer pensioners to fund payments for millionaires. Does my hon. Friend agree that the SNP must now re-examine its own policy in the light of this game-changing announcement today?

Torsten Bell: My hon. Friend is always quite right. I spoke to Ministers in the devolved Administrations today to set out in advance the details of this policy and to spell out, for example, to Ministers in Edinburgh that if they want a fairer system that means-tests the winter fuel payment and the equivalent in Scotland for those on the highest incomes, HMRC is ready to support that, but so far they have chosen not to means-test the system—to have a system that is not fair to poorer pensioners.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): The politics of U-turns are not always bad; this is a welcome U-turn by the Government as people will benefit. It would have been helpful for the Minister to have said, "We made a mistake, but we are going to put it right", but that is by the by. However, I have had many letters and communications, as I am sure have many other hon. Members from across the House, about a group of people who are still suffering: something like 750,000 pensioners who are eligible for pension credit, and therefore theoretically for the winter fuel payment, applied for the winter fuel payment but have not received a single penny for last winter. Whatever other changes are made, will the Minister commit to putting that situation right, so that those pensioners will receive the money that they should have had during the winter?

Torsten Bell: The right hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the issue of low take-up of pension credit and he refers to the figure of more than 700,000 pensioners,

which unfortunately was true under the last Government. We have seen unprecedented levels of pension credit applications over the past year because of the campaign by the Government and by hon. Members from all parties. Those applications are very welcome, but I agree that we need to keep up the momentum. In the short-term, we are writing to all new housing benefits claimants who we think could be eligible for pension credit and encouraging them to apply; we are engaging in new research about what has worked in the drive for pension credit take-up, which largely seems to be awareness of the benefit; and we are looking at better data sharing with local authorities and across central Government Departments, including between the Department for Work and Pensions and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

Frank McNally (Coatbridge and Bellshill) (Lab): I welcome today's announcement. It is right that, despite the horrendous financial situation that this Government inherited from the Conservative party, they are reinstating the winter fuel payment for 75% of pensioners and specifically targeting those in the most need. Following the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Johanna Baxter), will the Minister outline what discussions he expects to have with Scottish Ministers about the Scottish Government's universal approach to winter fuel payments in Scotland? At a time when public services in Scotland are facing significant peril, the SNP's position is to continue to give winter fuel payments to millionaires at a time of deep hardship for people in Scotland.

Torsten Bell: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the targeting. Setting the means test threshold at £35,000 ensures that it is well above the income levels of pensioners in poverty and is around the average earnings level. On policy in Scotland, an important principle of devolution is that those are decisions for the Scottish Government, but they are also decisions for which they will be held accountable.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): Over several fiscal events over seven years, the option of removing the winter fuel payment from the wealthiest was resisted by the previous Government because there was not seen to be an effective rationing mechanism and there were considerable presentational challenges. Will the Minister confirm that pensioners with no mortgage and with significant tax-wrapped savings in individual savings accounts or venture capital trusts, but with a monthly pension of £2,500, will still be fully entitled to receive the winter fuel payment?

Torsten Bell: I always enjoy discussing technical details with the right hon. Gentleman. I set the position out clearly in my initial statement: means-testing is based on taxable income of £35,000, which answers his question.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): The original decision to cut the winter fuel payment was the wrong decision; today's decision is the right decision and a much fairer decision. In my constituency, 2,000 more pensioners will, quite rightly, get the winter fuel payment again. It is clear that the Government have listened, so I ask them to listen again to the growing calls in the Chamber and to scrap their planned, devastating cuts to disability support.

Torsten Bell: I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming today's policy announcement. We will continue to discuss with him all aspects of how his constituents are treated in the social security system. On the wider questions that he raises, I will say that the Government have obviously set out the position—I think the position of most people in the country—that we cannot continue with a position where one in eight young people are out of work or where we see 1,000 people a day flowing on to personal independence payments. We need a better system, focusing on supporting those who can work into work—the Minister for Social Security and Disability is setting out the case on that. I do not think anybody should support the position of leaving the status quo as it is.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): No matter how the Minister tries to dress it up, the Chancellor made a monumental political mistake last year. While I welcome the news that the payment is being reinstated, it is cold comfort to those pensioners who missed out last year and faced really difficult choices over the winter. Will the Minister look at this issue again and reinstate the winter fuel payment for all those who missed out?

Torsten Bell: This is why I am confused. What is the position of the Conservative party? Is it to support means-testing of the winter fuel payment—yes or no? Are you going to send out the shadow Chancellor to give a speech—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. "Are you going to send?" I do not think the Minister is speaking to the Chair.

Torsten Bell: Is the Conservative party going to send out the shadow Chancellor to give a speech in which I cannot tell whether he is apologising for Liz Truss, then come to this House the very next week and call for universal winter fuel payments? If the Conservatives are calling for universal winter fuel payments, they need to set out how that will be funded. This is a Government who have made their choice. It is right to means-test the winter fuel payment, because millionaires should not receive it. If the Conservatives do not know what their policy is on that, they will not know their policy on anything else.

Blair McDougall (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): I have not met anyone—other than John Swinney, perhaps—who thinks that millionaires should get the winter fuel payment. I have met a lot of constituents who felt that the threshold was too low, and the Government have recognised that today. However, the Minister knows better than most that while some pensioners still struggle, pensioner poverty has fallen in recent times, whereas child poverty has gone in the opposite direction. Will he use some of the nearly £500 million saved through this measure and direct it towards the grandchildren, rather than the grandparents, and to where poverty is most acute in our society?

Torsten Bell: As always, I thank my hon. Friend for his well-put thoughts. He is absolutely right that pensioner poverty fell significantly, halving under the last Labour Government, before unfortunately rising by 200,000 people under the Conservatives, but we must not be

complacent about the headline of falling pensioner poverty, because there are wider problems. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the right hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) welcomes it. The point I am coming to is that the stagnating incomes of working-age households under the last Labour Government moved across to stagnant incomes for pensioners and no falls in absolute poverty for pensioners under the Conservatives. There are subsets of pensioners, such as single pensioners, private renters and others, where we see lasting problems. It is important to see this in the round, but my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Blair McDougall) is absolutely right to say that we must move further on child poverty. He will have seen last week's announcement on free school meals in England, with consequential for the devolved Administrations, and we will come forward further with a child poverty strategy soon.

Mr Will Forster (Woking) (LD): I welcome this Government's U-turn. Countless pensioners in Woking suffered last winter, so I am pleased that that will not continue. The Minister stated that £36,000 is the threshold that he and the Government have chosen because it is the average earnings. Will the Government commit to increasing that threshold going forward when average earnings rise?

Torsten Bell: That is an important question. There is always a judgment in choosing a threshold for any means-tested benefit, and I want to be completely straight with the House about that. We have chosen a threshold that is well above the income level of pensioners in poverty, and it will ensure that more than three-quarters of pensioners receive the benefit of the winter fuel payment in England and Wales. The hon. Gentleman is right that it is currently in line with average earnings. It is important to have clarity for pensioners—a point that the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Torbay (Steve Darling), just made. We will leave the £35,000 at the current level, as all thresholds in the income tax system are frozen for the coming year, so that pensioners know that that is the threshold and there are no surprises. Decisions about future uprating will be for future Budgets.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford) (Lab): I very much welcome the Minister's statement today—it is the right thing to do to lift pensioners out of poverty. I am sure that both he and the Chancellor also agree that it is right to lift children out of poverty, so can he reassure this House that he and the Chancellor are doing all they can to outline plans to lift the two-child cap on universal credit as soon as possible?

Torsten Bell: As my hon. Friend knows, we have said clearly that all levers to reduce child poverty are on the table. The child poverty strategy will be published in the autumn, but we are not waiting for that—as I said earlier, we have already seen action on free school meals. It is another reason why we need to see more support for energy bills, and for insulating homes in particular, because it is younger families with children who are struggling most and having to turn off their heating. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this issue, which is one of the core purposes of this Government. We cannot carry on with a situation in which huge percentages of large families are in poverty.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I assume that because the Minister cannot find the word “sorry” in his vocabulary this afternoon, he expects pensioners in North Dorset and elsewhere to be saying thank you to him for this screeching U-turn. However, just a few weeks ago, what he has announced today was predicted to cause financial Armageddon. When should the City of London, mortgage payers and everybody else now expect the run on the pound that was predicted by the Leader of the House of Commons?

Torsten Bell: What this Government are doing is sorting out the mess in the public finances left by the Conservative party, and not repeating its irresponsibility. All Opposition parties oppose all of the tax rises set out in the autumn Budget, yet claim that they support the spending on the NHS and on pensioners—they cannot have it both ways. The party of Liz Truss has not learned its lesson.

Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) (Lab): No one I have spoken to in Derby thinks that millionaires should be receiving the winter fuel allowance, but many will welcome the lifting of the threshold so that more people receive it. Does the Minister agree that this shows the Government listening; it shows money being targeted at where it is needed; and it shows what can be done with a stable economy?

Torsten Bell: My hon. Friend is completely right. As I say, we have set the threshold at a level that means that the vast majority of pensioners—not just in her constituency, but right across England and Wales—will receive support in the coming winter. Importantly, we are announcing the threshold now, to make sure those payments can be made in time for this winter.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP): When the Chancellor slashed the winter fuel allowance last year, she told us that it was necessary, urgent and the responsible thing to do. It turns out that it was not necessary, urgent or the responsible thing to do after all, so is the Minister going to apologise to the millions of pensioners who were put through the wringer so cruelly and unnecessarily? I think he knows that they deserve an apology from this Government. Having performed one U-turn, will the Government now do the same for the country’s poorest families and abolish the two-child cap?

Torsten Bell: I thank the hon. Member for his question. I have just referred to the progress that needs to be made on reducing child poverty, not just in England and Wales but in Scotland. We will set out that strategy in the coming months, and he is absolutely right to say that we should all want to see very significant progress on that issue in the years ahead. When it comes to the winter fuel payment in England and Wales, the equivalent benefit is obviously devolved in Scotland, so that is a question for Ministers in Edinburgh.

Pamela Nash (Motherwell, Wishaw and Carluke) (Lab): I welcome the decision today, and I am delighted to hear the announcement from the Minister. Let us be crystal clear: this is a direct result of the progress that this Labour Government are making in turning around our economy. For my constituents, however, the future

of the winter fuel payment—or its equivalent—lies in the hands of the Scottish Government. Can the Minister confirm that the Barnett consequential to Scotland resulting from today’s announcement will exceed what the Scottish Government are already planning to spend on their equivalent of the winter fuel allowance? [HON. MEMBERS: “Will the hon. Lady give way?”] Will he join me in urging the Scottish Government to follow suit and ensure that the additional funds that are provided due to today’s decision will restore the full winter fuel payment to all those who need it in—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. Please be seated. I do not need any help with managing the Chamber, but questions need to be short. Minister, let us have a short, sharp answer.

Torsten Bell: My short, sharp answer is that wages have grown in the first 10 months of this Government faster than in the first 10 years of the last Conservative Government. Interest rates have been cut four times. My hon. Friend is right to say that progress is being made, and that needs to continue. We need to ensure that more people feel the benefits of that growth in their pockets. The changes we are making to winter fuel payments today are one of those benefits. I can confirm that there will be a block grant adjustment exactly as she sets out.

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): I appreciate that this has been a humiliation for the Chancellor and that her credibility is in tatters—no wonder she is not here today to announce her own U-turn—but now that she and the Government have got a taste for climbdowns, may I urge them through the Minister, who unfortunately drew the short straw today, to reverse the equally ridiculous national insurance contribution rises, which are destroying jobs, and the inheritance tax changes, which are destroying farms and family businesses?

Torsten Bell: It is usual for a Minister to thank the Member for their question, but I actually mean it in this case, because the right hon. Lady has completely proved my point that the Conservatives have learned no lessons whatever. They think they can come to this Chamber and call for more spending and oppose every tax rise—and they expect to be taken seriously ever again? They will not be.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): As a Labour MP who voted against the winter fuel payment cuts, I welcome this change in position, but I urge the Minister and the Government to learn the lessons. One of them is to listen to Back Benchers. If the Minister and the Government listen to Back Benchers, we can help the Government get it right and help them avoid getting it wrong. We do not want to be here in a year or two’s time with a Minister sent to the Dispatch Box to make another U-turn after not listening to Back Benchers on disability benefit cuts. If they listen now we can help the Government get it right.

Torsten Bell: It is important to listen to Back Benchers and to Front Benchers. It is even important to listen to Opposition Members on occasion, particularly when they are digging their own grave with their party’s policies. More seriously, the point that my hon. Friend raises is important: everybody on the Government Benches

[Torsten Bell]

wants to make sure that this is a fairer country that is growing again—that wages are growing, that poverty is falling, that inequality is coming down. That is what we need to deliver. Sometimes that will involve tough choices, including all the ones that the right hon. Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) opposes. Those choices will need to be made, because we are a party of government not a party of protest, but they are made in the interests of our values and of a fairer country and a fairer Britain.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): The Minister comes to this House almost triumphant, having voted to take away winter fuel payments a minimum number of months before winter, and now says that we should be thanking him for this reinstatement. Anguish, anxiety, uncertainty—that is what my pensioners suffered. Will he apologise?

Torsten Bell: The hon. Gentleman is trying to put words in my mouth and he will not succeed. We have been clear. What I said in my statement is that we have come to the House today, before the summer recess, particularly to deal with the issue that he is raising, which is to provide absolute certainty for pensioners in England and Wales that they will be receiving the winter fuel payment this winter if their income is below £35,000. I agree with him that that is an important level of certainty to provide, and that is why I am here today.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. I give another reminder to colleagues that questions must be short, as must answers. Otherwise, many colleagues will be disappointed.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): I share the deep concerns of my constituents about the loss of the winter fuel payment, which the Minister will know I relayed to the Department. I am glad that the Government have acted on those concerns and reviewed the threshold so that the majority of pensioners will receive the payment this winter. Does the Minister agree that in stabilising the economy we are now in a better position to do what Labour Governments have always done best: protecting the vulnerable in our society?

Torsten Bell: That is exactly the point I have just made: what are Labour Governments here for? Building a fairer Britain. What did the last Labour Government do? They brought down child poverty, halved pensioner poverty and raised wages year after year. That is what this Government will do again.

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): I have listened to the Minister's statement and read the words, too, and nowhere can I see an explanation for why this decision has come now, 11 months after it was first announced. Why has this decision come now? Will we have to wait another 11 months for the Government to rethink their cuts to disability benefits?

Torsten Bell: I have just explained why we are making this announcement now: we want to ensure that the payments can be made in time for the winter. I have not hidden from the fact that last year we made the difficult

decision to means-test the winter fuel payment, and that was the right choice to make, but we have listened, which is why we have announced a higher means test. I have directly answered the hon. Member's question.

This is important, but we do need to make some tough decisions. I know that the Liberal Democrats want a universal winter fuel payment, because they think it right to pay hundreds of pounds to millionaires, but I take a different view. I think it is that kind of wishful thinking that created, in 2010, a Liberal Democrat Government who promised to scrap tuition fees and ended up trebling them.

Kirsteen Sullivan (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for his statement, which I know will be greatly welcomed by my constituents. Over 14 years, we became used to a Government who did not listen and did not change course when circumstances changed, so I for one am grateful for a Labour Government who do so.

While there was an uptick in pension credit—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Question!

Kirsteen Sullivan: Will the Minister commit himself again to working with local government and devolved Administrations to increase the number of people receiving pension credit, so that pensioners on the lowest incomes do not lose out but receive the support that they need?

Torsten Bell: That is a very important point. Whatever the views expressed in the House today, I say to all Members that if any of them want to suggest ways in which we can continue to drive up pension credit and ensure that the poorest pensioners receive the support to which they are entitled, I will always be happy to talk to them.

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): As my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) ably recalled, the Minister's superiors told us that there would be a run on the pound unless pensioners took a hit on winter fuel. Given that every economic indicator was worse last year, can the Minister tell us whether the pound is safe with this U-turn, or whether this is just another example of his seniors' talking utter bilge to justify their terrible decisions?

Torsten Bell: It is the hon. Member who is talking bilge. Growth was the highest in the G7 in the first quarter of this year, interest rates have fallen four times, and wages have risen faster in 10 months than they did in 10 years under the Conservatives. What is happening is that we are sorting out their mess and putting Britain on a better track.

Warinder Juss (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that, given that ours is now the fastest growing economy in the G7 and interest rates have been cut four times, now is the time to ensure that our public services will be protected and that pensioners who do not need the winter fuel payment to heat their homes will not receive it, while those who do need it to heat their homes will receive it?

Torsten Bell: I should have got out of the way, because my hon. Friend has given a direct rebuttal to what was said by the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster

(Julia Lopez). He is entirely correct in every detail of the important points that he has raised. A Labour Government investing in public services and ending austerity: that is what we will be hearing about in the House on Wednesday, and I look forward to hearing Conservative Members explain how they tried to support that spending while opposing every tax rise that was necessary to make it happen.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion Preseli) (PC): I welcome the Minister's statement, not least because it will offer much support and reassurance to so many of my constituents. As he knows, no system is perfect and mistakes will be made, so may I ask whether there will be an appeals mechanism for those who are entitled to the winter fuel payment but, for whatever reason, do not receive it?

Torsten Bell: I thank the hon. Member, my near neighbour, for that question. No bureaucracy is perfect, but in such cases we do not need an appeals mechanism; we just need to ensure that those people receive the payment as soon as possible. As I have said, we have made this decision to ensure that we can automatically make winter fuel payments to people who are receiving all the benefits that I mentioned, and who also received the payments previously. The success rate of that payment mechanism is strong, which is why I have made this announcement today. However, if any Members have any constituents in that position, I ask them to get in touch with me immediately.

Jacob Collier (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): I welcome the Government's decision, and thank them for listening to Members on both sides of the House. Many of my older constituents live in houses that are not energy-efficient, which results in higher bills, so can the Minister say more about what the Government are doing to increase energy efficiency in homes to keep them warmer and bring down bills?

Torsten Bell: That is such an important point! One of the biggest mistakes that we made in previous decades was saying, "We will not see the benefits of work to improve the quality of the housing stock for years, so let us slash it." That is exactly what happened in 2013, when there was a 90% cut in the level of insulations under the energy company obligation scheme, and we have paid the price for that ever since. This Government are not going to make the same mistake. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero has been ramping up the warm homes programme, and we need to be out there insulating homes and improving lofts every day until Britain has a housing stock of which it can be proud.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Many of my elderly constituents had an unnecessarily cold and miserable winter, and the uncertainty to which the Minister constantly refers was of his Government's own making. Will he take this opportunity to apologise to my constituents?

Torsten Bell: The right hon. Member is right to highlight that we need to provide support for older people, and for all households, with their energy bills right through the year, which is what this Government have been doing. We have not been waiting. As I said,

the warm homes discount is being extended to almost 3 million extra households, we are rolling out the improvements to the insulation programmes that I have just mentioned, and the household support fund has been extended for future years. That is exactly what we need to do, while at the same time improving our energy security and our energy generation to make sure that, in future, we do not see the disaster of the last five years, when global wholesale gas prices sent electricity and gas prices here in the UK through the roof.

Rachel Taylor (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement, which will be warmly welcomed by constituents, particularly pensioners who were just above the threshold and who lost out last winter. Does he agree that measures such as rolling out free breakfast clubs—I visited one this morning at Goodyers End primary school—are making a real difference by tackling poverty and that that is what this Government are doing across the board in all age groups?

Torsten Bell: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. We need to make sure that we are seeing child poverty fall and seeing extra help for families through free school meals, as well as through the breakfast clubs that she mentions. We also need to see more progress on pensioner poverty. That is why today we are saying that the threshold will be well above the incomes of pensioners who are in poverty. We do not want to see that poverty in the years ahead, which is exactly why we have made this change today.

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): While the Government buried their heads in the sand, countless pensioners suffered, such as my constituent who, despite having a terminal disease, had to cut back on heating and food, and spent the winter "freezing cold". Can the Minister explain why no impact assessments were conducted last year before winter fuel payments were stripped from millions of pensioners?

Torsten Bell: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, but the equalities analysis was done. Unusually, the poverty impact analysis was also published over the last year. I do not agree with the statement that she has just made, but she is right to say that we need to make sure that we are improving things for pensioners. As I said before, this Government's priority is to keep raising the state pension and to rescue the NHS. As I said, one in five over-75s are currently on an NHS waiting list, and the funding to make that happen is possible only because of the tax rises that I hear the Liberal Democrats oppose week in, week out.

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's announcement and the change in course from the Government. Many of us were uneasy about the low threshold for the winter fuel payment, especially in deprived communities such as mine—I have the most deprived borough in the country. Will the Minister assure my constituents that all pensioners under the threshold will automatically receive the new winter fuel allowance and will not have to do a single thing in the winter to come?

Torsten Bell: That is an absolutely crucial point and has been central to the work that we have done to decide on the policy. We want a system of automatic payment,

[Torsten Bell]

so that pensioners do not need to do anything to claim the payments, and one that is automatic for those who have incomes above £35,000, so that they do not have to take action if they need to have the funding recouped, unless they choose to opt out. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we need a simple system that supports pensioners.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The Minister talks about the NHS, and I wonder whether he recognises the number of elderly people who had to use the NHS as a result of having been cold because of his policies. I want to ask him a very specific question. He said:

“All pensioners with incomes up to and including £35,000 will benefit from support”.

He also said:

“Individual pensioners with taxable income above £35,000 will have any winter fuel payment automatically recovered”

through the tax system. Where a household has two individuals over the eligible age, what happens when one earns more than £35,000 and the other earns less? Will they get some, all or half of the winter fuel payment?

Torsten Bell: I think I have answered that question, but I am happy to lay it out again, if that is helpful. There is a long-standing principle of individual taxation, which I think is supported by all parties in this House. Where a couple are not receiving a means-tested benefit, they will each receive half of their household's winter fuel payment. Whether they continue to keep that or it is recouped through the tax system will be based on their individual taxable income. For example, if one has an income above £35,000, their payment will be recouped by HMRC automatically, but if the other has an income level below £35,000, they will retain the winter fuel payment. I hope that clarifies things.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): Would my hon. Friend help clear something up? The opposition parties seem to be claiming that they urged us to make this decision, but that is not true, is it? They actually urged us to give winter fuel payments to millionaires at the expense of our public services.

Torsten Bell: I can clear that up, in the case of the Liberal Democrats and Reform. They have the same policy—not for the first time, I might add—which is definitely to give winter fuel payments to millionaires. I have no idea what the position of the Conservative party is, and I have been here for an hour and a quarter. Actually, I have been in the House for the last 11 months, and I have still not been able to fathom what the Conservative party's policy is, but I think it is to not learn any lesson from Liz Truss.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): During the general election campaign, that well-known political giant, “a Labour spokesman”, said that Labour had no plans to change the winter fuel payment, but within weeks, the Government had cruelly cut it, withdrawing it from millions of pensioners, and 13 months later, the Minister is performing this screeching U-turn. Given the hokey-cokey nature of this policy, can he give an

assurance from the Dispatch Box that what he is announcing will apply not just this winter, but every winter in this Parliament?

Torsten Bell: The point about certainty for pensioners is important—I think that is the point the hon. Gentleman is making. As I said earlier, we are setting the £35,000 threshold so that people become aware of it in the coming months. It is a round number, and we do not intend to change it in the years ahead, although further in the future, yes, there will be questions about uprating, which will be considered in the normal way.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): I welcome the fact that the Government are responding to the huge public pressure and are expanding eligibility for winter fuel payments. I am concerned that we are about to make a similar mistake, which, once again, we will come to regret, in cutting disability benefits. Will the Treasury drop those cuts before they cause harm to our constituents, instead of reversing them after the fact? I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend has said. To be clear, I am not asking him to keep the status quo, or to not support people into work; I am simply asking him not to cut disabled people's benefits.

Torsten Bell: I thank my hon. Friend for her question, and we always have interesting conversations. The Minister for Social Security and Disability will have heard the point she made. I gently say that the number of people receiving personal independence payments is forecast to continue to grow in every single one of the years ahead. That is after changes were set out by this Government. That important point sometimes gets lost in this debate.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): I welcome the fact that the Government are finally listening to the public and doing a U-turn on winter fuel payments, which is long overdue. However, in a truly strategic approach to tackling fuel poverty, we would make sure that every home could be heated affordably and was well insulated. Will the Government commit to investing in the national asset that is our housing stock, and to properly funding the warm homes programme, so that no pensioner, no child—nobody—is condemned to fuel poverty in a cold home?

Torsten Bell: Yes, that is exactly what we are doing, and we are funding that, because this Government know that we need to make difficult decisions, and will make them, so that we can deliver priorities such as investment in better housing stock.

Peter Swallow (Bracknell) (Lab): I welcome this news, which will mean that more pensioners in Bracknell Forest receive this important benefit, and the Government's recommitment to the triple lock. Does the Minister agree that a Conservative party that cannot decide whether it supports giving winter fuel payments to millionaires, whether it backs the triple lock, or even whether Liz Truss is a member is in no position to govern this country every again?

Torsten Bell: Obviously, I agree with my hon. Friend in lots of ways, but it is really important to dwell on the point that he made at the beginning of his question. Through these changes, the vast majority of pensioners—

over three quarters—will receive winter fuel payments this winter. We can give them the necessary reassurance that they do not need to do anything for that to happen, even if they are on a higher income.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): The Minister is at pains to say that pensioners do not have to do anything to get this payment, but of course they had to do something—they had to write to, email and call Labour MPs, and tell them that this cut was wrong. At the time, the justification Labour MPs gave for the cut was the economic circumstances. Given that inflation and unemployment are higher, and growth is lower than it was going to be, was not the time for Labour MPs to listen before the cut, not after it?

Torsten Bell: No, because this Government were formed on the back of disastrous public finances. The Conservative party had announced public spending commitments without having a penny to pay for them. We will not apologise for doing the right thing to put this country back on an even keel.

Sam Rushworth (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): On 3 September, I said in this House that I represent England's coldest and snowiest constituency, where even people on a living wage can be in fuel poverty, as can children and pensioners. That is why, as the Minister knows, I pressed the Government not only for the changes that he has announced today, but to widen the eligibility criteria for the warm home discount scheme, which is the smartest mechanism we have for tackling genuine fuel poverty. He has only gone and done both those things, so can I thank him for listening not to me, but to the people I represent? What assessment has been made of the impact of these changes on lifting children out of fuel poverty?

Torsten Bell: I obviously thank my hon. Friend for his question, but I have to disagree. I do not deserve any credit for doubling eligibility for the warm home discount; the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Miatta Fahnbulleh), who is here on the Government Front Bench, deserves it. On fuel poverty estimates, over 5 million households should benefit from the warm home discount next year. That will make a real difference to households right across the country.

Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV): I greatly welcome this overdue U-turn, but if £35,000 is the correct cap, why did the Government impose misery on millions of pensioners last winter? Is not a basic part of getting something wrong saying sorry? It is not enough to say, "Look at all the things the Conservative party did." That is not the point. The point is that this Government think they are better than everyone else. Why will they not say sorry?

Torsten Bell: Over the past year, this Government have been getting on with providing more support for pensioners, raising the state pension, ensuring the triple lock, extending the household support fund and investing in the NHS, the state of which is the single biggest betrayal of pensioners in England. We believe in and support the principle of means-testing the winter fuel payment, but have listened, and have looked again at the threshold. That is what I have set out today.

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): I very much welcome raising the threshold for the winter fuel allowance. As I am sure the Minister knows, the threshold was at the heart of my concern about means testing, although the principle of means-testing is absolutely correct. Morecambe and Lunesdale has an older than average population. Can the Minister assure me that my pensioners will not have to do anything special—make any application—to get their winter fuel allowance?

Torsten Bell: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. We want to make sure that the vast majority of pensioners can receive winter fuel payments. We want to make that as easy as possible, which means making receipt automatic.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): The Minister seems unable to say sorry, but does he at least regret that more than 90,000 more elderly people went to A&E last winter than did the year before, in the last winter under the Conservative Government?

Torsten Bell: Over the last few years, since 2020, energy bills have risen for all households, and far too many people have been struggling. That is absolutely right, and the Government are focusing on addressing it through the warm home discount and the warm homes scheme, which provides the insulation that the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns) mentioned. We need to do that right across the board, including, in the long run, by fixing our broken energy system.

Louise Jones (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): I have spoken to many people in North East Derbyshire who, although they acknowledged that we should not give this payment to millionaires, were deeply concerned that the threshold was too low. Can the Minister reassure my constituents that those who are eligible for the payment will not have to apply for it?

Torsten Bell: I absolutely can. As I said, we need to provide the reassurance that the vast majority of pensioners will receive this support, and will not have to do anything to get the payment in their bank account.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): The cut to winter fuel allowance and the subsequent U-turn have caused much anguish, distress and misery to the parliamentary Labour party. Judging by the questions from the Minister's Back Benchers, it seems that we will have two further U-turns, on PIP and on the two-child benefit cap. To save his colleagues the anguish, will he let us know now when those U-turns are coming?

Torsten Bell: What Labour MPs want is a Labour Government who bring down child poverty, and that is what we will do. They want a Government who take responsible decisions, including difficult ones on tax and on means-testing the winter fuel payment, so that we can invest in public services and turn around the disgrace that there has been in Britain's public realm for far too long.

Alison Hume (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): I welcome this announcement, as will the 26,000 pensioners in my constituency, where we have particularly cold and harsh winters. Will the Minister reassure my constituents

[Alison Hume]

that automatic payments will be reinstated, and will there be any change to the date on which payments will be made?

Torsten Bell: I will not adjudicate on which Member has the coldest constituency in England, as my hon. Friend invites me to. She raises an important point that has not yet been made, so I should spell this out: we will bring forward the regulations on the payment of the winter fuel allowance over the summer, and they will set the qualifying week as that of 15 September, as it has been in past years. That means that payments will be made in November and December, as in past years.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): A shocking 75% of Scottish pensioners said that they were left cold in their home last winter. Does the Minister agree that the Scottish Government must use the additional funding from today's announcement to ensure that pensioners in Scotland receive the same amount of winter fuel payment as they did under the previous UK Conservative Government?

Torsten Bell: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, those are decisions for the Scottish Government. However, as I said, I have spoken to the relevant Ministers in the Scottish Government today. There will be a block grant adjustment to reflect this higher spending in England and Wales.

Gill German (Clwyd North) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement, and for the extensive time he spent with the Work and Pensions Committee last week. Our inquiry on pensioner poverty has found that this issue is multifaceted and complex. Can the Minister assure me that he will work cross-Government on a policy that will ensure that pensioner poverty is a thing of the past?

Torsten Bell: My hon. Friend raises the important issue of the complexity of pensioner poverty. I will just give one example, which does not get mentioned in these discussions often enough. The growth rate—the value people are getting; the returns on every pound saved into a private pension—absolutely needs to be as strong as possible. Private pensions support the living standards of our pensioners. We need a pension industry that is focused on driving the best possible value for savers.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): There appears to be universal support for this damascene conversion by the Government. Last year, they told pensioners that the right course of action was to scrap the winter fuel payment for millions, but they are now telling them that a means-tested system is right, so how can pensioners possibly believe anything that the Government say?

Torsten Bell: Did we actually get a Conservative party policy there? Is the hon. Member saying that the Conservatives support today's announcement? [Interruption.] That is a no. We do not have an answer yet, after an hour and 10 minutes, on what the Conservative party's policy is. I can give him the answer that he would like: yes, we will provide certainty that this is the policy of this Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): We could have gone faster in the past hour and 10 minutes if the Minister was faster with his answers.

Jessica Toale (Bournemouth West) (Lab): I have worked hard with Citizens Advice Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole in my constituency to get pensioners on to pension credit. However, on the doorstep, I have met far too many people, especially single women, who are £10—or even £1—over the threshold for pension credit. I welcome the statement, and thank the Minister for listening to my constituents' concerns about the threshold. Does he agree that this policy shows the difference between this Government and the previous one? This Government are doing what is necessary to get stability in our economy, what is fair to get money back into our public services, and what is right to protect the vulnerable in our society.

Torsten Bell: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and, in particular, for her hard work to drive take-up of pension credit. Forget winter fuel payments—pension credit is a really important lifeline for low-income pensioners. It is worth an average of £4,000 to those receiving it, and far too many are missing out. I thank my hon. Friend for her work, and I hope that it continues.

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): Today's U-turn is an astonishing victory against the Government, whose support has dried up after less than a year in office. When the Government announced their cruel cut to the winter fuel payment, costing 64,000 Bradford district pensioners vital support, experts across the country warned that up to 4,000 lives could be at risk as people were forced to choose between heating and eating. Now that the majority of the winter fuel payment has been restored, do the Government dare to produce a figure for how many pensioners may have lost their life as a result of the Government's choice to remove the winter fuel allowance?

Torsten Bell: That is a serious matter. There are poorer households, with people of all ages, that have been struggling with energy bills in recent years. I am sure that all of us across this House want to see those problems addressed. We have also seen increases in food prices over the last few years that are higher than we would like, and it is lower-income households that spend a higher proportion of their budget on essentials such as food, energy and housing. It is the policy of this Government to ensure that we are dealing with all those issues.

Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op): The median average income of a pensioner in Rochdale is £15,000, which is way below the amount we expect people to live on with the national living wage, so I thank the Minister for today's announcement. Does he agree that it proves that the Government have listened not only to Opposition MPs, but to MPs in the Labour party who have pushed for this for so long and, more importantly, to the pensioners we represent?

Torsten Bell: My hon. Friend is right that we had to make difficult decisions last year, and I understand that Labour Members have raised those with the Government. It is why we looked again at the threshold and are

sticking to the principle of means-testing while setting a higher threshold so that the vast majority of pensioners—over three quarters—will now receive winter fuel payments.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): I welcome the partial reinstatement of the winter fuel payment. When we met, the Minister and I discussed the cliff edge that existed last winter, which meant that people in receipt of pension credit could in some cases leapfrog the income of people in receipt of a small private pension. Can the Minister indicate whether the new means test will remove that eligibility cliff edge?

Torsten Bell: I remember discussing exactly that with the hon. Member. All means tests have pros and cons, but by having a much higher threshold—in particular a higher threshold relative to the level of payment, with £100 or £200 being received by individuals—the large unfairness he talks about, where small differences in income led to large differences in outcome, is far reduced.

Richard Baker (Glenrothes and Mid Fife) (Lab): I used to work for Age Scotland, so may I say how welcome it is that the Government have listened to older people's charities and made today's announcement? I understand it will mean some £100 million additional funding for the payments in Scotland. Does my hon. Friend agree that SNP Ministers should now rethink their plans and instead endorse Scottish Labour's plans, which were first proposed last November and would mean more generous payments for the pensioners who need them most?

Torsten Bell: I am glad to hear about my hon. Friend's previous role, and it is encouraging to see what charities representing older people have put out over the last few hours. As I said earlier, Age UK has said that this is the right thing to do and that it will bring much-needed reassurance for older people and their families.

Lincoln Jopp (Spelthorne) (Con): I appreciate that the Minister did not get a chance to spend long on the Back Benches—such has been his accelerated rise up the ministerial pole—but would he like to spare a thought for his former Back-Bench colleagues and join me in thanking and congratulating the small band of Labour Back Benchers who went public, broke cover and opposed this dreadful policy?

Torsten Bell: I agree that we should welcome all Labour Back Benchers, because they are the people going through the Lobbies every day to keep in place a Labour Government who are saving public services, taking tough but fair decisions on tax—decisions that are opposed by all the Opposition parties—rescuing our public services and driving down poverty. That is what a Labour Government is about, and that is what everyone on the Labour Benches agrees on.

Neil Duncan-Jordan (Poole) (Lab): I welcome today's statement. As one of the MPs who spoke against the decision to means-test the winter fuel payment last year, I pay tribute to all the campaigners who have lobbied hard for a change in policy. Does the Minister agree that means-testing has once again failed and that effectively what we are seeing today is the return of Labour's commitment to universalism and to using the taxation system to get money back from those who are better-off?

Torsten Bell: I think I agree with my hon. Friend, in the sense that the tax system is a progressive tax system. That is the purpose for which it is being used in this case—to drive fairer outcomes for pensioners, and so that millionaires do not receive the benefit of a winter fuel payment but all lower and middle-income pensioners do.

Robin Swann (South Antrim) (UUP): The Northern Ireland Executive is to receive a consequential budget adjustment. May I ask the Minister when it will receive that adjustment, so that we can ensure that our Northern Ireland pensioners get a winter fuel payment in the coming winter?

Torsten Bell: I absolutely recognise the hon. Member's question, and I spoke to the Northern Ireland Executive earlier today. We will ensure that the Executive receive the budget adjustments in year in order to provide the same support, in line with the principle of parity under which the social security system in Northern Ireland operates. The answer is yes, that support and funding will be there.

Shaun Davies (Telford) (Lab): Away from the knockabout of Westminster politics, I and people in Telford welcome this change. The principle of means-testing was right, but the level was too low. Does my hon. Friend agree that millionaires, MPs who happen to be of pensionable age and those who are living abroad should not receive this payment?

Torsten Bell: I almost always agree with my hon. Friend, so the answer is yes. He also provides me with an opportunity to clarify a point that has not been covered in the last hour or so: the payment will continue not to be exportable for those not resident in the UK.¹

Mr Peter Bedford (Mid Leicestershire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that those pensioners who missed out on their payment in the winter of 2024 and will qualify under these rules should be reimbursed for the money they lost?

Torsten Bell: My view is that all pensioners are being supported by our higher level of the basic state pension and the new state pension, supported by the difficult decisions that the Government have been able to take. All pensioners will be supported by a functioning NHS, which is what we are putting in place after the disgrace of the last 14 years. To answer the hon. Member's question directly, we are setting out the system for future years and not for the past.

Douglas McAllister (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab): This is welcome news that will bring even more money to Scotland on top of the record funding settlement that our Chancellor delivered in the Budget. Does the Minister agree that my constituents fear the Scottish Government and John Swinney's plans to pay out just £100 in Scotland? Those who need it most will now get more in England and Wales than the SNP will pay out to pensioners in Scotland—double, in fact—because the Scottish Government seem determined to pay out to the very wealthiest millionaires in Scotland. Should they rethink that?

1.[Official Report, 2 July 2025; Vol. 770, c. 4WC.] (Correction)

Torsten Bell: I cannot compete with my hon. Friend in making a powerful case that the SNP Government in Edinburgh do need to think again.

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): In my constituency, over 15,500 pensioners lost the winter fuel allowance, of whom 5,000 were over 80. Would the Minister like to apologise to the gentleman who wrote to me who had cancer and could not keep his heating on for the winter of worry he was put through?

Torsten Bell: I thank the hon. Member for raising that point. It is important that those in need of healthcare, in particular, receive support. It is not that we see higher levels of challenge in keeping the heating on among older generations; it is about the consequences of that, particularly in cases such as the one she raises. That is exactly why we need to ensure that we are turning around the NHS, which all the constituents of hon. Members in England are relying on. We are seeing improvements to waiting times in Wales as well.

Dr Scott Arthur (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his leadership on this issue. If he is looking for examples of how to increase the uptake of pension credit, he is welcome to visit my constituency to see the work that the Community Help and Advice Initiative is doing with Gate55 to maximise benefits. If he comes along to one of those sessions with the Dove Centre, he can also get a warm meal and a game of bingo. But the £35,000 threshold is much more generous than I, as a tight-fisted Scotsman, would have expected, so will he explain how he reached that value?

Torsten Bell: It is a fair question. All means-test thresholds do involve judgments—I have been completely honest with the House about that—and the judgment we have come to is that we want to see the vast majority of pensioners receiving the winter fuel payment. We want to be absolutely sure that no lower-income pensioners will miss out. That is what brought us to a £35,000 threshold. It also means that those on higher incomes—the richest 20% or 25% of pensioners—will not receive it.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): The Minister may be in denial, but this U-turn is a humiliation for the Chancellor, who claimed that economic stability demanded taking money from vulnerable pensioners, and for all the Labour MPs who voted for it. Why did the Government not listen sooner to those who campaigned against these cruel cuts? Will he now apologise to my constituents and those across the country who were cold last winter?

Torsten Bell: This is a Chancellor who has brought stability and growth back to the economy and got wages growing once again; one who is driving investment in our public services, which will rescue them; one who has driven up public investment, which is crucial to showing that, once again, we are a country that can do the basics like building houses, filling potholes and the rest.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): When the policy was originally announced, I, hon. Members across the House and constituents of mine all shared the same basic view that means-testing is fair but the threshold was far too low. I therefore welcome the Government's decision today and the fact that they are listening. Over the last winter, working with the citizens advice bureau

in Hartlepool, we secured nearly £1 million of additional annual income for Hartlepool pensioners. Does that not show the work that needs to be done on all those unclaimed benefits not going to the pensioners who need them?

Torsten Bell: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that he and others have been involved in in Hartlepool. Driving up the take-up of all benefits so that people get the support to which they are entitled is important for ensuring that more poor households are able to eat, to heat their homes and to live a decent life.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I do not know where Scottish Labour MPs have been for the past six months, but the Scottish Government have already made it abundantly clear that we will reintroduce a winter fuel payment—and we would have done that with or without this embarrassing, screeching U-turn. Here is another place where the Minister can follow the Scottish Government: the two-child benefit cap. We vowed to ensure that it will disappear in Scotland. Will he now make the same pledge across the UK?

Torsten Bell: The hon. Gentleman asks where Scottish Labour MPs have been, so I will tell him: campaigning in Hamilton, making sure there is a Labour MSP and that in a year's time there will be a Labour Government in Edinburgh once again.

Noah Law (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): Away from some of the consternation of this place, a glance at His Majesty's Treasury distributional analysis will reveal that the original decision to protect the most vulnerable, the Budget that followed, the spring statement and—I hope—the spending review have been some of the most progressive fiscal decisions we have seen in recent years. Will the Minister join me and the many wealthier pensioners in my constituency who agree that means testing is the right decision, the progressive decision and the Labour decision?

Torsten Bell: That is absolutely right. I think every Member of this House will have heard from people on higher incomes who think it makes no sense at all that they receive hundreds of pounds from the Government each year. With the sensible decision to means-test—yes, to the higher threshold—we have brought that to an end.

Liz Jarvis (Eastleigh) (LD): The Government's cuts to the winter fuel payment was estimated to have impacted 16,766 pensioners in my constituency, so I welcome today's U-turn. Those affected include my constituent Chrissy, who was just above the threshold and now has the added fear that she will lose her personal independence payments. Does the Minister understand why Chrissy is so angry and afraid?

Torsten Bell: I have already discussed with the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) the question of people just over the pension credit threshold. I recognise that issue and I have spoken to pensioners in that situation. As I say, we have listened, and that is why we have put in place a much higher threshold, which means that Chrissy, if she is near to the pension credit threshold, will be receiving winter fuel payments this year.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for his statement, which pensioners in Harlow will welcome. The fastest growth in the G7, three trade deals and four interest rate cuts—is that the context in which the Minister feels we are able to provide more pensioners in Harlow with the winter fuel allowance?

Torsten Bell: My hon. Friend always does a good job of not only representing Harlow, but remembering the economic progress that is being made. If anyone did not hear what he just said, he talked about rising growth, rising wages, interest rates falling and a country back on the path to success.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): Almost £85,000 was paid out by Dorset Community Foundation through its “Surviving Winter” campaign, including to many in my constituency. The foundation has noticed that many more people are relying on oil and liquefied gas, especially those in park homes and rural areas. What is the Minister doing with Cabinet colleagues to push down the price of power for those who do not have a choice?

Torsten Bell: The hon. Lady’s question gives me the opportunity to praise the work done by all kinds of charities—in some cases through supporting pension credit uptake and, in the case of better funded foundations, providing direct support to pensioners. That is all very welcome. She is right to raise the wider question about sources of energy, but of course the winter fuel payment is a cash benefit that can be used for all kinds of energy.

Chris McDonald (Stockton North) (Lab): The decision to restore the winter fuel payment to those earning under £35,000 a year is the right decision. I thank the Minister and his predecessor for their constructive engagement with representations from my constituents in Stockton, Billingham and Norton on the threshold issue, but does he agree with my constituent who wrote to me to say that, although welcome, the winter fuel payment is not a silver bullet, and this Government’s commitment to the triple lock stands in stark contrast to the previous Conservative Government’s breaking of that triple lock in 2022, which is still costing my constituents hundreds of pounds a year?

Torsten Bell: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and he is right to say that we should focus on the big changes we are making to support pensioners, which in England are rescuing the NHS and raising the basic and the new state pension.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his statement. I very much welcome the decision to give the winter fuel payment back to pensioners. Raising the threshold to £35,000 means that many will now qualify, and I thank him for that. On behalf of all of those pensioners who have struggled for the last 10 months, will they receive back pay from the Government to pay off the credit cards or the loans they have had to take out in order to make it through the last winter, bearing in mind that the cold weather over the last few weeks has meant people are still having to turn their heating on and racking up even more costs?

Torsten Bell: We have been making sure that there has been support over the course of the last winter, and the hon. Gentleman will have seen the increase in the state

pension at the beginning of April, including for many of his constituents. The question for the Northern Ireland Executive is how they wish to handle this, but on the principle of parity, we would say that the same change should take place in Northern Ireland so that his constituents receive the winter fuel payment this winter.

Fred Thomas (Plymouth Moor View) (Lab): I represent over 20,000 pensioners in Plymouth—more than a quarter of my constituents. I have had hundreds of conversations over the past year, and I know that people understand that the winter fuel payment should not be given out to everyone in society. The richest in society do not need it, and I warmly welcome the policy announced by the Minister today. What economic measures have this Government taken to allow us to make this change now?

Torsten Bell: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. We have gone from competing over temperatures to competing over volume of pensioners, but both are important. The point he makes will echo with lots of Members around the House who have had similar conversations with pensioner constituents who are on a higher income and who do not think it makes sense for them to be receiving hundreds of pounds from the Government every year. In future, they will not be, but the vast majority of pensioners—over three quarters—will be receiving support this winter because of today’s decision.

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that it is the strong economic foundations that this Government have been building that have enabled us to provide this extra support to pensioners and working people, and that as the economy continues to grow, we must focus ever more political attention and resources on the younger generation, particularly people starting their careers, so that perhaps one day they may have a triple lock?

Torsten Bell: My hon. Friend raises an important point, which is that as economic growth returns, as it has over recent months, what matters is that it feeds through to rising living standards, particularly for poorer middle-income households. We need to be honest about this: the reason why wages did not grow under the last Government was that growth was not there. That is exactly what we need to make sure never happens again.

Linsey Farnsworth (Amber Valley) (Lab): My constituents are people of common sense, and they tell me that they do not think millionaires should get the winter fuel allowance, but they did feel that the threshold was too low, so they will no doubt welcome today’s announcement. However, after 14 years of being let down by the Conservatives, they are wary of Government announcements, so can the Minister reassure my constituents that support for pensioners by way of the triple lock, pension credit and NHS investment will remain?

Torsten Bell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that faith in the system has been strained by the failure of the last 14 years—economic failure, public service failure and a failure of basic behaviour in politics—and that is what we need to turn around. She can tell her constituents that wages are growing, pensions are rising, waiting lists are falling and Britain is back.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): That is the end of the statement. I will allow the Front Benchers a moment to shuffle over.

PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Ordered,

That the Order of 24 March 2025 (Planning and Infrastructure Bill: Programme) be varied as follows:

(1) Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the Order shall be omitted.

(2) Proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading shall be taken in two days in accordance with the following provisions of this Order.

(3) Proceedings on Consideration—

(a) shall be taken on each of those days in the order shown in the first column of the following Table, and

(b) shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the times specified in the second column of the Table.

Proceedings	Time for conclusion of proceedings
First day	
New Clauses and new Schedules relating to the subject matter of, and amendments to, Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3.	The moment of interruption on the first day.
Second day	
New Clauses and new Schedules relating to the subject matter of, and amendments to, Part 4, Part 5 and Part 6; remaining new Clauses and new Schedules; remaining proceedings on Consideration.	One hour before the moment of interruption on the second day.

(4) Proceedings on Third Reading shall be taken on the second day and shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the second day.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

Planning and Infrastructure Bill

[1ST ALLOCATED DAY]

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

[Relevant documents: Oral evidence taken before the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee on 29 April, on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, HC 855.]

New Clause 69

EXAMINATION OF APPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT CONSENT

“(1) In section 89 of the Planning Act 2008 (Examining authority’s decisions about how application is to be examined), in subsection (1), after ‘light of’ insert “the assessment under section 88(1) and”.

(2) In section 97 of that Act (procedure rules), after subsection (5) insert—

‘(5A) Power under this section to make rules includes power to make transitional provision.’

(3) The amendment made by subsection (1) applies in relation to every application in respect of which the assessment under section 88(1) of the Planning Act 2008 is made on or after the date on which subsection (1) comes into force (whenever the application was made or accepted).”—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

This new clause requires the examiner of an application for development consent to take procedural decisions in the light of the initial assessment of principal issues made under section 88(1) of the Planning Act 2008, and makes a technical amendment regarding the power to make procedural rules.

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 1—*Steps to be taken when exercising functions under Part 3—*

“When exercising any function or fulfilling any duty under Part 3 of this Act, the Secretary of State and Natural England must take all reasonable steps to—

- avoid, prevent and reduce any identified significant adverse effects on the environment, and only permit such adverse effects where they cannot be avoided and where the adverse effects will be compensated for;
- enhance biodiversity;
- permit a significant adverse effect on a European site or Ramsar site only where justified by imperative reasons of overriding public importance and where the adverse effect will be compensated for, and
- prevent the loss of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and veteran and ancient trees, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and any loss will be compensated for.”

This new clause would ensure that the Secretary of State and Natural England must take all reasonable steps to avoid causing adverse environmental effects.

New clause 2—*Zero carbon standard for new homes—*

“(1) Within six months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must make regulations under section 1 of the Building Act 1984 to require that new homes must—

- be built to a net zero carbon building standard, and
- include provision for solar power generation.

(2) Regulations must include a presumption that, as far as is reasonably practicable, new developments will include facilities for the rooftop generation of solar power.”

This new clause would require that new homes to be built to a net zero carbon building standard and include provision for the generation of solar power.

New clause 3—Transfer of land to local authority following expiry of planning permission—

“After section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, insert—

“91A Transfer of land to local authority following expiry of planning permission

- (1) This section applies—
 - (a) where a development includes the construction of 100 or more homes and has not begun within the applicable period, and
 - (b) where section 91(4) of this Act does not apply.
- (2) There is a compelling case in the public interest for the compulsory purchase under section 17 of the Housing Act 1985 of land on which any such development was permitted provided that such purchase is—
 - (a) in accordance with the terms of the Land Compensation Acts, and
 - (b) complies with the relevant provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998.
- (3) In this section—
 - (a) “applicable period” has the meaning given in section 91(5) of this Act;
 - (b) “Land Compensation Acts” means—
 - (i) the Land Compensation Act 1961;
 - (ii) the Compulsory Purchase Act 1965;
 - (iii) the Acquisition of Land Act 1981;
 - (iv) any other relevant Act which the Secretary of State may specify.”

This new clause would mean that, where permission for a development of 100 homes or more is not used within the applicable period, there is automatically a justifiable case for the compulsory purchase of the land under the Housing Act 1985.

New clause 4—Sustainable drainage—

“The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act—

- (a) bring into force Schedule 3 (Sustainable drainage) of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, and
- (b) provide guidance to local planning authorities, land and property developers and other relevant stakeholders on how to incorporate sustainable drainage into new developments.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to bring into force the sustainable drainage provisions of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and provide guidance on the building in of sustainable drainage in future developments.

New clause 5—Local planning authority discretion over affordability of housing—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, provide guidance to local planning authorities on how to define or classify new or prospective developments as affordable housing.

(2) The guidance must make clear that a local planning authority may, while having regard to national or general guidelines, determine what is to be understood to be affordable housing in its area based on local needs and circumstances.”

This new clause would enable local planning authorities to use their discretion to determine whether certain housing is to be “affordable housing”.

New clause 6—Development plans to aim to improve health and well-being—

“(1) Any national or local plan or strategy relating to the planning or development of an area must be designed to improve the physical, mental and social health and well-being of the people who are to reside in that area.

(2) The Secretary of State must issue guidance to local planning authorities on how local plans and strategies can be designed to achieve the aims outlined in subsection (1).”

This new clause would require national or local development plans to be designed in a way that aims to improve the physical, mental and social health and well-being of residents.

New clause 7—New car parks to include solar panels—

“(1) No local planning authority may approve an application for the building of an above-ground car park which does not make the required provision of solar panels.

(2) The required provision of solar panels is an amount equivalent to 50% of the surface area of the car park.”

This new clause would require solar panels to be provided with all new car parks.

New clause 8—Independent oversight of administration of nature restoration levy—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, before Part 3 of this Act comes into force, establish an independent body to monitor the administration of the nature restoration levy by Natural England.

(2) The independent body may request information from Natural England relating to Natural England’s administration of the nature restoration levy additional to the information and reports provided to the independent body by Natural England under section 66(5).

(3) The independent body may report to the Secretary of State on—

- (a) any concerns relating to Natural England’s administration of the nature restoration levy, and
- (b) any other matters relating to Natural England’s administration of the nature restoration levy as the independent body deems appropriate.”

This new clause would provide for independent oversight of Natural England’s administration of the nature restoration levy.

New clause 9—Environmental infrastructure in new developments—

“(1) Within six months of to the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must make regulations under section 1 of the Building Act 1984 for the purpose of protecting and enhancing biodiversity.

(2) Regulations made under this section must—

- (a) take account of biodiversity targets and interim targets set out in sections 1(2), 1(3)(c), 11 and 14 of the Environment Act 2021;
- (b) include measures to enable the provision in new developments of—
 - (i) bird boxes;
 - (ii) bat boxes;
 - (iii) swift bricks;
 - (iv) hedgehog highways; and
 - (v) biodiverse roofs and walls.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to introduce regulations to protect and enhance biodiversity in new developments.

New clause 10—Inclusion of wildbelts in planning considerations—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act—

- (a) create a category of protection for wildbelt areas in England for the purpose of permanently protecting such areas from or during development, and
- (b) issue guidance for local planning authorities and other relevant parties on how wildbelt land is to be protected.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), “permanently protecting” areas means protecting or restoring the natural environment in a wildbelt area, and in ecosystems functionally connected to a wildbelt area.

(3) Guidance issued under subsection (1)(b) must—

- (a) provide assistance to local planning authorities and others on the identification of wildbelt sites;
- (b) impose responsibilities on strategic planning authorities in relation to the development of spatial development strategies regarding—
 - (i) the use of Local Nature Recovery Strategies to protect and enhance wildbelt;
 - (ii) the reporting of progress towards the development of wildbelt sites; and
 - (iii) the reporting of progress towards the use of wildbelt designation to increase public access to nature.

(4) For the purposes of this section, “wildbelt” has such meaning as the Secretary of State may specify in guidance, but must include—

- (a) areas of land;
- (b) bodies of water and adjacent land;
- (c) wetlands.”

This new clause would enable the creation of new wildbelt areas and associated ecosystems, and require guidance to be issued regarding the use of provisions of the bill to protect wildbelt areas.

New clause 11—Register of planning applications from political donors—

“(1) A local planning authority must maintain and publish a register of planning applications in its area where—

- (a) a determination has been made by the Secretary of State responsible for housing and planning, and
- (b) the applicant has made a donation to the Secretary of State responsible for housing and planning within the period of ten years prior to the application being made.

(2) A register maintained under this section must be published at least once each year.”

This new clause would require a local planning authority to keep and publish a register of applications decided by the Secretary of State where that Secretary of State has received a donation from the applicant.

New clause 12—Considerations when deciding an application for development consent—

“In section 55 of the Planning Act 2008 (acceptance of applications), after subsection (4) insert—

“(4A) When deciding whether to accept an application, the Secretary of State must have regard to the extent to which consultation with affected communities has—

- (a) identified and resolved issues at the earliest opportunity;
- (b) enabled interested parties to understand and influence the proposed project, provided feedback on potential options, and encouraged the community to help shape the proposal to maximise local benefits and minimise any disbenefits;
- (c) enabled applicants to obtain relevant information about the economic, social, community and environmental effects of the project; and
- (d) enabled appropriate mitigation measures to be identified, considered and, if appropriate, embedded into the proposed application before the application was submitted.”

This new clause to the Planning Act would require the Secretary of State to consider the content and adequacy of consultation undertaken with affected communities when deciding an application for development consent.

New clause 13—Removal of statutory consultees—

“(1) A party may only be removed from the list of consultees—

- (a) in or under section 42 of the Planning Act 2008, or
- (b) in Schedule 1 of the Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009, once Parliamentary approval for the removal has been signified.

(2) Parliamentary approval may be signified by—

- (a) the approval of a relevant statutory instrument;
- (b) the agreement of a relevant motion.”

This new clause would make the removal of statutory consultees subject to parliamentary approval.

New clause 14—Electricity distribution networks: land and access rights—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of the passing of this Act, consult on and implement measures to give electricity distribution network operators powers in relation, but not limited, to—

- (a) the acquisition of rights over land for new and existing overhead lines and underground cables;
- (b) the acquisition of land for new substations or the extension of existing substations;
- (c) the entering into of land for the purposes of maintaining existing equipment;
- (d) the entering into of land for the purposes of managing vegetation growth which is interfering with the safety or operation of overhead equipment.

(2) Any powers granted must be compatible with the need to complete works related to development in a timely, inexpensive and uncomplicated manner, and may include the provision of compensation to relevant landowners.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to consult on giving electricity distribution network operators powers in relation to the acquisition of and access to land.

New clause 15—Extension of permitted development—

“The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of the passing of this Act—

- (a) make provision for the following to be included as permitted development—
 - (i) upgrading of existing lines from single to three phase;
 - (ii) alteration of conductor type;
 - (iii) increase in the height of distribution network supports to maintain minimum ground clearances under the Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002;
 - (iv) increase in the distance of supporting structures by up to 60m from their existing position when replacing an existing overhead line;
 - (v) in relation to new connections from an existing line, an increase in nominal voltage to a maximum of 33kV and related increase in pole heights;
 - (vi) upgrading of existing lines from 6.6kV to 11kV;
 - (vii) installation of additional stays supporting wood poles;
 - (viii) upgrading of existing apparatus, including the increase of capacity of pole mounted transformers, subject to the provisions of section 37(1) of the Electricity Act 1989 and the Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002;
 - (ix) temporary placement of a line for a period of up to two years.
- (b) consult on the introduction of further measures for the purposes of enabling distribution network upgrades and reinforcements to be delivered as permitted development.”

This new clause would expand permitted development rights for upgrades to the transmission network.

New clause 16—Preservation of playing fields and pitches—

“(1) A local planning authority must, when exercising any of its functions, ensure the preservation of playing fields and playing pitches.

(2) The duty in subsection (1) may, when granting permission for development, be met through the imposition of conditions or requirements relating to—

- (a) the protection of playing fields or playing pitches affected by the development; or
- (b) the provision of alternative, additional or expanded playing fields or playing pitches.

(3) For the purposes of this section, “playing fields” and “playing pitches” have the same meanings as in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010.”

This new clause would require local authorities to preserve playing fields when granting permission for development.

New clause 17—Community benefit from major energy infrastructure projects—

“(1) The Secretary of State must by regulations establish a scheme under which communities with a specified connection to a major energy infrastructure project are entitled to financial benefits.

(2) In subsection (1), “major energy infrastructure project” and “specified connection” have such meaning as the Secretary of State may by regulations specify, provided that any such definition includes all newly consented renewable energy projects.

(3) Financial benefits provided for by a scheme under this section must—

- (a) be provided by the owner of the relevant major energy infrastructure project, and
- (b) amount to 5% of the annual revenue of the relevant project.

(4) Where a major energy infrastructure project is onshore, regulations made under this section must—

- (a) provide for two-thirds of the financial benefits accruing to a community under this section to be paid to the council of that community, and
- (b) provide for one third of the financial benefits accruing to a community under this section to be paid into a strategic fund operated by the council.

(5) Where a major energy infrastructure project is offshore, regulations made under this section must provide for the financial benefits accruing to a community under this section to be paid into a strategic fund operated by the relevant council.

(6) Regulations made under this section may, among other things—

- (a) specify the powers, purposes, responsibilities and constitution of a council strategic fund;
- (b) make further provision determining which communities are qualifying under this section, and defining community for this purpose;
- (c) confer functions in connection with the scheme;
- (d) provide for delegation of functions conferred in connection with the scheme.”

This new clause sets out a scheme for providing financial benefits to communities in areas connected with major energy infrastructure schemes.

New clause 18—Local Area Energy Plans—

“(1) All local authorities and combined authorities must create a Local Area Energy Plan.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a “Local Area Energy Plan” means an outline of how the relevant authority proposes to transition its area’s energy system to Net Zero.”

This new clause would require all local and combined authorities to develop Local Area Energy Plans which set out how they will meet their Net Zero goals.

New clause 19—Extension of use classes C5 and C6 to England—

“In article 1(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (Wales) Order 2022, after “Wales” insert “, except in relation to articles 2(e) and 2(f), which apply in relation to England and Wales”.”

This new clause of existing regulations would extend use classes C5 (Dwellinghouses, used otherwise than as sole or main residences) and C6 (Short-term lets), which currently only to apply to Wales, to England.

New clause 20—Change of certain use classes to require permission—

“In article 3(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, at end insert “, subject to paragraphs (1AA) and (1AB).

(1AA) Where a building is used for the purpose of Class C3, the use of that building for the purpose of Class C5 or Class C6 (or vice versa) is to be taken to involve development of the land.

(1AB) Where a building is used for the purpose of Class C5, the use of that building for the purpose of Class C6 (or vice versa) is to be taken to involve development of the land.”

This new clause would require planning permission to be obtained to change the use of a dwelling to a second home or to a short term let use class and for changes of use between those classes.

New clause 21—Local plan compliance with Land Use Framework and nature recovery strategies—

“When developing a local plan, a local planning authority must consider whether the plan complies with—

- (a) the Land Use Framework, and
- (b) any nature recovery strategy relevant to the area covered by the plan.”

This new clause seeks to ensure that Local Plans comply with the Land Use Framework and local nature recovery strategies.

New clause 23—Review of drainage performance of new developments—

“(1) A review of a development’s drainage performance must take place five years after the completion of the development.

(2) Where a review recommends that action be taken to improve the development’s drainage performance, the developer must implement such recommendations, giving priority to those relating to flood risk.”

This new clause requires developers to review the drainage performance of a development five years after being built.

New clause 24—Housing needs of ageing population—

“Any plan or strategy produced by a local planning authority which proposes the development of housing must include an assessment of the housing needs of an ageing population.”

New clause 25—National Landscape Partnerships to be statutory consultees for planning applications—

“In Schedule 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015, after paragraph (zf) insert—

“(zg) Development likely to affect an area covered by a National Landscape Partnership	The relevant National Landscape Partnership”
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This amendment to the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015 would ensure that National Landscape Partnerships are included as statutory consultees in planning applications which impact their areas.

New clause 26—Environmental improvement duty: nature restoration levy—

“(1) Subsection (2) applies where Natural England agrees to a request to pay the nature restoration levy.

(2) The Secretary of State has a duty to ensure to a high degree of certainty based on an objective assessment that significant and measurable improvements to the conservation status of each identified environmental feature is achieved within the period covered by the EDP.”

This new clause would place a duty on the Secretary of State to ensure significant environmental improvements for protected features during the EDP period.

New clause 27—Gardens Trust to be statutory consultees for planning applications—

“In Schedule 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, after paragraph (zf) insert—

“(zg) Development likely to affect historic parks or gardens	The Gardens Trust”
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This new clause would ensure that the Gardens Trust are included as statutory consultees in planning applications.

New clause 28—Pre-application consultation of emergency services—

“In Schedule 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, after paragraph (zf) insert—

“(zg) Development which is likely to affect operations of ambulance services	The ambulance trust concerned
“(zh) Development which is likely to affect operations of fire and rescue services	The fire and rescue service concerned”

New clause 29—Support for small businesses and charities affected by roadworks—

“(1) This section applies where—

- (a) any building or development works require or involve works to or on the road network, or otherwise result in road closures,
- (b) such roadworks or closures have lasted, or are expected to last, for a period of six months or more, and
- (c) any small business or charitable organisation suffers a material financial, access or other detriment resulting from the roadworks or closures.

(2) The Secretary of State must make provision for any affected small business or charitable organisation to receive financial compensation or other equivalent support to recover or mitigate the detriment suffered.”

New clause 30—Permitted development for ponds—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, make regulations under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to amend Schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 so as to include the creation of ponds with a surface area of less than 0.2 hectares as permitted development.

(2) For the purposes of this section, “pond” means a permanent or seasonal standing body of water with a surface area not exceeding 2 hectares.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to make regulations to allow the creation of new ponds under 0.2 hectares in size without planning permission being required.

New clause 31—Thresholds for affordable housing provision—

“Where an application proposes or is required to provide affordable housing, no amendment to the amount of affordable housing to be developed may be made if the amendment would result in the amount of affordable housing to be developed failing to exceed the higher of—

- (a) the relevant authority’s affordable housing threshold, or
- (b) twenty per cent of the total amount of housing provided in the development.”

This new clause would place lower limits on the amount of affordable housing developments which intend to provide such housing must provide.

New clause 32—Housing plans to include quotas for affordable and social housing—

“(1) Any national or local plan or strategy which relates to the building or development of housing must include specific quotas for the provision of—

- (a) affordable housing, and
- (b) social housing.

(2) Where a national or local plan or strategy includes quotas for the provision of affordable and social housing, the plan or strategy must include justification for the quotas.”

This new clause would require national and local housing plans to include, and justify, quotas for the provision of both affordable and social housing.

New clause 33—Power to decline applications based on outcomes of previous grants of permission—

“(1) Where a local planning authority has previously given planning permission to a party (the “initial grant”), the planning authority may decline any future planning applications from the party where, in respect of the initial grant of planning permission, the party has failed to—

- (a) build out the structure or development,
- (b) make sufficient progress towards the building out of the structure or development within a reasonable time period, or
- (c) build out the structure or development at a reasonable rate.

(2) A local planning authority may define how it is to interpret “sufficient progress”, “reasonable time period” and “reasonable rate” as part of its local plan.”

This new clause would enable local planning authorities to decline planning applications from parties which have failed to build, or make sufficient progress on, projects for which permission has previously been granted.

New clause 34—Additional business rates for developers not completing approved development—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, hold a public consultation on providing local authorities who exercise the functions of local planning authorities with the power to levy additional business rates on—

- (a) land owners, and
- (b) developers who fail to complete the development of projects for which permission has been granted within a reasonable period.

(2) The Secretary of State must, within 18 months of the conclusion of the public consultation, lay before both Houses of Parliament—

- (a) a report on the findings of the consultation, and
- (b) a statement setting out the Secretary of State’s response to those findings.”

New clause 35—Review of the setting of local plans under the National Planning Policy Framework—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 6 months of the passing of this Act, review the National Planning Policy Framework with regard to the setting of local plans.

(2) The review must consider in particular replacing the existing “call for sites” process with a requirement for local planning authorities to identify sites within their areas which are necessary to meet—

- (a) local housing targets, and
- (b) the United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to review the setting of local plans with a view to replacing the existing “call for sites” process with a requirement for local planning authorities to identify sites which meet housing targets and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal.

New clause 36—Purposes and principles to be followed by parties exercising planning or development functions—

“(1) Any party exercising any function in relation to planning and development must—

- (a) have regard to the purpose of the planning system outlined in subsection (2), and
- (b) apply the principles outlined in subsection (3) for the purposes of achieving sustainable development.

(2) The purpose of the planning system is to promote the spatial organisation of land and resources to achieve the long-term sustainable development of the nation and the health and wellbeing of individuals.

(3) The principles are—

- (a) living within environmental limits;
- (b) ensuring a strong, healthy and just society;
- (c) achieving a sustainable economy;
- (d) promoting good governance including promoting democratic engagement and accountability; and
- (e) using sound science responsibly.

(4) For the purposes of this section, “sustainable development” means managing the use, development and protection of land and natural resources in a way which enables people and communities to provide for their legitimate social, economic and cultural wellbeing while ensuring the health and integrity of terrestrial and marine ecosystems and the species within them, as well as the wellbeing of future generations.”

The new clause would define the purpose of the planning system and of planning as promoting the efficient spatial organisation of land and resources to achieve the long-term sustainable development of the nation and the health and wellbeing of individuals.

New clause 37—Right to appeal against approved applications—

“In section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (right to appeal against planning decisions and failure to take such decisions), after subsection (2) insert—

“(2A) Where a local planning authority approves an application for planning permission which—

- (a) does not accord with the provisions of the development plan in force in the area in which the land to which the application relates is situated, or
- (b) is a major application,

the parties specified in subsection (2B) may appeal to the Secretary of State against the decision to approve the application.

(2B) The parties are—

- (a) any persons who have lodged a formal objection to the application in writing to the relevant planning authority;
- (b) any other persons that a person appointed by the Secretary of State uses their discretion to permit to appeal.

(2C) The Secretary of State must appoint a person to—

- (a) define “major application” for the purposes of subsection (2A)(b);
- (b) consider parties to be permitted to appeal against a decision to approve an application under subsection (2B)(b).”

This new clause would create a limited third-party right of appeal for certain individuals to appeal to the Secretary of State where a local authority has approved a development that does not accord with a local development plan.

New clause 38—Dismissal of appeal or referral—

“In section 79 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (determination of appeals), after subsection (6A) insert—

“(6B) The Secretary of State may dismiss an appeal or referral where, having considered the appeal or referral, the Secretary of State is of the opinion that the appeal or referral is—

- (a) vexatious, frivolous or without substance or foundation, or
- (b) made with the sole intention of—
 - (i) delaying the development, or
 - (ii) securing the payment of money, gifts or other inducement by any person.”

This new clause would enable the Secretary of State to dismiss appeals or referrals in certain circumstances.

New clause 39—Prohibition of solar development on higher-quality agricultural land—

“No permission may be granted for the building or installation of provision for solar power generation where the development would involve—

- (a) the building on or development of agricultural land at grade 1, 2, or 3a, and
- (b) building or installation at ground-level.”

This new clause would prohibit the development of solar power generation on higher quality agricultural land.

New clause 40—Review of method for assessing local housing need—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, review the standard method for assessing local housing need.

(2) A review under this section must consider—

- (a) how the method for assessing local housing need should consider different types of property;
- (b) basing calculations on price per square metre rather than price per unit.

(3) In conducting a review under this section, the Secretary of State must consult—

- (a) local councils; and
- (b) any other parties the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

(4) Upon completion of the review, the Secretary of State must—

- (a) lay before Parliament a report which summarises the evidence considered in the review and the review's final conclusions or recommendations;
- (b) provide guidance to local planning authorities and other relevant bodies on how they should calculate and consider local housing need.”

New clause 41—New towns to contribute towards housing targets—

“In any national or local plan or strategy which sets targets for the building of new houses, houses built as part of new towns may contribute to the meeting of such targets.”

New clause 43—Protection of villages—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, issue guidance for local planning authorities, or update any relevant existing guidance, relating to the protection of villages.

(2) Any guidance issued under this section must provide villages with equivalent protection, so far as is appropriate, as is provided for towns in relation to—

- (a) preventing villages from merging into one another,
- (b) preventing villages merging into towns, and
- (c) preserving the setting and special character of historic villages.”

This new clause would provide existing villages with protection equivalent to that currently provided to towns under the NPPF.

New clause 44—Sustainable drainage (No. 2)—

“The Secretary of State must, within one month of the passing of this Act—

- (a) bring into force Schedule 3 (Sustainable drainage) of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, and

- (b) provide guidance to local planning authorities, land and property developers and other relevant stakeholders on—
 - (i) how to incorporate sustainable drainage into new developments, and
 - (ii) the minimum expected standards for ongoing maintenance of sustainable drainage infrastructure.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to bring into force the sustainable drainage provisions of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and provide guidance on the building in of sustainable drainage in future developments.

New clause 45—No planning permission to be granted in cases of intentional unauthorised development—

“(1) A local planning authority may not grant consent for development where there has been intentional unauthorised development in respect of the land or properties which are to be subject to that development.

(2) For the purposes of this section, “intentional unauthorised development”—

- (a) includes any development of land undertaken in advance of obtaining planning permission;
- (b) does not include any unintentional, minor or trivial works undertaken without having obtained the relevant permission.

(3) Where works under subsection (2)(b) are undertaken, the local planning authority may require relevant permissions to be obtained retrospectively.”

New clause 46—Duty to complete development of local infrastructure—

“(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a Development Consent Order is made providing for, or
- (b) a Strategic Development Scheme includes provision for, the development of local infrastructure.

(2) Where subsection (1) applies, the developer must deliver the relevant local infrastructure in full.

(3) For the purposes of this section, “local infrastructure” has such meaning as the Secretary of State may specify, but must include—

- (a) schools,
- (b) nurseries, and
- (c) General Practice clinics.

(4) A duty under this section may be disapplied with the consent of the relevant local planning authority.”

This new clause aims to ensure that commitments to provide local infrastructure such as schools and GP clinics, approved as part of a development, are permanent and legally binding.

New clause 47—Development of land for the public benefit—

“(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a developer has entered into an obligation under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 which requires the development of local community infrastructure; and
- (b) such development—
 - (i) has not been completed, and it is not intended or anticipated that the development will be completed; or
 - (ii) has been subject to a change of circumstance which means that it will not or cannot be used for its intended purpose.

(2) Where this section applies—

- (a) the relevant land remains under the ownership of the local planning authority;
- (b) the local planning authority may only develop or permit the development of the land for the purposes of providing a community asset;

- (c) the local planning authority must, when proposing to develop the land under subsection (2)(b), consult the local community before commencing development or granting permission for any development.

(3) For the purposes of this section—

“local community infrastructure” means a development for the benefit of the local community, including schools, nurseries, and medical centres,

“community asset” means—

- (a) a public park;
- (b) a public leisure facility;
- (c) social housing;
- (d) such other assets as the local planning authority may specify, provided that their development is to meet the needs of the local community.”

This new clause provides that land designated development as community infrastructure under a S106 agreement will not be returned to a developer to use for other purposes in the event that the original purpose is not fulfilled. It provides instead that land would remain under the control of the local planning authority for development as a community asset.

New clause 48—Neighbourhood plans—

“The Secretary of State may only—

- (a) grant a development consent order where the Secretary of State believes that the application for consent gives due consideration to any relevant neighbourhood plan;
- (b) permit a variation to a neighbourhood plan which, in the opinion of the Secretary of State—
 - (i) is clearly justifiable;
 - (ii) is unlikely to compromise the overall intention of the neighbourhood plan; and
 - (iii) has been proposed in a clear and timely manner.”

This new clause would require due consideration to be given to neighbourhood plans when deciding on an application for development consent.

New clause 49—Review of land value capture—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, conduct a review of land value capture.

(2) A review under this section must consider—

- (a) the benefits of different methods of land value capture;
- (b) international best practice;
- (c) how changes to existing practice could assist in the meeting of housing targets and the delivery of critical infrastructure and public services; and
- (d) how any changes to existing practice could be incorporated into UK planning law.

(3) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the conclusion of the review, lay before Parliament a report on the findings of the review.”

To require a review into methods of land value capture, to ensure the public benefit from instances where land value rises sharply, and for this to be considered to be incorporated into UK planning legislation.

New clause 50—Guidance relating to social rent homes—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, provide or update guidance for all parties involved in local or national planning decisions on how they can contribute to the provision of social rent homes through the exercise of their planning or development functions.

(2) Guidance produced under this section must include reference to the number of social rent homes which the Government intends to be delivered each year.”

This new clause requires the Government to set a national target for the number of Social Rent homes to be delivered per year.

New clause 51—Prohibition of solar development and battery storage facilities on all agricultural land—

“No permission may be granted for the building or installation of provision for solar power generation or battery storage where the development would involve—

- (a) the building on or development of any grade of agricultural land used in food production, and
- (b) building or installation at ground-level.”

This new clause would prohibit the development of solar power generation and battery storage on all agricultural land.

New clause 52—Local planning authority powers relating to new towns—

“(1) A local planning authority whose area includes the whole or any part of a new town may—

- (a) include any of the area of the new town as land to be developed in any local plan which covers a period between the designation of the new town and the completion of development,
- (b) include in the local planning authority’s housing target any houses expected to be provided by or in the new town during the period covered by the local planning authority’s local plan,
- (c) include any housing expected to be provided by or in the new town in any consideration of the local planning authority’s 5 year housing land supply, and
- (d) disregard National Planning Policy Framework guidance relating to the duty on local planning authorities and county councils to cooperate on strategic matters crossing administrative boundaries as it relates to the delivery of housing numbers originally allocated to a neighbouring authority.

(2) For the purposes of this section, “new town” means a town developed by a corporation under section 1 of the New Towns Act 1981.”

This new clause would provide local planning authorities with the ability to include new towns in local plans and housing targets, and give planning authorities certain powers with regard to new towns.

New clause 53—Prohibition of development on functional floodplains—

“(1) No local planning authority may grant planning permission for any development which is to take place on a functional floodplain.

(2) The Secretary of State must, within three months of the passing of this Act, issue new guidance, or update existing guidance where such guidance exists, relating to development in flood zones and the management of flood risk.”

This new clause would prevent local planning authorities from allowing developments on functional floodplains.

New clause 54—Assessment of impact of nature restoration levy on environmental protections—

“(1) The Secretary of State must publish an annual assessment of the impact of the introduction of a nature restoration levy.

(2) Any report published under this section must include—

- (a) an analysis of the impact of—
 - (i) the introduction of a nature restoration levy, and
 - (ii) the disregarding of obligations under section 65(3) on environmental protections; and
- (b) an overview of each occasion where—
 - (i) the nature restoration levy has been paid, and
 - (ii) obligations have been disregarded under section 65(3).”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to publish assessments of the impact of the nature restoration levy and the disregarding of obligations under the Habitats Regulations 2017 or Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 on environmental protections.

New clause 55—Impact on major infrastructure on local area—

“The presence, or planned presence, of any major infrastructure project in an area may—

- (a) exempt the relevant local planning authority from being required to meet national or local housing targets or other development targets;
- (b) be a material consideration in any decision-making relating to further development proposed in that area.”

This new clause would ensure that areas hosting pieces of major infrastructure – such as transport projects, prisons and NSIPs – may not be expected to meet their full housing or other development targets and can have such projects taken into account when decisions relating to further planning applications are made.

New clause 56—Building regulations: biodiversity—

“(1) Within six months of the passing of this Act the Secretary of State must bring forward regulations under section 1 of the Building Act 1984 for the purposes of—

- (a) protecting and enhancing biodiversity, and
- (b) contributing to the achievement of biodiversity targets and interim targets set out under the Environment Act 2021.

(2) Regulations under this section must include provision—

- (a) for the appropriate installation and maintenance of measures including—
 - (i) bird boxes,
 - (ii) bat boxes,
 - (iii) swift bricks,
 - (iv) hedgehog highways,
 - (v) splash-free pavements, and
 - (vi) biodiverse roofs and walls,
- (b) limiting the use of artificial grass in a garden or in or on land associated with a dwelling or building covered by the regulations.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to introduce regulations to require new developments to include design features that will contribute to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and the achievement of Environment Act targets.

New clause 57—Co-ordination in the development of energy projects—

“(1) Where two or more energy developers are engaged in the development of projects relating to energy infrastructure within the same area, there is a duty on each developer to—

- (a) exchange relevant information relating to project design, construction, and environmental impact;
- (b) cooperate in the development of shared infrastructure where feasible and appropriate;
- (c) take reasonable steps to reduce cumulative impacts on the environment, local communities, and existing infrastructure; and
- (d) seek alignment of timelines and operational practices to minimise disruption.

(2) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of the passing of this Act, publish guidance for such developers, which must include—

- (a) criteria for determining when coordination is required;
- (b) mechanisms for dispute resolution between developers;
- (c) standards for joint planning and reporting; and
- (d) details of consultation required with affected local authorities and communities.

(3) Where subsection (1) applies, a relevant local planning authority may require the submission of a Joint Coordination Statement by the developers.

(4) A Joint Coordination Statement must include—

- (a) an overview of each developer’s proposed works within the area,
- (b) an identification of shared infrastructure opportunities,
- (c) assessment of cumulative environmental and social impacts,
- (d) details of measures proposed to mitigate identified environmental and social impacts, and

- (e) a proposed governance structure for ongoing coordination during construction and operation, and must be submitted as part of or in addition to development consent applications.

(5) A party which fails to comply with any of the requirements of this section may be subject to—

- (a) a delay in granting, or a refusal of, development consent;
- (b) the imposition of conditions on an application for consent requiring such coordination; or
- (c) such financial or legal penalties as may be prescribed by the Secretary of State in regulations.

(6) For the purposes of this section—

“area” means an area determined by the relevant planning authority or Secretary of State where coordination is deemed necessary due to overlapping or adjacent projects;

“energy developer” means any person or body undertaking or proposing to undertake energy generation, transmission, or distribution infrastructure projects;

“shared infrastructure” includes roads, grid connections, substations, and other physical or operational systems.”

This new clause would require developers to cooperate in the development of energy projects when they are taking place in the same area. It also empowers local planning authorities to require statements detailing such cooperation.

New clause 58—Environment and climate duty: forestry land—

“When exercising any planning or development function relating to forestry land, or when contributing to or participating in the exercise of any such function, the appropriate forestry authority must take all reasonable steps to contribute to—

- (a) the achievement of targets set under sections 1 to 3 of the Environment Act 2021 and any interim targets set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan;
- (b) the achievement of targets set under Part 1 of the Climate Change Act 2008; and
- (c) the delivery of the programme for adaptation to climate change under section 58 of the Climate Change Act 2008.”

New clause 59—Regard to existing use of land in exercise of planning functions—

“After section 58B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 insert—

“58C Duty of regard to existing use of land in granting permissions

- (1) In considering whether to grant planning permission or permission in principle for the development of land in England, the decision maker must have special regard to the existing use of land within the vicinity of the land in relation to which permission is being considered.
- (2) In complying with this section, the decision maker must consider whether to grant permission subject to such conditions that would promote the integration of the proposed development of land with any existing use of land, including such conditions as may be necessary to mitigate the impact of noise on the proposed development.
- (3) In this section, “decision maker” means the local planning authority or (as the case may be) the Secretary of State.””

This new clause imposes a duty to have special regard to the existing use of land when considering whether to grant planning permission and, in particular, whether there are any planning conditions that would promote the integration of the proposed development (such as conditions relating to mitigation of noise caused by an existing use). This reflects the “agent of change” principle referred to in paragraph 200 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

New clause 60—Time-limited permission for landfill sites—

“Where—

- (a) planning permission has previously been granted for a landfill site,
- (b) landfill operations at the site have been ceased for a period of ten years, and
- (c) a new party wishes to resume landfill operations at the site,

the party who wishes to resume landfill operations at the site must submit a new application for permission to develop or operate the landfill site.”

This new clause would mean that, where a landfill site has been dormant for a period of ten years, a new planning application is required to resume operations at the site.

New clause 61—Minimum depth requirement for underground cables on agricultural land—

“(1) Where a development involves the laying of electrical or communications cables under land currently in active agricultural use, such cables must be buried to a minimum depth of 1.8 metres from the surface level.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), “active agricultural use” includes, but is not limited to, land used for arable farming, including the ploughing, sowing, and harvesting of crops.

(3) The Secretary of State may by regulations provide for exemptions from the requirement in subsection (1) only where—

- (a) the developer can demonstrate that installing at such depth is technically unfeasible, and
- (b) alternative measures are put in place to ensure active agricultural use is not adversely affected.

(4) Regulations under subsection (4) must be made by statutory instrument and must not come into force until approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.”

This new clause would require electrical or communications cables required as part of a new development to be installed at least 1.8m under agricultural land.

New clause 62—Impact of the Act on biodiversity and nature investment—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 3 months of the passing of this Act, publish a report on the impact of the nature restoration levy on—

- (a) biodiversity net gain, and
- (b) initiatives to encourage investment in nature markets.

(2) A report produced under this section must be laid before both Houses of Parliament.”

New clause 63—Guidance on planting along highways—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, issue guidance for developers, local planning authorities and other relevant parties on the planting of trees, shrubs, plants or grass alongside highways constructed as part of—

- (a) any new transport infrastructure;
- (b) any other development for which consent has been granted.

(2) Guidance issued under this section must—

- (a) outline how licence conditions under section 142(5) of the Highways Act 1980 (licence to plant trees, shrubs, etc., in a highway) are to be applied and complied with in a way which—
 - (i) is not unreasonably burdensome on applicants for licences, and
 - (ii) does not prevent or discourage the planting of trees, shrubs, plants or grass;
- (b) provide model licence conditions, standard designs, and planting palettes.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to publish guidance on the planting of trees and other plants alongside new highways.

New clause 64—*Rural Exception Sites*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, take steps to support the delivery of housing through the Rural Exception Sites mechanism.

(2) Steps to be taken must include—

- (a) reviewing the National Planning Policy Framework;
- (b) publishing best practice guidance on—
 - (i) assessing the viability of Rural Exception Sites;
 - (ii) the setting of incentives for landowners and delivery partners to deliver housing on Rural Exception Sites.”

New clause 65—*Provision of green space in new housing developments*—

“Any application for permission for the development of housing must include provision for—

- (a) green spaces, including private gardens, balconies, and community gardens;
- (b) open green space which can be accessed by residents using active transport within fifteen minutes; and
- (c) the care and maintenance of the green spaces provided for under this section.”

New clause 66—*Fire authorities to be statutory consultees for applications relating to Battery Energy Storage Solutions*—

“In Schedule 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015, after paragraph (zf) insert—

‘(zg)	Development involving Battery Energy Storage Solutions	The relevant fire authority”
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This new clause would ensure that fire authorities are included as statutory consultees in planning applications involving Battery Energy Storage Solutions (BESS's).

New clause 67—*Requirement to undertake planned affordable housing construction*—

“(1) Where an application to develop affordable housing has been granted, no amendment to the amount of affordable housing to be developed may be made if the reasons for the amendment include—

- (a) the affordability to the applicant; or
- (b) that providing such affordable housing would make the development unprofitable for the applicant.

(2) This section applies where the provision of affordable housing forms the whole of or part of the proposed development.

(3) For the purposes of this section “develop” has the meaning given by section 336 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.”

This new clause would mean that, where a developer has committed in their initial application to providing a certain number of affordable homes, they would be prohibited from lowering that provision based on affordability or profitability.

New clause 71—*Display of new advertisements*—

“In section 220(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (regulations controlling display of advertisements), omit “amenity or public safety” and insert “amenity, environmental impact, public safety or public health.”

This new clause amends the section 220 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to add environmental impact and public health to the considerations for which the Secretary of State can restrict or regulate the display of advertisements.

New clause 73—*Building regulations: swift bricks*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, introduce regulations under Section 1 of the Building Act 1984 to make provision for the installation of an average of one swift brick per dwelling or unit greater than 5 metres in height.

(2) Regulations must require the installation of swift bricks in line with best practice guidance, except where such installation is not practicable or appropriate.

(3) For the purposes of this section—

“swift brick” means an integral nest box integrated into the wall of a building suitable for the nesting of the Common Swift and other cavity nesting species;

“best practice guidance” means the British Standard BS 42021:2022.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to introduce regulations to require the installation of integral bird nest boxes and swift boxes in developments greater than 5 metres in height. Swift bricks provide nesting habitat for all bird species reliant on cavity nesting habitat in buildings to breed.

New clause 74—*Refusal of permission to reduce affordable housing in large scale developments*—

“(1) If an application is made for reserved planning permission relating to a large scale housing development which seeks to reduce the amount of affordable housing originally proposed by a developer as part of an application for outline planning permission, the local planning authority must refuse the application.

(2) Where—

(a) a local planning authority has agreed an application for a modification or discharge of a planning obligation under section 106A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and

(b) the modification or discharge would reduce the amount of affordable housing from that originally proposed by a developer in the outline planning application, this section applies.

(3) In this section “large scale housing development” means any development which includes more than 500 houses in the outline planning application.”

New clause 75—*Change of certain use classes to require permission*—

“In article 3(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, at end insert “, subject to paragraphs (1AA) and (1AB).

(1AA) Where a building is used for the purpose of Class C3, the use of that building for the purpose of Class C4 is to be taken to involve development of the land.”

This new clause would mean that converting a residential dwelling into a house of multiple occupation would require planning permission.

New clause 77—*Embodied carbon assessments*—

“(1) Local planning authorities must, within 12 months of the passing of this Act—

(a) require applications for permission for developments which exceed a specified gross internal area and number of dwellings to include an embodied carbon assessment;

(b) consider a relevant embodied carbon assessment as a material factor when considering whether to grant permission for the development.

(2) The Secretary of State must—

(a) approve a methodology for calculating embodied carbon emissions;

(b) provide guidance on how the whole-life carbon emissions of buildings must be expressed; and

(c) establish a centralised reporting platform to which embodied carbon and whole life carbon assessments must be submitted.

(3) For the purposes of this section—

“embodied carbon” means the total emissions associated with materials and construction processes involved in the full life cycle of a project;

“whole life carbon” means the combination of embodied and operational emissions across the full life cycle of a project;

“operational emissions” means the carbon emissions from the energy used once a project is operational, including from heating, lighting and cooling.”

This new clause would require the submission of embodied carbon assessments for larger developments as part of the planning application and consideration of these by local planning authorities. The Secretary of State will be required to approve a methodology, issue guidance, and establish a centralised reporting platform for whole-life carbon emissions.

New clause 78—Requirement regarding the provision of social housing under housing plans—

“(1) Any national or local plan or strategy which relates to the building or development of housing must—

- (a) state the proportion of social housing which must be provided as part of any such development; and
- (b) require any such housing to be delivered to a net zero carbon building standard.

(2) The proportion of social rent housing to be provided under subsection (1)(a) must be based on an assessment of the need for social rent homes in the relevant area.

(3) Any assessment of the need for social rent homes must consider—

- (a) levels of homelessness,
- (b) the number of children in temporary accommodation, and
- (c) the number of households on social housing waiting lists, in the relevant area.”

This new clause would require housing plans to state the proportion of social rent housing to be provided (based on an assessment of need) and require those homes to be built to a net zero carbon building standard.

New clause 79—Duty of cooperation between neighbouring authorities—

“(1) A local planning authority has a duty to cooperate with neighbouring local planning authorities when considering an application for development consent which could affect the area of a neighbouring local planning authority.

(2) In carrying out a duty to cooperate under this section, a local planning authority must—

- (a) consult neighbouring authorities on the content of the application;
- (b) take account of any neighbouring authority’s response to such consultation when reaching a decision on the application.

(3) For the purposes of this section, a development affects the area of a neighbouring local planning authority if—

- (a) it directly adjoins any land within the area; or
- (b) the construction, maintenance and occupation of the development would alter the environment, character, or infrastructure of the area.”

This new clause will ensure that Local Authorities have to work together when considering planning applications that will also impact the neighbouring Authority due to its geographical location.

New clause 80—Distribution of s.106 funding between local planning areas—

“(1) This section applies where a person interested in land in the area of a local planning authority has—

- (a) entered into a planning obligation under section 106 of the Town and Country Act 1990,
- (b) the planning obligation requires a sum or sums to be paid to the authority on a specified date or dates or periodically, and
- (c) the land in question is within a certain proximity of an area of a neighbouring local planning authority.

(2) A local planning authority has a duty to distribute part or parts of the sum or sums to the neighbouring planning authority.

(3) Where the conditions in subsection (1) are met in relation to more than one neighbouring local planning authority, the duty applies in such a way as to require distribution to each neighbouring authority.

(4) The Secretary of State may by regulations made by statutory instrument specify—

- (a) the method by which any sum payable to a neighbouring local authority is to be calculated and distributed;
- (b) the meanings of—
 - (i) “certain proximity of an area”, and
 - (ii) “neighbouring planning authority”
- for the purposes of this section;
- (c) any other provisions as the Secretary of State deems appropriate for the purposes of this section.

(5) A statutory instrument containing regulations under this section may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.”

This new clause will require local authorities to distribute s.106 funding to neighbouring authorities should a development be in proximity to that local authority area.

New clause 81—Subsidy of s.106 agreements prior to development—

“(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a person interested in land in the area of a local planning authority has entered into a planning obligation under section 106 of the Town and Country Act 1990, and
- (b) the person has received development consent for—
 - (i) housing, and
 - (ii) any infrastructure reasonably connected with the provision of that housing.

(2) The person may only begin development if—

- (a) the Secretary of State has paid to the local planning authority a sum equivalent to any sum under the section 106 agreement for the purposes of developing infrastructure;
- (b) the person applying for permission must enter into an agreement with the Secretary of State to repay to them the total sum paid out under paragraph (a) (a “repayment agreement”).

(3) For the purposes of this section, “infrastructure” has such meaning as the Secretary of State may specify, but may include—

- (a) roadways;
- (b) utilities;
- (c) educational provision;
- (d) medical facilities;
- (e) recreational facilities;
- (f) routes for active travel.”

This amendment will enable the Secretary of State to pay the equivalent of s.106 contributions to local authorities up front for the purpose of developing planned infrastructure, and thereafter reclaim it from the relevant developer.

New clause 82—Play Sufficiency Duty—

“(1) A local planning authority in England must, so far as reasonably practicable, assess, secure, enhance, and protect sufficient opportunities for children’s play when exercising any of its planning functions.

(2) In fulfilling the duty under subsection (1), a local planning authority must—

- (a) undertake and publish play sufficiency assessments at intervals to be defined in regulations;
- (b) integrate the findings and recommendations of such assessments into local plans, relevant strategies, infrastructure planning, and development decisions;

- (c) not give permission for any development which would lead to a net loss of formal or informal play spaces except where equivalent or improved provision is secured;
- (d) require new developments to provide high-quality, accessible, inclusive play opportunities which incorporate natural features and are integrated within broader public spaces; and
- (e) consult regularly with children, families, communities, and play professionals regarding play provision.

(3) A play sufficiency assessment produced under subsection (2)(a) must specifically evaluate and report on the quantity, quality, accessibility, inclusivity, and integration of play opportunities within the planning authority's area.

(4) The Secretary of State may, by regulations, specify—

- (a) the frequency, methodology, content, and publication requirements of play sufficiency assessments;
- (b) minimum design standards and quality expectations for formal and informal play provision;
- (c) developer obligations regarding play infrastructure contributions to be secured through planning conditions.

(5) For the purposes of this section—

“play” means activities undertaken by children and young people that are freely chosen, self-directed, and carried out following their own interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons;

“play opportunities” include formal and informal play spaces, parks, open spaces, streets, schools, neighbourhood spaces, natural green areas, active travel routes, supervised play settings (including adventure playgrounds), and community recreation facilities;

“sufficient” means adequate in quantity, quality, accessibility, inclusivity, and integration within community infrastructure.”

New clause 83—*Housing developments to include children's play areas*—

Any application for the development of new housing where the majority of units comprise more than one bedroom must include provision for adequate outdoor children's play areas as part of the development.”

New clause 84—*Prohibition of battery energy storage systems on higher-quality agricultural land*—

“No permission may be granted for the building or installation of provision for battery energy storage systems where the development would involve the building on or development of agricultural land at grade 1, 2, or 3a.”

This new clause would prohibit the development of battery energy storage systems on higher quality agricultural land.

New clause 86—*Joint Nature and Conservation Committee Report*—

“(1) The Joint Nature and Conservation Committee must publish a report on how best to consolidate the provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 into the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in so far as they relate to planning and development.

(2) The report required by subsection (1) must be published by the end of 2025.”

This new clause would require the Joint Nature and Conservation Committee to report on how to consolidate the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, in so far as they relate to planning and development.

New clause 87—*Designation of chalk streams as protected sites*—

“Within six months of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must publish proposals to designate more chalk streams as protected sites”.

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to designate as protected sites more of the 209 out of 220 chalk streams that are not currently legally protected.

New clause 88—*Use of grey water recycling in new developments*—

“In any application for development, the applicant must include a statement outlining their consideration of and proposals for the use of grey water recycling in the new property.”

New clause 89—*Prohibition of cross-subsidy on Rural Exception Sites*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, take steps to prohibit cross-subsidy on Rural Exception Sites.

(2) Steps to be taken must include reviewing the National Planning Policy Framework.

(3) For the purposes of this section, “cross-subsidy” means the use of any financial proceeds from the sale or letting of housing at market rate on a Rural Exception Site for the purposes of subsidising the sale or letting of any other housing on the same Rural Exception Site.”

This new clause would require the secretary of state to take steps to prohibit cross-subsidy on rural exception sites.

New clause 90—*Cap on profits for developers*—

“(1) Within six months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must make regulations which limit the profits which may be made by a housing or property developer.

(2) Regulations under this section must—

(a) provide that a developer may not make a profit from a development which is greater than 10% of the estimated cost of the scheme to be developed;

(b) where a developer makes a profit of more than 10%, set out procedures for the reclamation and use of any excess profit.

(3) This section applies to all developments which receive consent after the passing of this Act.”

This new clause would limit the profit a developer makes from any development to 10% of the estimated cost of the development.

New clause 91—*Extension and application of use classes in planning*—

“(1) A local planning authority must prescribe a limit on the number of buildings within its area which are used for the purposes of Class C5 or C6.

(2) Before setting a limit under subsection (1) a local planning authority must—

(a) consult residents of the local planning area, and

(b) publish a report on the outcome of the consultation.

(3) A local planning authority must refuse any application for development consent which would have the effect of increasing the number of buildings used for the purposes of Class C5 or C6 above any limit prescribed under subsection (1).”

This new clause would require local planning authorities to place a limit on the number (or proportion of housing stock) of second homes and short-term lets in their area, and refuse planning applications that would have the effect of exceeding the limit.

New clause 92—*Change in use class upon transfer of property*—

“(1) Where a building—

(a) is used the purposes of Class C5 or C6, and

(b) there is a change in its registered owner,

the use class of the building is to be automatically amended to Class C3.

(2) In this section, “change in its registered owner” means any change in the ownership of a property which requires a registration, or amendment to an existing registration made, with the Land Registry.”

This new clause would require that when property used as a short-term let or second home changes owners, it reverts immediately to having permission only to be used as a main residence, unless subsequent planning permission is sought and secured.

New clause 93—Permitted development and charging points—

“(1) Part 2 of Schedule 2 to The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph D of class D, after “parking”, insert “or adjacent to a public highway lawfully used for on-street parking where a local highway authority approved cross-pavement charging solution is installed, ”.

(3) In paragraph 1 of class D, after subparagraph (a) add—

“(b) overhang the footway by more than 150mm perpendicular to the property boundary including the cable plug when it is plugged in;”.

This new clause extends permitted development rights to charge points powering EVs parked on-street, where an approved cross-pavement charging solution is present and the charger does not overhang the footway by more than 15cm. Installations still require approval by the Local Highways Authority to control liabilities, maintenance, and parking arrangements.

New clause 94—Installation of digital infrastructure—

“In Section 48 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (streets, street works and undertakers), after subsection (3) insert—

“(3ZA) In this Part, “street works” also includes works relating to digital infrastructure, and any reference to subsection (3) is to be read accordingly.”.

New clause 95—Digital infrastructure planning officers—

“(1) Local planning authorities must appoint persons to carry out functions relating to the promotion of digital infrastructure development within the planning system.

(2) Such persons may—

- (a) advise planning officers, committees, and any other relevant person about the inclusion of digital infrastructure within a proposed development;
- (b) assess the digital infrastructure needs of any local community likely to be affected by a proposed development;
- (c) propose amendments to proposed developments to improve the provision of digital infrastructure;
- (d) carry out any other duty relating to the assessment and provision of digital infrastructure within proposed developments as the local planning authority may require.

(3) Any amendment proposed under paragraph (2)(c) may include alternation to existing street furniture and infrastructure provision for the purposes of fulfilling the digital infrastructure needs of a proposed development.”

New clause 96—Assessment of need for banking services—

(1) In any case where a proposed development in a settlement would have the potential effect of increasing the population size of a town and any settlements reasonably considered reliant on the town for provision of public services to at least 5000 persons, the local planning authority has a duty to assess the need for a banking hub within the town settlement.

(2) In meeting a duty under this section, the local planning authority may consult—

- (a) residents of the settlement and its local area;
- (b) the relevant developer;
- (c) the Post Office;
- (d) LINK;
- (e) providers of banking services, and
- (f) any other relevant person.

(3) The local authority must publish a report on its assessment before any grant of permission can be made.”

New clause 97—Flood risk mitigation: planning permission—

“When considering an application for development consent, a local planning authority has a duty to consider whether any development of the land for which consent is sought could have the effect of increasing flood risk, or reducing flood mitigation, to any neighbouring land or development.”

New clause 98—Flood resilience measures for new homes—

“(1) Within six months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must make regulations under section 1 of the Building Act 1984 to require that property flood resilience measures are included in any new homes.

(2) Property flood resilience measures under this section may include—

- (a) raised electrical sockets;
- (b) non-return valves on utility pipes;
- (c) airbricks;
- (d) resilient wall plaster;
- (e) any other measure as the Secretary of State may specify.”

New clause 99—Obligation on developers to consider climate and flood resilience—

“(1) No local planning authority may approve an application for development unless it is satisfied that the applicant has considered how the development would contribute to—

- (a) the UK’s climate resilience, and
- (b) flood resilience in the area surrounding the development.

(2) The Secretary of State must, every twelve months starting with the day twelve months after which this Act is passed, publish a review of the extent to which applications approved in the previous twelve months would contribute to the aims set out in subsection (1).”

New clause 100—Conditions to mitigate overheating risk—

“In section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, after subsection (1) insert—

“(1ZA) Where an application is made to a local planning authority for planning permission for residential development, the authority may impose conditions which require the implementation of measures to mitigate the risk of overheating where local climatic data indicates elevated risk.”

This new clause would allow local planning authorities to impose conditions on residential developments to mitigate the risk of overheating, where local climate data shows elevated risk.

New clause 101—Cooling hierarchy guidance—

“The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, issue guidance for local planning authorities which—

- (a) outlines a cooling hierarchy; and
- (b) provides guidance on the application of the cooling hierarchy in the exercise of a local planning authority’s planning and development functions.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to publish guidance for local planning authorities on applying the “cooling hierarchy” - a structured approach to reducing overheating risk in buildings, prioritising passive and sustainable design measures.

New clause 102—Overheating risk assessments—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, require all applications for planning permission for residential development to include an overheating risk assessment.

(2) An overheating risk assessment must be conducted in accordance with—

- (a) the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers' design methodology for the assessment of overheating risk in homes, or
- (b) any successor standard designated by the Secretary of State."

This new clause would require all planning applications for residential development to include an overheating risk assessment, conducted in line with the latest recognised technical standard, such as those of the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE).

New clause 103—Incorporation of features to mitigate overheating risk—

"(1) When preparing any plan or strategy relating to the development of housing under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, a local planning authority must have regard to the need for residential developments to incorporate passive design features that mitigate the risk of overheating.

(2) Passive design features may include—

- (a) cross-ventilation,
- (b) external shading,
- (c) solar control glazing, and
- (d) thermal mass."

This new clause would require local planning authorities, when preparing housing-related plans or strategies, to have regard to the need for residential developments to include passive design features that reduce the risk of overheating, such as cross-ventilation, external shading, solar control glazing, and thermal mass.

New clause 104—Access to data on overheating risk—

"(1) For the purposes of supporting the making of local plans, spatial development strategies and planning decisions, the Secretary of State must make provision for local planning authorities to have access to relevant data relating to overheating risk.

(2) The Secretary of State must ensure that data on overheating risk made available to local planning authorities is updated at intervals not exceeding five years."

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to ensure that local planning authorities have access to up-to-date data on overheating risk, to support the making of local plans, spatial development strategies, and planning decisions.

New clause 105—Regard to flood risk guidance when considering development on flood plains—

"(1) When preparing a local plan for an area which includes a flood plain or considering an application for development on a flood plain, a local planning authority must have regard to—

- (a) the sequential and exception tests;
- (b) the most up to date guidance on flood risk produced by the Government.

(2) For the purposes of this section—

"sequential test" means steering new development to areas with the lowest risk of flooding, taking all sources of flood risk and climate change into account. Where it is not possible to locate development in low-risk areas, reasonably available sites within medium risk areas should be considered, with sites within high-risk areas only considered where there are no reasonably available sites in low and medium risk areas;

"exception test" means that it has been demonstrated that the development would provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh the flood risk and that the development will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall."

This new clause would require local planning authorities to have regard to the sequential and exception tests on managing flood risk when considering applications for development on flood plains.

New clause 106—Requirement for installation of flood resilience measures—

"(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, amend relevant Approved Documents to require the installation of flood resilience measures in properties being developed on land which is at risk of flooding.

(2) Flood resilience measures must be specified and installed in accordance with the Construction Industry Research and Information Association's code of practice for property flood resilience."

This new clause would require Approved Documents to require the installation, to CIRIA's code of practice, of property flood resilience measures in properties being developed on land which is at risk of flooding.

New clause 108—Planning applications for homes to address housing need—

"(1) Where an application proposes to provide housing, the applicant must demonstrate how the proposed development will contribute towards reducing the housing need in the local planning area where the development would take place.

(2) A "housing need" under this section—

- (a) has such meaning as a local planning authority for the relevant local planning area may determine, and
- (b) must be communicated clearly to any applicants proposing to provide housing in reasonable time before any application is submitted."

New clause 109—Conditions for development on greenfield sites—

"Permission may only be granted for development on a greenfield site where—

- (a) the applicant has proved that there are no appropriate alternative brownfield sites which could be used for the development, and
- (b) the applicant has held a public consultation on the development of the greenfield site."

New clause 110—Prioritisation of development on brownfield sites—

"(1) Any local or national plan or strategy which relates to the building or provision of housing must prioritise development on brownfield sites.

(2) The Secretary of State must take steps to support the development of housing on brownfield sites.

(3) Steps to be taken under subsection (2) may include—

- (a) the disapplication of certain planning requirements or regulations;
- (b) exemption from certain consultation requirements."

New clause 111—Statements of service charges—

"(1) Where it is proposed that a development of social housing will impose service charges on residents, the application for such a development must include a statement of service charges which are to be applicable to residents of the new housing.

(2) Before granting permission for such development, a local planning authority must consider whether the statement of service charges—

- (a) proposes service charge models which are fair, affordable, appropriate, and limited to services directly accessible to the residents;
- (b) includes provision for annual, itemised breakdowns of applicable service charges to be provided to residents;
- (c) provides for service charges to not apply where units are used as temporary emergency accommodation for individuals or families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness."

New clause 112—Requirement to undertake planned affordable housing construction (No. 2)—

"Where an application proposes—

- (a) to develop more than 10 houses, and

- (b) that at least 20% of the houses to be developed will be social housing, no amendment to the amount of social housing to be developed may be made if the amendment reduces the amount of social housing below 20% of the houses to be developed if the reason for the amendment is the viability to the applicant.”

This new clause would prevent developers from seeking to reduce commitments to provide social housing on the grounds of viability.

New clause 113—*New towns to contribute towards social housing targets—*

“In any national or local plan or strategy which sets targets for the building of new social housing, houses built as part of new towns may contribute to the meeting of such targets.”

This new clause would ensure that new towns contribute to social housing targets.

New clause 115—*Identification and protection of Green Belt—*

“(1) Within two years of the passing of this Act, a local planning authority must identify land within its area which it is necessary to protect from development.

(2) It is necessary to protect land from development under subsection (1) if such protection would—

- (a) limit the expansion of large built-up areas;
- (b) prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- (c) preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- (d) encourage the development of previously-developed land in urban areas.

(3) A local planning authority may designate as Green Belt any land identified under subsection (1) as necessary to protect, including undeveloped land within, and green wedges of land that extend into, built up areas.

(4) A local planning authority must prevent any development of land designated as Green Belt under this section for a minimum period of 20 years starting on the day on which it is so designated.”

This new clause would ensure that a local planning authority can identify land which it deems necessary to protect from development.

New clause 116—*Heritage tree preservation orders—*

“(1) A local planning authority may make a heritage tree preservation order in respect of a heritage tree.

(2) The Secretary of State must make provision by regulations for heritage tree preservation orders, which must include provision—

- (a) for a heritage tree to have all the protections afforded to a tree by a tree preservation order under section 198 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990;
- (b) requiring the owner of a heritage tree, or any other occupier of the land where the tree stands, to advertise appropriately its status as such, and the penalties for harming it, to persons approaching the tree or planning activities in its vicinity;
- (c) enabling the responsible planning authority, Natural England or the Secretary of State to order the owner of a heritage tree or any other occupier of the land where the tree stands to take specified reasonable steps to maintain and protect the tree and, if the owner or occupier does not take such steps in reasonable time, to take such steps itself and to recover the reasonable cost of doing so from the owner or occupier;
- (d) for the responsible planning authority, Natural England, the Secretary of State or another prescribed responsible body to enter into an agreement with the owner or occupier about the care and preservation of the heritage tree (a “heritage tree partnership agreement”), including about costs;
- (e) for additional or higher penalties for breach of a heritage tree preservation order.

(3) The Secretary of State must make provision for the creation, publication and maintenance of a register of heritage trees in respect of which heritage tree preservation orders have been made.

(4) For the purposes of this section, “heritage tree” means a tree listed as such by Natural England on grounds of exceptional historic, landscape, cultural or ecologic importance.

(5) Natural England must create, publish and maintain a list of heritage trees in England for the purposes of this section.”

This new clause provides for the protection of heritage trees.

New clause 117—*Development consent for betting shops above street level—*

“A planning authority must not consider any application for development consent—

- (a) for a new betting shop, or
- (b) to change the use of an existing building to, or to include, a betting shop,

unless the relevant premises proposed to function as a betting shop are at least one storey above street level.”

New clause 118—*Development of dwellinghouses above shops—*

“(1) This section applies where an application for development consent proposes to develop any part of a building which is—

- (a) part of a retail or commercial premises, and
- (b) is at least one story above ground level.

(2) It is permitted to—

- (a) develop any such part of the building for the purposes of dwellinghouses;
- (b) include in development safe access and egress to the new dwellinghouses;

that does not require any such access and egress through the existing retail or commercial premises.”

New clause 119—*Internal Drainage Boards to be statutory consultees—*

“In Schedule 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, after paragraph (zf) insert—

zg	Development falling within any area covered by an Internal Drainage Board	The relevant Internal Drainage Board”
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New clause 120—*Accessibility standards for new homes—*

“(1) It is a condition of any grant of planning permission for new homes that—

- all planned homes meet Building Regulations M4(2) (accessible and adaptable dwellings); and
- the relevant number of homes, as set out in the following table, must meet Building Regulation M4(3) (wheelchair user dwellings)—

<i>Number of homes in development</i>	<i>Number required to meet Building Regulation M4(3)</i>
Up to and including 9 homes	A minimum of 1 home
Exceeding 9 homes	10% of all homes, rounded to the nearest whole number”

New clause 121—*Residential development on flood plains—*

“(1) Where a development involves the building of residential accommodation on a flood plain, no living or social spaces may be located on ground level.

(2) For the purposes of this section, “living or social spaces” include bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens and other private or communal rooms or spaces used for social or recreational purposes or for the preparation or consumption of food, but does not include garages or other rooms or spaces used primarily for the purposes of storage.”

New clause 122—*Availability of small and medium sized properties to be considered*—

“(1) When considering an application for development which would increase the size or number of bedrooms in a residential property which has a maximum of two bedrooms, a local planning authority must consider the availability and affordability of small and medium sized properties in the authority’s area.

(2) Where the authority considers that the extension of a small or medium sized property would have a detrimental impact on the availability and affordability of such properties in the authority’s area, the authority may not grant permission for the proposed development.”

New clause 123—*Notices*—

“(1) Where a party is required to publish a notice relating to proposed or prospective development, such a requirement may be satisfied by the relevant party providing the information to be included in such a notice to—

- (a) affected individuals directly;
- (b) a relevant parish or local authority.

(2) Where there is no relevant parish authority, the requirement under this section is satisfied if the relevant party notifies the nearest equivalent authority.

(3) In the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, omit the words from “; and” in paragraph 13(1)(a) to the end of paragraph 13(1).”

New clause 124—*Notices (No. 2)*—

“(1) Where a party is required to publish notices relating to proposed or prospective development in the vicinity of the area which is to be developed, the relevant party must—

- (a) place such a notice at the main entrance to the property or site or, where there are multiple entrances, at each entrance;
- (b) serve notice on the owner of every property located within 250 metres of the external boundary of the relevant site.”

New clause 125—*Agreements on adoption of new highways*—

“(1) The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 62 (applications for planning permission or permission in principle), after subsection (4A) insert—

“(4B) Where an application seeks permission for development which includes the construction of a new highway, the local planning authority must require that the application includes a declaration specifying the extent of any highway for which the applicant intends to seek adoption by the local highways authority.

(4C) A declaration under subsection (4B) must contain such information and be in such form as the Secretary of State may specify.”

(3) After section 106C insert—

“106D Requirement to enter into highways adoption agreement before occupation

- (1) Where the conditions in subsection (2) are satisfied, an agreement must be made under section 38(1) of the Highways Act 1980 (power of highway authorities to adopt by agreement) prior to the occupation of land or buildings resulting from development.
- (2) The conditions are—
 - (a) that a declaration has been made under section 62(4B) of this Act which specifies that all or part of the highway is intended for adoption; and
 - (b) that the land or buildings to be occupied front one or more highway section intended for adoption.
- (3) Any agreement must include all highway sections intended for adoption that front the land or buildings to be occupied.

(4) For the purposes of this section, “front” has the meaning given for “fronting” in section 203 of the Highways Act 1980.””

This new clause would require developers to declare, when seeking planning permission, that they intend for a highways authority to adopt the roads they construct as part of their development, and enter into an agreement with the highways authority before occupying any building next to the relevant roads.

Amendment 87, in clause 2, page 3, line 33, leave out subsection (3).

This amendment retains the requirement for the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament a statement setting out their response to a resolution of either House of Parliament or the recommendations of a committee of either House relating to a proposed national planning policy statement.

Amendment 128, page 4, line 9, leave out paragraph (a).

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament a response to a resolution made by either House or recommendations made by a committee of either House in relation to amendments to national policy statements. The requirement to do so is otherwise removed by 2(a).

Amendment 145, in clause 25, page 34, line 34, after “electricity suppliers” insert “and generators”.

This amendment would extend the financial benefit scheme for people living near network transmission infrastructure to those living near new energy generation infrastructure.

Amendment 146, page 34, line 38, after “plant” insert “, energy generation,”.

This amendment is related to Amendment 145.

Amendment 147, page 35, line 2, after “system” insert

“or is intended to generate electricity.”

This amendment is related to Amendment 145.

Government amendment 93.

Amendment 3, page 53, line 22, leave out clause 40.

This amendment aims to conserve the listed building conservation area and scheduled ancient monument consent requirements that would otherwise be disapplied for transport projects here.

Government amendments 94 to 98.

Amendment 122, in clause 46, page 58, line 10, leave out “(5)” and insert “(6)”.

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 123.

Amendment 123, page 58, line 38, at end insert—

“(5A) After subsection (5), insert—

“(6) References in this Part to public charge points are to be taken as including cross-pavement charging solutions.”

This amendment will extend the easements being provided to public charge points of installation without the need for a section 50 street works licence to approved cross-pavement charging solutions. Each site remains subject to Local Highways Authority approval, enabling control over liabilities, maintenance and parking arrangements.

Amendment 124, page 59, line 9, at end insert—

“‘cross-pavement charging solution’ means a local highway authority approved device, solution or apparatus to safely convey electricity from premises across or under a footway to a vehicle that is capable of being propelled by electrical power derived from a storage battery (or for discharging electricity stored in such a vehicle);”.

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 123.

Amendment 125, page 59, line 23, at end insert—

“cross-pavement charging solution section 105(1);”.

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 124.

Amendment 127, page 60, line 5, at end insert—

“References to public charge points are to be taken as including cross-pavement charging solutions.”

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 125.

Amendment 141, page 60, line 5, at end insert—

“(10) The Automated and Electric Vehicles Act 2018 is amended as set out in subsections (11) and (12).

(11) In section 10 (public charging or refuelling points: access, standards and connection)—

(a) in subsection (1), after paragraph (b) insert—

‘(ba) the accessibility of public charging or refuelling points;’

(b) after subsection (3) insert—

‘(3A) Regulations under subsection (1)(ba) may, for example, require the operator of a public charging or refuelling point to ensure that the point complies with minimum specifications for placement of a charge point display, bay size, and the height and weight of the charging cable.’

(12) In section 14 (transmission of data relating to charge points), in subsection (2) after ‘energy consumption’ insert ‘, accessibility’.

Amendment 139, in clause 47, page 60, line 12, leave out “(2)” and insert “(1A)”.

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 140.

Amendment 140, page 60, line 12, at end insert—

“(1A) After subsection (1ZZA) insert—

‘(1ZZB) References in subsection (1) to functions of a local planning authority include recovery of costs to authority resulting from enforcement of any breach of planning permission.’”

This amendment allows local planning authorities to levy a fee or charge to recover any costs to them associated with enforcing planning rules. It is linked to Amendment 139.

Amendment 133, page 60, line 25, at end insert—

“(ba) the requirement for proportionality in the level of the fee or charge, based on the nature and size of the development to which the fee or charge will apply;”.

This amendment would require authorities to consider the proportionality of the level of any fee or charge they set, based on the nature and size of the works to which the fee or charge will apply.

Amendment 126, page 60, line 35, at end insert—

“‘cross-pavement charging solution’ means a local highway authority approved device, solution or apparatus to safely convey electricity from premises across or under a footway to a vehicle that is capable of being propelled by electrical power derived from a storage battery (or for discharging electricity stored in such a vehicle);”.

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 123.

Amendment 129, page 61, line 3, after “imposed” insert

“, and must be such an amount as the authority, Mayor or specified person considers to be a proportionate contribution towards the carrying out of their functions under Part 2 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.”

This amendment, which is linked with Amendment 130, would expand the planning fees ringfence to allow local planning authorities to spend revenue from planning fees on local plan-making functions under Part 2 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Amendment 130, page 61, line 15, at end insert—

“(ba) functions under Part 2 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.”

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 129.

Amendment 1, page 67, line 1, leave out clause 50.

This amendment would ensure that planning committees retain their existing powers.

Amendment 74, in clause 51, page 72, line 27, at end insert—

“(1A) A spatial development strategy must prioritise for new development previously-developed land.”

This amendment would require that spatial development strategies prioritise development on brownfield land over other locations.

Amendment 15, page 72, line 29, at end insert—

“(2A) A spatial development strategy must have regard to the need to provide 150,000 new social homes nationally a year.”

Amendment 21, page 72, line 38, at end insert—

“(4A) For the purposes of subsection (4), ‘infrastructure and public services’ must include—

- (a) primary and secondary healthcare provision, including mental health provision;
- (b) social care provision;
- (c) education, skills and training provision;
- (d) infrastructure for active travel and public transport;
- (e) sufficient road capacity;
- (f) access to such commercial amenities, including shops, as the strategic planning authority deems necessary to support residents of the strategy area;
- (g) recreational and leisure facilities; and
- (h) publicly accessible green spaces.

(4B) A spatial development strategy must include targets for the provision of strategically important infrastructure and public services which are—

- (a) considered to be appropriate by the relevant planning authorities and delivery bodies;
- (b) periodically amended to account for changes in population size or dynamic within the strategy area;
- (c) annually reported against with regard to the strategic planning authority’s performance.”

This amendment would clarify the meaning of strategically important infrastructure and public services, require targets for such provision to be set, and for performance against such targets to be annually reported.

Amendment 77, page 72, line 39, after “describe” insert

“(subject to the conditions in subsection (5A))”.

Amendment 148, page 73, line 1, leave out paragraph (a) and insert—

- “(a) an amount or distribution of housing the provision of which either—
- (i) is considered by the strategic planning authority to be of strategic importance to the strategy area, or
- (ii) meets housing need within, or related to, the strategy area.”

This amendment would enable strategic planning boards authorities to choose whether housing allocation based on local need or strategic importance.

Amendment 71, page 73, line 7, at end insert—

- “(c) a specific density of housing development which ensures effective use of land and which the strategic planning authority considers to be of strategic importance to the strategy area.”

This amendment requires strategic planning authorities to include a specific housing density in their plans which ensures land is used effectively where it is considered strategically important.

Amendment 149, page 73, line 7, at end insert—

- “(c) the timetable for, and annual targets relating to the delivery of, housing specified or described under this subsection.

- (5A) In subsection (5) ‘housing need’ has such meaning as a strategic planning authority may determine in consultation with local planning authorities within the strategy area.”

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 148. It requires a strategic planning board to set targets for the delivery of any housing specified under this section, and allows a strategic planning board to define housing need in consultation with relevant local authorities.

Amendment 78, page 73, line 7, at end insert—

- “(5A) Where a spatial development strategy specifies or describes an amount or distribution of housing, the strategy must not—

- (a) increase the number of homes to be developed in any part of the strategy area by more than 20%, or
- (b) reduce the required number of homes to be developed by more than 20% in any part of a strategy area which is an urban area,

when compared to the previous spatial development strategy or the amount of housing currently provided in the relevant area.

- (5B) In subsection (5A) ‘urban area’ has such meaning as the Secretary of State may by regulations specify.”

This amendment would place limits on changes to housing targets in a spatial development strategy.

Amendment 134, page 73, line 7, at end insert—

- “(5A) For the purposes of subsection (5), any amount or distribution of housing or affordable housing includes Gypsy and Traveller sites provided privately, by local authorities, or by other registered social landlords.”

This amendment would include Gypsy and Traveller sites in the strategically important housing identified in spatial development strategies.

Amendment 16, page 73, line 10, at end insert—

- “(6A) Where a strategy area includes a chalk stream, the spatial development strategy must include policies on permissible activities within the area of the stream for the purposes of preventing harm or damage to the stream or its surrounding area.”

This amendment would ensure spatial development strategies include policies to protect chalk streams.

Amendment 70, page 73, line 10, at end insert—

- “(6A) A spatial development strategy must—

- (a) list any chalk streams identified in the strategy area;
- (b) identify the measures to be taken to protect any identified chalk streams from pollution, abstraction, encroachment and other forms of environmental damage; and
- (c) impose responsibilities on strategic planning authorities in relation to the protection and enhancement of chalk stream habitats.”

This amendment would require a special development strategy to list chalk streams in the strategy area, outline measures to protect them from environmental harm, and impose responsibility on strategic planning authorities to protect and enhance chalk stream environments.

Amendment 75, page 73, line 10, at end insert—

- “(6A) A strategic planning board has a duty to ensure that any development specified or described under subsections (4) or (5) does not take place on green belt land unless there is no practicable option for development in existing urban areas, including by—
- (a) increasing the density of existing development, and
 - (b) regenerating an existing development,
- in an urban area.”

This amendment would ensure that a strategic planning board must only propose development on green belt land where development in urban areas is not possible.

Amendment 76, page 73, line 10, at end insert—

- “(6A) Where a spatial development strategy proposes the development or use of agricultural land, the strategy must consider—

- (a) the grade of such agricultural land;
- (b) the cumulative impact of projects developing or using such agricultural land.”

Amendment 17, page 73, line 33, at end insert—

- “(11A) A spatial development strategy must—

- (a) take account of Local Wildlife Sites in or relating to the strategy area, and
- (b) avoid development or land use change which would adversely affect or hinder the protection or recovery of nature in a Local Wildlife Site.”

This amendment would ensure that spatial development strategies take account of Local Wildlife Sites.

Amendment 91, page 73, line 33, at end insert—

- “(11A) A spatial development strategy must include policies relating to the provision and protection of land for community gardening and allotments”

This amendment would require planning authorities to include their policies in relation to the provision of allotment and community garden land in their spatial development strategy.

Amendment 67, page 74, line 3, leave out from “means” to end of line 6 and insert

“housing which is to be let as social rent housing.

- (15) For the purposes of this section, ‘social rent housing’ has the meaning given by paragraph 7 of the Direction on the Rent Standard 2019 and paragraphs 4 and 8 of the Direction on the Rent Standard 2023.”

This amendment would define affordable housing, for the purposes of spatial development strategies, as social rent housing, as defined in the Directions on Rent Standards.

Amendment 23, page 74, line 5, after “2008,” insert—

- “(aa) housing provided by an almshouse charity.”

Amendment 81, page 76, line 29, leave out from “must” to end of line 38 and insert

“consult—

- (a) residents of the relevant area;
- (b) businesses located in the relevant area; and
- (c) representatives of those that the authority considers may have an interest in any relevant area.”

This amendment would change the existing requirement in the Bill for a strategic planning authority to notify specified parties to a requirement to consult local residents, businesses, and representative organisations.

Amendment 18, page 77, leave out line 33 and insert—

- “(5) A strategic planning authority must prepare and consult on a statement of community involvement which provides for persons affected by the strategy to have a right to be heard at an examination.”

This amendment would require strategic planning authorities to consider notifying disabled people about the publication of a draft spatial development strategy.

Amendment 72, page 77, leave out line 33 and insert—

- “(5) Any person who makes representations seeking to amend a draft spatial development strategy must, if they so request, be given the opportunity to appear before and be heard by the person conducting out the examination.”

This amendment requires that anyone who submits representations to amend a draft spatial development strategy has a right to appear in person and be heard during the examination of the strategy.

Amendment 142, page 81, line 4, at end insert—

“(4A) No review of a spatial development strategy may be undertaken within five years of the publication of the relevant strategic planning authority’s first spatial development strategy following the passing of the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, except where such a review is consented to by the Secretary of State.”

This amendment would mean that an authority’s first spatial development strategy may not be reviewed for the first five years except with the agreement of the Secretary of State.

Amendment 143, page 81, line 26, after “strategy” insert

“, but this may not, within a period of five years following the publication of the relevant strategic planning authority’s first spatial development strategy following the passing of the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, take the form of a full review of the strategy and the scope of any alterations must be agreed with the Secretary of State.”

This amendment would mean that an authority may not conduct a full review of its first spatial development strategy in the course of preparing alterations in the first five years.

Amendment 144, page 82, line 5, at end insert—

“(2A) Subsection (2) does not apply within the first five years of the publication of the relevant strategic planning authority’s first spatial development strategy following the passing of the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, except with the consent of the Secretary of State.”

This amendment would mean that an authority may not replace its first spatial development strategy within five years.

Amendment 24, page 89, line 28, leave out clause 52.

This amendment, along with Amendments 25 to 63, would leave out Part 3 of the Bill.

Amendment 6, in clause 52, page 89, line 35, after “to” insert “significantly”.

Amendment 82, page 90, line 4, at end insert—

“(1A) An environmental delivery plan may be prepared by a local planning authority, or incorporated into a local plan or supplementary planning document.

(1B) Where an environmental delivery plan is prepared by a local planning authority, references in sections 48 to 60 to Natural England should be read as referring to the relevant local planning authority.”

Amendment 25, page 90, line 14, leave out clause 53.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 26, page 91, line 12, leave out clause 54.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 7, in clause 54, page 91, line 27, leave out “an” and insert “a significant”.

This amendment would require that an improvement made to the conservation status of an identified environmental feature within environmental delivery plans should be significant.

Amendment 150, page 91, line 28, at end insert—

“(3A) An EDP must—

- (a) require developers to demonstrate that they have sought to avoid and minimize any negative effects on the identified environmental feature, and
- (b) only permit adverse effects on the identified environmental feature where they cannot be avoided and where the adverse effects will be compensated for.”

This amendment would ensure the mitigation hierarchy applies to development covered by EDPs.

Amendment 137, page 91, line 30, after “appropriate” insert

“and if there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest”.

Amendment 83, page 91, line 33, at end insert—

“(4A) Subsection (4) does not apply where an identified environmental feature is a protected feature of a protected site and is—

- (a) a chalk stream;
- (b) a blanket bog.”

Amendment 138, page 91, line 33, at end insert—

“(4A) Where an identified environmental feature is a protected species, the EDP should—

- (a) set out conservation measures that address the environmental impact of development on that feature within the relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy area, and
- (b) where Natural England considers it appropriate and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest, seek to improve the conservation status of the same feature elsewhere.”

Amendment 27, page 92, line 10, leave out clause 55.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 28, page 92, line 19, leave out clause 56.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Government amendment 99.

Amendment 69, in clause 56, page 93, line 8, at end insert—

“(10) An EDP must include a schedule setting out the timetable for the implementation of each conservation measure and for the reporting of results.

(11) A schedule included under subsection (10) must ensure that, where the development to which the EDP applies is in Natural England’s opinion likely to cause significant environmental damage, the corresponding conservation measures result in an improvement in the conservation status of the identified features prior to the damage being caused.

(12) In preparing a schedule under subsection (10) Natural England must have regard to the principle that enhancements should be delivered in advance of harm.”

This amendment would require Environmental Delivery Plans to set out a timetable for, and thereafter report on, conservation measures, and require improvement of the conservation status of specified features before development takes place in areas where Natural England considers development could cause significant environmental damage.

Amendment 29, page 93, line 10, leave out clause 57.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Government amendment 100.

Amendment 136, in clause 57, page 93, line 19, at end insert—

“(2A) When preparing an EDP, Natural England must—

- (a) demonstrate that there is reliable scientific evidence to suggest that implementing conservation measures as part of an EDP could contribute to a significant environmental improvement in the conservation status of the relevant environmental feature at an ecologically appropriate scale;
- (b) be able to establish sufficient baseline data on relevant protected features to enable an accurate assessment of the environmental impact of development on the identified environmental features; and
- (c) take account of the environmental principles set out in section 17 of the Environment Act 2021 and publish a statement explaining how it has done so.”

This amendment would require Natural England to provide scientific evidence on the expected effectiveness of the proposed conservation measures when preparing an EDP.

Government amendments 101 and 102.

Amendment 30, page 93, line 32, leave out clause 58.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Government amendments 103.

Amendment 84, in clause 58, page 94, line 14, at end insert—

- “(j) any impacted landowner,
- (k) sea fishing businesses, where the EDP covers an area which is adjacent to their fishing grounds,
- (l) the owners of fishing rights, where the EDP includes or otherwise affects rivers or lakes used for fishing.”

Government amendments 104 and 105.

Amendment 31, page 94, line 31, leave out clause 59.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 8, in clause 59, page 95, line 2, leave out “are likely to” and insert “will”.

This amendment seeks to strengthen the overall improvement test.

Amendment 9, page 95, line 2, after “sufficient to” insert “significantly”.

This amendment seeks to strengthen the overall improvement test.

Amendment 32, page 95, line 13, leave out clause 60.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 33, page 95, line 21, leave out clause 61.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 34, page 96, line 27, leave out clause 62.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 5, in clause 62, page 96, line 33, at end insert—

- “(2A) An EDP may not be amended if the amendment would reduce the amount, extent or impact of conservation measures that are to be taken to protect the identified environmental features.”

This amendment would mean that the Secretary of State could not amend an environmental delivery plan so as to reduce the measures to be taken to mitigate the negative environmental impact of a development.

Amendment 35, page 97, line 20, leave out clause 63.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 10, in clause 63, page 98, line 8, after “to” insert “significantly”.

Amendment 36, page 98, line 21, leave out clause 64.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Government amendment 106.

Amendment 37, page 99, line 33, leave out clause 65.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Government amendments 107 and 108.

Amendment 38, page 100, line 33, leave out clause 66.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 90, in clause 66, page 100, line 37, leave out from “that” to end of line 40 and insert

“the conservation status of environmental features are maintained and improved whilst supporting development to proceed where ecologically appropriate.”

This amendment would state that the purpose of the nature restoration levy is to enable development while maintaining and improving environmental features.

Amendment 39, page 101, line 1, leave out clause 67.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 40, page 101, line 29, leave out clause 68.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 41, page 102, line 36, leave out clause 69.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 42, page 103, line 9, leave out clause 70.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 4, in clause 70, page 103, line 13, at end insert—

- “(1A) The regulations must require Natural England to ensure that use of money received by virtue of the nature restoration levy is not unreasonably delayed.”

The amendment would ensure that funding would be available for upfront nature restoration and mitigation on development sites.

Amendment 11, page 104, line 5, leave out “separately” and insert

“to the body established under section [Independent oversight of administration of nature restoration levy]”.

This amendment is consequential on NC8.

Amendment 12, page 104, line 9, after “money” insert

“, and to report to the body established under section [Independent oversight of administration of nature restoration levy] accordingly”.

This amendment is consequential on NC8. This amendment would require Natural England to report to an independent oversight body on the use made of nature restoration levy money.

Amendment 13, page 104, line 10, after “report” insert

“to the body established under section [Independent oversight of administration of nature restoration levy]”.

This amendment is consequential on NC8. This amendment would require Natural England to report to an independent oversight body on expected charging collection and use of nature restoration levy money.

Amendment 14, page 104, line 16, after “paragraph”) insert

“, and to report to the body established under section [Independent oversight of administration of nature restoration levy] accordingly”.

This amendment is consequential on NC8. This amendment would require Natural England to report to an independent oversight body on money passed to another public authority.

Amendment 43, page 104, line 17, leave out clause 71.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 2, in clause 71, page 104, line 27, leave out from “levy” to end of line 30 and insert—

- “(4A) Provision under subsection (4) must include a condition that the nature restoration levy must be paid before development begins.”

This amendment would require that the levy is paid up front, so that nature restoration can begin immediately.

Amendment 44, page 105, line 8, leave out clause 72.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 45, page 106, line 32, leave out clause 73.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 46, page 107, line 18, leave out clause 74.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 47, page 107, line 24, leave out clause 75.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 48, page 107, line 32, leave out clause 76.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 49, page 108, line 19, leave out clause 77.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 50, page 109, line 27, leave out clause 78.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 51, page 110, line 38, leave out clause 79.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 52, page 111, line 9, leave out clause 80.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 53, page 111, line 25, leave out clause 81.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 54, page 112, line 33, leave out clause 82.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 55, page 113, line 29, leave out clause 83.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 56, page 114, line 3, leave out clause 84.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 57, page 114, line 33, leave out clause 85.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 58, page 115, line 10, leave out clause 86.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 59, page 116, line 19, leave out clause 87.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 60, page 117, line 1, leave out clause 88.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 61, page 117, line 10, leave out clause 89.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 62, page 117, line 27, leave out clause 90.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Amendment 63, page 118, line 29, leave out clause 91.

This amendment is linked to Amendment 24.

Government amendments 115 to 119 and 109 to 111.

Amendment 65, page 163, line 12, leave out schedule 5.

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 54.

Amendment 66, page 170, line 3, leave out schedule 6.

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 60.

Amendment 20, in schedule 6, page 174, line 37, leave out paragraph 41.

Amendment 131, in schedule 6, page 175, line 1, leave out subparagraph 41(2).

This amendment removes provisions that amend the reasons for the killing or taking of badgers.

Amendment 132, in schedule 6, page 175, line 16, leave out subparagraph 41(4).

This amendment removes provisions that amend the reasons for the killing or taking of badgers.

Government amendments 112 to 114, 120 and 121.

Amendment 64, in clause 109, page 150, line 38, leave out subsection (3).

This amendment is consequential to Amendments 24 to 63.

Matthew Pennycook: It is a real pleasure to bring this landmark Bill back to the House on Report. Let me begin by thanking hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber for their engagement with the Bill over recent months. In particular, I thank the hon. Members for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes), for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), for Broxbourne (Lewis Cocking), for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos), for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) and for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns), as well as hon. Friends on the Government Benches, for their considered line-by-line scrutiny of the Bill in Committee.

Over the past 11 months, the Government have acted decisively to restore economic stability, increase investment and reform our economy to drive up productivity, prosperity and living standards in every part of the country. To build the homes and critical infrastructure we need,

we have already delivered the most significant reforms to our planning system in a generation, including the publication of a revised, pro-growth national planning policy framework, which the Office for Budget Responsibility concluded will permanently increase the level of our real GDP by 0.02% by 2029-30—the equivalent of £6.8 billion in today's prices.

We are making further progress on our plan-for-change mission of rebuilding Britain and kickstarting economic growth this week by progressing this critical legislation. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill will speed up and streamline the delivery of new homes and critical infrastructure, helping us to achieve our ambitious milestones of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes in England, and making planning decisions on at least 150 major economic infrastructure projects in this Parliament, as well as supporting our clean power 2030 target by ensuring that essential clean energy projects are built as quickly as possible.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I declare an interest as a member of the Ulster Farmers Union, the mother body of which is the National Farmers Union. Others will comment on this, but the UFU has told me that it is concerned about losing farmland for housing. Should it not be the policy of Government to ensure that brownfield sites are used first? If they are used first, farmers will have the opportunity to retain their land to produce food, which is important. Does the Minister feel there must be balance in what is put forward tonight to ensure that that happens?

Matthew Pennycook: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention—he knows I have great affection for him. He tempts me into a debate that does not directly relate to the Bill, but I can tell him the following: the Government's position is brownfield-first when it comes to development. He knows that we strengthened the national planning policy framework to give greater weight to brownfield release. We have consulted on a brownfield passport to ensure that bringing forward previously developed land becomes the default and that people get a yes in those circumstances. When it comes to agricultural land, very strong protections already exist. They remain in force in terms of what is in the NPPF.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Matthew Pennycook: I will give way briefly, and then I will make some progress.

Greg Smith: When the Minister says that agricultural protections are very strong, that simply is not true, is it? In the new NPPF that the Government brought in after being elected, they removed the important clause that explicitly protected land used in food production.

Matthew Pennycook: I slightly take issue with the hon. Member's interpretation. We made targeted changes, but the strong protections that apply to agricultural land exist. He knows that, and I have spoken to him before about the fact that, in particular parts of the country, we see high numbers of applications for things like solar farms. But as I have said to him before, even under the most optimistic scenarios, less than 1% of agricultural land will be brought forward for solar farm applications, and those protections remain in place, so we are confident that that is robust.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Matthew Pennycook: I will take this one last intervention because these are not matters relating to the Bill, and then I want to move on.

Sir Roger Gale: This relates directly to the Bill. Not only does it relate directly to the Bill, but there are dozens of amendments all relating to this one single issue. The fact of the matter is that, under the proposals as they stand, we will lose vast swathes of prime agricultural land because planning consent will effectively be driven straight through. That is simply not satisfactory.

Matthew Pennycook: I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman heard the point I just made. Even under the most optimistic scenarios, less than 1% of agricultural land will be turned over to solar farm use. Some of the hyperbole that has been associated with the issue over recent months is unwarranted. I say directly to him, because I want to move on and speak to the Bill, that these are matters that relate to the national planning policy framework, rather than to any proposals in this piece of legislation. I am more than happy to sit down with him and talk about them outside of the context of this debate, but I do want to make some progress.

We made a number of improvements to the Bill in Committee to ensure that it operates as intended and that its expected benefits are fully realised. In many cases, the changes were a direct result of constructive feedback from key stakeholders and parliamentarians. The result is the stronger and more impactful Bill before us. I will briefly outline the more substantive changes made to the Bill in Committee, including in relation to the nationally significant infrastructure projects, statutory consultee funding and the nature restoration fund, before turning to further amendments that the Government tabled last week.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I thank the Minister for the very open way in which he has approached this process so far. He is absolutely right that the Government made many positive changes and concessions in Committee, but he will be aware that many stakeholders remain concerned about the Bill's impact on nature. As the Bill progresses, is he minded to listen to representations from people who are absolutely behind him on his growth mission but who want to ensure that there is no further loss of natural habitat in one of the most nature-depleted nations on the planet?

Matthew Pennycook: My hon. Friend and I spoke just days ago about that issue. We are of course more than happy to continue engaging with and listening to the views proposed by hon. Members from across the House and by organisations. If he will allow me to make a little progress, I will deal specifically with the nature restoration fund in fairly short order.

Let me begin with the improvements made to the consenting process for critical infrastructure. As set out in my written ministerial statement of 23 April, the Government have removed the overly prescriptive and burdensome statutory consultation requirements for major economic infrastructure projects that were unique to the NSIP system established by the Planning Act 2008.

Over this Parliament, that change could result in a cost-saving of over £1 billion across the project pipeline. By speeding up delivery, increasing capacity and reducing constraint cost, it will also contribute to lower household bills.

We have decided to proceed with the change because considerable evidence attests to the fact that the statutory requirements in place are driving perverse outcomes. Rather than providing a means by which engagement drives better outcomes, statutory pre-application procedures have become a tick-box exercise that encourages risk-aversion and gold-plating. The result is consultation fatigue and confusion for communities; longer, more technical and less accessible documentation; and an arrangement that actively disincentivises improvements to applications, even if they are in a local community's interests, because applicants worry that a further repeat consultation will be required.

In removing the statutory requirement to consult as part of the pre-application stage for NSIP applications, and bringing requirements more closely in line with other planning regimes, the Government are not downgrading the importance of high-quality pre-submission consultation and engagement. We still want the NSIP regime to function on the basis of a front-loaded approach in which development proposals are thoroughly scoped and refined prior to being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, and we still expect high-quality, early, meaningful and constructive engagement and consultation to take place with those affected as part of that process. Given that such engagement and consultation routinely takes place and leads to improved proposals in other planning regimes without such statutory requirements, and because the development consent order examination procedure rewards high-quality applications, we are confident that developers will continue to be incentivised to undertake it.

To support that change, the Government intend to publish statutory guidance setting out strong expectations that developers undertake consultation and engagement prior to submitting an application. We will work with stakeholders to design that guidance—a public consultation will be launched in the coming months—so that it encourages best practice without recreating the flaws of the current system.

We have also made a number of other changes relating to the nationally significant infrastructure project regime, including by amending the Bill to ensure that promoters can gain access to land to carry out surveys assessing its condition and status and inform environmental impact assessments, and to make the process for post-consent changes to development consent orders more proportionate to the change requested.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): My inbox is full of correspondence from Harlow residents who cannot get a home and cannot get on the housing ladder. They find that the planning framework means that it takes too long to get houses built. The main purpose of the Bill is to speed up that process and build people the homes that they need.

Matthew Pennycook: My hon. Friend is right: the Bill does streamline the delivery of new homes and critical infrastructure. Although the changes I have just referred to relate not to homes but the regime for nationally

[Matthew Pennycook]

significant infrastructure projects—big clean energy projects, water reservoirs and so forth—there are other changes in the Bill that do support a more streamlined local planning process.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): Before the Minister moves on, will he give way?

Matthew Pennycook: I am going to make some progress, because I know a lot of hon. Members want to get in and there are lots of points I need to make before I can bring others in.

5.45 pm

I turn to other important changes made to the Bill in Committee. To support our grid connections queue reforms, we introduced a small set of amendments to ensure that the relevant clauses operate as intended and that they support us to move from a first come, first served to a first ready, first needed, first connected approach. To help address the lack of capacity and resources within statutory consultees, we have introduced a new sustainable funding model for the statutory consultee system. The new surcharge that will be able to be applied to planning application fees will be used to fund bodies, including statutory consultees, that provide advice and ancillary support that enable good decision making. Alongside the localisation of planning fees provided for by clause 47, the new surcharge will allow us to address capacity and resourcing issues and support a faster and better quality decision-making process.

Finally, we have made changes to the nature restoration fund. Before I detail the various improvements made, let me take this opportunity to remind the House why part 3 of the Bill is so important. Put simply, when it comes to development and nature, the status quo is not working. It is not working for development because constraints like the requirements for nutrient neutrality in sensitive river catchments are stifling the building of new homes and infrastructure. Equally importantly, it is not working for nature, because the need to meet environmental obligations on the basis of site by site assessments and interventions all too often does little to drive the recovery and restoration of our protected sites and species.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): Is the Minister not concerned that he has lost the audience among wildlife organisations and trusts that say they are offended by Ministers' portraying nature as a blocker to development rather than an enhancement to life and the economy, and are now asking for part 3 of the Bill to be scrapped?

Matthew Pennycook: I will come on to address that call, which I know is being made, but in general the Bill aims for, and I have always focused on, a win-win for development and the environment. We had extremely productive engagement with ENGOs in the development of the Bill, and we continue to have fruitful conversations with them, aside from the campaigns that I know are being fought out there in the country and in some of the national media.

While critics of this part of the Bill may be content to maintain the suboptimal status quo, in full knowledge of the fact that it is frustrating the building of new homes and failing to drive the restoration of nature, this

Government are not. To those who believe this Government might buckle and scrap part 3 of the Bill entirely, I simply say, "You have underestimated the resolve of this Government and this Minister." The case for moving to a more strategic approach that will allow us to use funding from development to deliver environmental improvements at a scale that will have the greatest impact in driving the recovery of protected sites and species, is compelling.

That is why so many organisations indicated their in-principle support for the purpose and intent of part 3 when the Bill was first introduced.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): Will the Minister give way?

Matthew Pennycook: I will make some progress.

As Beccy Speight, the chief executive of RSPB, put it at the time:

"With bold leadership, collaboration, and smart planning through initiatives like the Nature Restoration Fund, we can build a future where nature, climate, people and the economy thrive together".

Jessica Toale (Bournemouth West) (Lab): I welcome the enhanced environmental protections in the nature restoration fund. My constituency of Bournemouth West has some unique heathland habitats, many of which are protected as sites of special scientific interest. They hold deep value for the local community, so can the Minister reassure me that these unique habitats will be protected as well under this Bill?

Matthew Pennycook: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. We must make a distinction between irreplaceable habitats, where the model does not remove the strong protections that exist for them, such as ancient woodland in the national planning policy framework, and habitats where Natural England will be allowed to take a view as to whether conservation measures that apply to them meet the overall improvement test in the Bill, and any intervention in those circumstances will be driven by what is in the environmental best interests of the relevant feature. There are, therefore, protections in place that address my hon. Friend's concerns.

In recent weeks, there has been a not inconsiderable amount of spurious commentary attempting to convey a false impression of what the nature restoration fund does.

Ellie Chowns: On that specific point, will the Minister give way?

Matthew Pennycook: If the hon. Lady will let me develop my argument a little, I am more than happy to give way to her in due course.

As such, I feel obliged to tackle a number of the most flagrant misconceptions head on. First, some have claimed that the nature restoration fund is driven by a belief that development must come at the expense of the environment and that the Government are creating a licence for developers to pay to pollute—a "cash to trash" model, as some have dubbed it.

In reality, the nature restoration fund will do the precise opposite. I have been consistently clear that building new homes and critical infrastructure should not—and need not—come at the expense of the

environment. It is plainly nonsense to suggest that the nature restoration fund would allow developers simply to pay Government and then wantonly harm nature. Instead, it takes payments from developers and hands them to Natural England, a public body with regulatory duties to conserve and enhance our natural environment, to develop environmental delivery plans, setting out how various conservation measures will not only address the impact of development, but go further to demonstrate how they will improve the conservation status of the environmental feature.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): The Minister is making a strong case for the legislation, on which he has worked very hard. However, does he accept that many concerns were raised in Committee, on which we both served, about Natural England's ability to undertake the duties that he is asking it to undertake, and that he was unable to give an answer about the extra funding that may be needed for that to happen? Will he elaborate on that?

Matthew Pennycook: The shadow Minister's memory is different from mine: I did provide those assurances. We have already allocated £14 million in the Budget to support the delivery of the nature restoration fund, and through measures set out in the Bill, we will move to a system of full cost recovery so that Natural England has the resources it needs to carry out those functions.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Matthew Pennycook: I know lots of Members wish to contribute to the debate but I will make some progress. If I may finish the argument I am trying develop about taking on those misconceptions, I will give way to the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns) very shortly.

We have been perfectly clear that the new approach is not a means of making unacceptable development acceptable, which is why the Bill gives Natural England the ability to request planning conditions to ensure that appropriate actions are taken by developers as part of using an EDP.

Ellie Chowns: I thank the Minister warmly for giving way. He dismissed "spurious" criticism of part 3 of the Bill, but would he use that phrase to dismiss the very expert criticism of the Office for Environmental Protection? In complete contrast to the Secretary of the State's claim that the Bill does not reduce environmental protections, in its independent expert advice, the OEP says that it does and that the Bill constitutes "a regression" in environmental protection?

Matthew Pennycook: The simple answer is no, I would not characterise the OEP's advice as "spurious", but I am characterising some of the arguments that have been made over recent days and weeks as such. The OEP is not saying that the Bill is a "cash to trash" model, but some people out there in the public discourse are making that claim.

Ellie Chowns *rose—*

Matthew Pennycook: I will not give way again. We have to make this argument to take on the critics of the Bill who are intentionally trying to malign the objectives—

Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): On that point, will the Minister give way?

Matthew Pennycook: I will not. I have just been very clear that I am not going to give way again as I want to make some progress.

Ellie Chowns *rose—*

Matthew Pennycook: The hon. Member for North Herefordshire is more than welcome to have another go at intervening in due course. I know that she will be putting forward her views later. The Government's view is that the Bill is not "regressive". As I have said, environmental delivery plans will secure improved environmental outcomes that go further than simply offsetting harm as required under current legislation. As the hon. Lady knows, because we had extensive debates in Committee, we are giving very serious consideration to the OEP's technical advice on how the Bill might be strengthened in various areas.

Another claim that has been put forward has been that the Bill strips protections from our protected sites and species, allowing for untrammelled development across the country. Again, that amounts to nothing less than wanton misrepresentation. The very strong protections for important sites set out in national planning policy are untouched by the legislation. It is only when an EDP is in place, following consultation and approval by the Secretary of State, that developers can avail themselves of it to discharge the relevant obligation.

In the same way that developers can build only once they have met existing requirements, development supported by the nature restoration fund will only be able to come forward when there is a credible and robust EDP in place that will deliver better environmental outcomes. The Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins), has rightly flagged the importance of these plans relying on robust scientific evidence, which is why they will only ever be put in place where they can be shown to deliver better environmental outcomes.

Finally, there has been a suggestion by some that the new approach provided for by the Bill would allow for the destruction of irreplaceable habitats or for irrecoverable harm. Again, that is patently false. Not only do all existing protections for irreplaceable habitats remain in place, but the overall improvement test in clause 59 simply could not be met if an EDP proposed to allow irrecoverable harm. Natural England would not propose such measures, and the Secretary of State could not sign them off if it did. If any Secretary of State signed them off, they would be open to judicial review on the basis of that decision.

In short, the nature restoration fund will do exactly as its name suggests: it will restore, not harm nature. It is smart planning reform, designed to unlock and accelerate housing and infrastructure delivery, while improving the state of nature across the country. By shifting to a strategic approach, leveraging economies of scale and reducing the need for costly project-level assessments, it will deliver a win-win for development and the environment.

While the Government have no time for spurious and misleading attacks on the nature restoration fund, I am acutely conscious of the views expressed both within and beyond this House from those who are supportive

[Matthew Pennycook]

of the purpose and intent of part 3 of the Bill—those who are not calling for it to be scrapped, but are not yet convinced that the safeguards within it are sufficiently robust or that there is the required certainty that it will deliver in practice the potential environmental benefits it offers.

Carla Denyer (Bristol Central) (Green): I find it remarkable that the Minister repeatedly accused the over 30 leading environmental groups, including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which has described the Bill as a “cash to trash” model, as making “spurious” remarks, given that he quoted the chief executive of the RSPB, Beccy Speight, to try to shore up his own argument. However, the quote that he took was from a much earlier comment made before the debate in Committee. More recently, she has said:

“The evidence clearly shows nature isn’t a blocker to growth. The Government has identified the wrong obstacle to the problem it’s trying to overcome”.

She went on to say that, with no possibility for improving the Bill through amendments,

“the complete removal of Part 3 of the Bill is the only responsible option left.”

Matthew Pennycook: It is for the chief executive of the RSPB to justify why she has changed her view on the Bill when the Bill has not changed. If anything, as I will come on to explain, quite a lot of amendments that the Government made—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. The list of Members wishing to speak is extensive, so I hope that the Minister will be coming to a conclusion shortly.

Matthew Pennycook: I was not planning to, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I need to set out some important changes that the Government have made and the amendments that we are proposing. However, on the basis of your stricture, I will not take any further interventions.

The Bill has not changed; if anything, it has been strengthened in Committee in ways that I will set out. To assuage what are entirely reasonable questions in respect of an approach that is novel, we have already made some targeted improvements to part 3 in Committee, including requiring environmental delivery plans to demonstrate how conservation measures will be maintained and over what period; strengthening the overall improvement test by clarifying that the Secretary of State must be satisfied that it will be passed by the end date of the environmental delivery plan; clarifying that the negative effect the Secretary of State must consider relates to the maximum amount of development covered by the environmental delivery plan; and ensuring that Natural England has sufficient powers of entry, used only when absolutely necessary, to survey or investigate land alongside appropriate constraints, including notice requirements and introducing further protections in respect of Natural England’s use of compulsory purchase powers. Those changes significantly strengthen the nature restoration fund and, I hope, will be welcomed across the House.

However, as I was at pains to make clear in Committee, and will more than happily restate once again today, I continue to reflect on the reasonable points made by hon. Members and the advice of the Office for Environmental Protection with a view to deliberating on what more might be done to ensure everyone is confident that the outcomes for nature provided for by this part of the Bill will be positive. For the purposes of clarity, that includes giving serious consideration to ways in which we might instil further confidence in respect of the rigour of the overall improvement test, provide for greater certainty in respect of the delivery of EDPs, and ensure that there is more clarity about the evidential basis and environmental rationale for strategic network level conservation measures. As we do so, I put on record my thanks to all those who have continued to engage constructively with the Government with a view to providing reassurance that the nature restoration fund will operate as intended. As ever, I will listen carefully to the contributions made by hon. Members in respect of part 3 of the Bill, and I look forward to a constructive debate on these clauses.

In Committee, we discussed the need to do more to rapidly increase the coverage of swift bricks across the country as an important means of arresting the long-term decline in breeding swift populations. In responding to the debate, I intend to cover some of the ways forward that the Government intend to take.

6 pm

Before I close, I must turn to a number of substantive amendments that the Government propose to the Bill, starting with a further change to the NSIP regime. We have already included an ambitious package of reforms in the Bill that will deliver a faster and more certain consenting process for critical infrastructure. As part of our mission to speed up the process overall, it is critical that examinations are focused and efficient and that examining authorities continue to report to the Secretary of State within the regime’s statutory timeframes. Following feedback from stakeholders and a review of recent examinations, we are making an amendment with a view to reinforcing best practice in examinations already adopted by some examining authorities.

At the start of the examination process, the examining authorities are required to make an initial assessment of the principal issues—an IAPI—for each application, which will detail the key matters specific to an application. Although the Planning Act requires that an initial assessment of the principal issues is made at the start of the examination, there is no requirement for it to be used for or to influence anything in the subsequent examination process. We believe that that initial assessment stage could be working harder to set the foundations for effective and streamlined examinations. That is why we are amending the Bill to ensure that the initial assessment of principal issues is a meaningful step that ensures that more focused examinations can occur. Through the amendment, examining authorities will be required to make procedural decisions about how they intend to examine an application in the light of the IAPI. That will support their ability to ensure that examinations are focused, with time prioritised on the issues that are most critical to the project, as set out in the IAPI. The change will also give more certainty up front to all those involved in examinations, so that they have more clarity about what to expect during the examination process.

I turn to an important proposed change relating to transport infrastructure. As hon. Members will be aware, the Bill contains important reforms to the Highways Act 1980 and the Transport and Works Act 1992 that will streamline and improve the efficiency of delivering road infrastructure schemes and ensure that processes within the regime in the 1980 Act are fit for purpose and proportionate. Delivering a faster and more certain consenting process for transport infrastructure projects builds connectivity and tackles congestion and overcrowding. Following engagement with the Department for Transport and the Welsh Government, we are making a small number of technical amendments to these reforms. The amendments clarify beyond doubt that the responsibility for consenting marine licences in Welsh offshore areas remain with the Welsh Ministers. They also ensure that parts of clause 31 do not apply to instruments made by Welsh Ministers under the Highways Act 1980. That demonstrates our commitment to devolution and to working with all parties constructively to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

Finally, we propose two further technical changes to the nature restoration fund. The provisions in part 3 of the Bill have always allowed for the nature restoration fund to operate in English waters out to 12 nautical miles. However, given the different regulatory requirements and protected sites at sea, we are making amendments to ensure the effective operation of the nature restoration fund in the marine environment—in particular, to enable marine-licensable activities in English waters out to 12 nautical miles to be covered by an environment delivery plan to support the development of new harbours and ports. In line with the provisions for terrestrial EDPs, any such plan in the marine space will need to take into account the relevant marine plan, marine policy statement and UK marine strategy as appropriate. That will ensure that EDPs support the Government's marine priorities.

In bringing forward the nature restoration fund, it is also necessary to ensure that the provisions work effectively to support development delivered through different consenting regimes. To achieve that, we are making amendments relating to the Harbours Act 1964 and the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 that will ensure that the strategic benefits of environmental delivery plans can help to unlock the delivery of transport projects and better support nature recovery in those areas. I reiterate that we will continue to consider whether elements of the new nature restoration fund model could be strengthened to give greater confidence that positive environmental outcomes will be achieved. I look forward to continuing to engage with stakeholders and parliamentarians on this important issue.

I commend the Government amendments to the House. I thank hon. Members for their efforts to improve the Bill and for the scrutiny and challenge that the Bill has received so far, and I look forward to listening to the remainder of the debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Minister.

Paul Holmes: I thought I just spoke once at the end.

Madam Deputy Speaker: You just wish to speak at the end—marvellous. [*Interruption.*]

Paul Holmes: Actually, I will say a few words. Why resist the temptation to say a few things?

I thank the Minister for his hard work in leading the Planning and Infrastructure Public Bill Committee and all Members who served on that Committee over the past few weeks. He spent a long time in Committee saying that he would reflect on a number of really important points that hon. Members across the political divide had made, but he has done no such thing. He said that he has reflected and that he will also reflect after the events of today and tomorrow, but he has made no substantive changes to the Bill based on the real and genuine environmental concerns of many Members across the House.

I do not intend to detain the House too long, because I know that I have a winding-up speech, but we are worried about the centralising zeal of this Government when it comes to planning, as I said on Second Reading. We are worried about the erosion of the powers of locally elected, democratic politicians to make decisions about their local areas, serving their local people.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I agree with the hon. Gentleman that local communities should have much more control over what happens to the housing stock in their areas. Will he reflect on his party's opposition so far to the proposal from the Liberal Democrats for a different category of planning use for both short-term lets and second homes, given that communities such as mine are ravaged by so many homes being unavailable to local people? Will he change his party's position and show that if the Minister is not listening, he is?

Paul Holmes: The Conservative party has always believed in the rights of locally elected councillors and planning committees to make decisions for the people they serve; we have said that consistently through the passage of this Bill. The hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos) has tabled new clause 1 to ensure that planning committees have their current powers reinstated under the Government's proposals. The Minister is saying this afternoon, as he will say tomorrow, that he does not trust any planning committee or any Labour-controlled council to make decisions based on the wishes of the constituents in their local areas. We think that that is a disgrace.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that our constituents expect to have their voice heard on a local planning committee? Provided that councils are well-trained, the system that we have is working quite well.

Chris Curtis (Milton Keynes North) (Lab): Oh, is it?

Paul Holmes: The hon. Gentleman says, "Is it?" from a sedentary position, but I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. Very few planning applications are refused by planning committees, and very few planning applications do not go through because of the actions of planning committees. We on the Opposition Benches happen to trust our locally elected councillors and local leaders to make decisions for our constituents. It is quite clear that Government Members do not trust them, as they are vesting more power into the hands of the Minister and the Secretary of State.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Obviously, the hon. Gentleman is a member of the party that was in power for the last 14 years. The result of that 14-year period is that we are a nation with a housing crisis and huge numbers of people in inadequate accommodation or no accommodation at all, and that we are the most nature-depleted nation on earth, so the system clearly is not working. Does he have any real sense that there needs to be change, or is he saying that we can carry on with the system that we have?

Paul Holmes: I would have more truck with the hon. Gentleman's argument if anything than his Government proposed had the intentions that he has outlined. Just this morning, Savills has indicated, knowing what the proposed legislation will do, that the target of 1.5 million homes will not be met and that only 880,000 houses will be built by the end of this Parliament.

When it comes to the environmental protections that the Minister has outlined, it is quite clear that many of the concerns of Members across this House should be listened to. The environmental proposals made by the Minister will have a detrimental impact on local areas by shipping the problem elsewhere.

Mr Perkins: Does the hon. Member have any proposals?

Paul Holmes: The hon. Gentleman asks whether I have any proposals. The last Government built the largest number of houses in history. There are many things that we agree need to be done, and there are some areas of this Bill that we agree with, but the hon. Gentleman needs to realise that taking power away from locally elected councillors is a disgrace. The Minister is saying to the hon. Gentleman and his councillors that they should not be trusted to make decisions on behalf of their local communities. I am sure he will not be happy with that when he gets to his annual general meeting in a few months' time to be reselected as a parliamentary candidate.

There are other concerns about this legislation. As we have said, the Government have consistently said that they want to build 1.5 million homes, but the independent Office for Budget Responsibility—a body that Labour held in high regard when it was in opposition—has forecast that the Government will fail to deliver on their manifesto commitment and will fall short of that figure. As I have said, that was echoed today by Savills, which estimates that the Government will build just over half the number of houses that the Deputy Prime Minister has promised, even after coming out of her very testing meetings with the Chancellor.

The Government's proposal to reduce the number of legal challenges available to opponents of major infrastructure developments from three to two—and in some cases just one—should alarm anyone who believes in checks and balances. Legal scrutiny is not an inconvenience; it is the backbone of our democratic system. Infrastructure projects often have far-reaching environmental, social and economic consequences, and by curtailing legal recourse, we are not removing red tape but removing the public's right to hold power to account. In the name of speed, the Government are undermining the legal mechanisms that protect us from Government overreach.

As I have said, the clear implication of the Minister's proposals today is that powers will be removed from locally elected planning committees. That is a disgrace, and it is in addition to a gerrymandering housing algorithm that punishes rural areas and rewards Labour councillors in urban centres for failure. We are told that the Bill will speed up planning decisions, but at what cost? Local planning authorities are indeed struggling, under-resourced and overburdened, but granting them fee-raising powers without guaranteed central support is like asking a drowning man to swim harder. More alarmingly, the shift of decision-making powers from elected councillors to unelected planning officers under the guise of efficiency diminishes local democracy. It takes key decisions out of the hands of public representatives and places them in the hands of a bureaucracy increasingly dictated by central policy.

We are also told that the Bill will make planning more strategic. That is a noble aim, but let us not forget that the strategic failure of recent years has been due not to too much local input but to too little co-ordination. The requirement for regional spatial strategies was scrapped by this Government's predecessors. Now, the pendulum swings once again, with combined authorities being told to draft regional plans; however, those same authorities are being starved of the funding and staff required to do so. We risk repeating history, only this time with fewer safety nets and a weakened capacity to challenge flawed strategies.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): I chair the all-party parliamentary group on flooding and flooded communities, which is concerned that there are 6.3 million properties currently at risk of flooding—a figure that is forecast to rise to 8 million by 2050 because of climate change. However, the Bill does not really address climate change or any kind of flood resilience. Will the hon. Gentleman join me in urging the Minister to consider the amendments tabled by me and others that deal with building properties in areas that are at risk of flooding and lack flood resilience?

Paul Holmes: Of course. We discussed this topic at great length in Committee, and many good amendments were tabled. However, as I understand it and as I think the hon. Lady agrees, having reflected consistently the Minister has not strengthened the environmental protections or the measures to deal with flooding risks to housing that will be built in future. In fact, I would argue that those protections have been weakened. I hope the Minister will go away and look at these issues again.

Turning to environmental protections, we in the Conservative party say that they are under threat. The creation of environmental delivery plans sounds suitably wishy-washy, but this new centralised model turns bespoke ecological assessments into a bureaucratic chequebook exercise. While developers may cheer the ability to pay into a nature restoration fund instead of taking direct responsibility for mitigations, we should ask whether this is really restoration, or whether it is greenwashing.

On Natural England, I remind the Minister once again that the Bill Committee held a huge evidence session. He consistently said that he had confidence in Natural England's ability to undertake the responsibilities he is seeking to impose on it, but time and time again he has outlined that he has allocated what I would argue is

a mediocre sum of money to Natural England. He is asking that organisation to make decisions and improve environmental protections for people across this country, but he still has not outlined what funding model will be in place. The chief executive of Natural England herself stated, in very generic terms, that she was not entirely sure that she or her organisation would be able to undertake those operations going forward. The Minister should listen to the huge concerns across this House that Natural England is not the right organisation to undertake those responsibilities—rather, it should be local councils and local mayors. They should be the ones who represent their constituents and speak for local people, and who can make the changes they need on environmental protections.

6.15 pm

The Conservative party has tabled two amendments that I hope—rather fruitlessly, I suspect—the Minister will look kindly on. He did not look favourably on many Opposition amendments in Committee; he says that he has strengthened the Bill, but that is just through Labour amendments. However, I hope that he will look seriously at new clauses 39 and 43, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds).

New clause 39 would prohibit solar power developments on high-quality agricultural land. That is a vital safeguard for the future of British farming and national food security. At a time when global food supply chains are increasingly fragile, it is essential that we protect our most productive agricultural land from irreversible development. This clause will ensure that the UK's best farmland is preserved for growing food, which is what it is intended for, rather than being covered in solar panels. The clause does not oppose renewable energy; rather, it calls for a smarter, more balanced approach that directs solar projects to brownfield sites, rooftops, and lower-grade land, so that we do not undermine our capacity to feed ourselves.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): Does the hon. Member recognise that only up to 1% of agricultural land could actually be dedicated to solar panels? Does he also recognise that a former president of the National Farmers Union has said that solar helps farmers to generate income?

Paul Holmes: The hon. Gentleman says “only up to 1%”, but given the international situation, this country should be producing its own food, and that land should be protected. He may need to catch up, because I understand that the NFU now wants the Bill to go further and completely ban solar panels on high-quality land. I suggest that he speaks to the NFU again, and then comes back to this House and backs new clause 39. The NFU speaks up for our farmers, so we should listen if it is not happy with what is in the Bill. Instead of giving me a quote from a former NFU employee, the hon. Gentleman should listen to the NFU's current leadership, and then maybe change his comments.

Dan Tomlinson (Chipping Barnet) (Lab): Does the hon. Member believe that farmers are able to choose how best to use their land?

Paul Holmes: Of course I believe that farmers know how to make best use of their land, but this Government are taking power away from farmers, whether by increasing

the power to issue compulsory purchase orders for land that farmers want to use to produce food, or by reducing the money that they will get from the CPOs that the Government are advocating for. Farmers see more and more agricultural land being taken out of use. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads the Bill and the measures that the Minister is bringing forward, which undermine our farmers and stop them from being able to do the job that they want to do.

Rachel Blake (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): Will the hon. Member give way?

Paul Holmes: I will move on to another clause, because Madam Deputy Speaker probably wants me to sit down soon, as might many other Members. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] I knew I would get universal acclaim eventually.

New clause 43 was also tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner. Villages across our country need to be protected, and the Bill simply does not do that. It eradicates the relevance of local plans and power of local people to make decisions to protect the strategic gaps around our villages. I hope that the Minister will look favourably on the new clause, which would provide villages with protections equivalent to those provided to towns under the national planning policy framework. It is a vital measure for protecting the character, identity and heritage of England's villages before they are lost to unchecked sprawl.

For too long, planning policy has prioritised urban growth without giving equal attention to the unique pressures faced by rural communities. New clause 43 seeks to correct that imbalance by requiring the Secretary of State to issue or update guidance that grants villages equivalent protections to those afforded to towns under the NPPF in order to safeguard villages from being swallowed up by neighbouring developments, preserve green buffers between settlements, and protect the historic fabric and rural character that define these communities. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) for her work in bringing about the amendment, following a truly baffling planning appeal decision on green belt in her constituency. That decision would result in the merging of two settlements with completely different characters and identities, simply because one was classed as a village and one was classed as a town. Many Members will have had such problems. The Minister needs to go away and look at the protection of villages and green belt in the Bill, because it is not delivering that.

A number of amendments have been tabled that Opposition Members think would make the Bill better. New clause 82, tabled by the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Tom Hayes), relates to play areas. Many developments are not delivered with play areas, and those should be brought forward. Amendment 69, tabled by the hon. Member for North East Hertfordshire (Chris Hinchliff), would require environmental delivery plans to set out a timetable for, and to report on, conservation measures, and it would require improvement of the conservation status of specified features before development takes place.

We Opposition Members believe that there need to be changes to planning policy, but the Minister has squandered a chance. He has not listened to Members who genuinely

[Paul Holmes]

want to strengthen the Bill by making planning policy faster, while protecting our environment and enhancing the role of our locally elected councillors. As a result, he has left us unable to strengthen the Bill by working together. This is a wasted opportunity. He will not deliver his housing numbers. He will take powers away from local communities and stifle the planning process. We Opposition Members will always stand up for our locally elected councillors. It is a shame that this Government simply have not done that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): More than 55 Back Benchers hope to contribute, and colleagues know what time this debate has to end. It is unlikely that everybody will get in, so colleagues may want to reconsider and submit to speak tomorrow instead of today. I call the Chair of the Select Committee.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I am mindful of what you say, Madam Deputy Speaker, and will try to keep my remarks short. I rise to speak to the amendments in my name. In this Report stage, I will briefly touch on why the Bill is so vital. It is fair to say that we all, as constituency MPs, have our frustrations with the planning system, but ultimately we must remember why this Bill matters. We are in the middle of a housing crisis. A generation of young people are spending more and more of their income on unaffordable private rents, while the dream of home ownership fades even further. We have 1.3 million households on local authority waiting lists for social housing and more than 165,000 children growing up in temporary accommodation. That figure has risen by 15% in the last year alone.

I am the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, and our first report looked at the lives of some of the children in temporary accommodation. What we found was truly shameful. Families are living in damp, cold and mouse-infested homes. Babies are not able to crawl or learn to walk because of a lack of floor space. Most shockingly, we found that temporary accommodation has been a contributing factor in the death of at least 74 children in the past five years.

Nesil Caliskan (Barking) (Lab): As a fellow London Member of Parliament, I recognise everything that my hon. Friend has described. Was she surprised, as I was, to hear from the shadow Minister that the planning system is fine and should not change?

Florence Eshalomi: As I outlined in my opening comments, the planning system does not work. It is broken, just as we have a broken housing market and a housing crisis.

I mentioned the 74 children who died in the past five years; 58 were under the age of one. As Members of Parliament representing different parts of the country, we might disagree with aspects of developments in our constituencies, and we must not let developers off the hook when they often fail to deliver quality in new housing.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech, and she touches on developers. My new clause 67 focuses on developers' obligations when they have committed, at the planning application stage, to deliver a certain number of affordable homes. Under my new clause, they would have to stick to that. They should not be given scope to use issues around viability or profitability to reduce the number of affordable homes that they deliver. Does she agree that that option should not be open to developers if they want to build homes?

Florence Eshalomi: I thank my constituency neighbour for that important point. We have to be honest: the market facing developers is challenging. Their costs have increased, but we see waiting lists across our boroughs increasing daily. More and more people face an acute housing shortage. It is therefore important that when developers consult and go to planning committees with their development plans, they stick to what they have committed to. Developers must build the infrastructure that our communities need, and we must ensure that homes are built to the highest safety standards. We must be in no doubt that, unacceptably, we have for decades failed to build the homes that we need. If we want to give young people homes, stop families facing the scourge of homelessness, and ensure that every child has the best start in life, we must say yes to building more homes. In particular, not enough new social homes have been built. That is why I tabled new clause 50.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): I completely agree that not enough social homes are being built. Does the hon. Lady think we should have a target for social homes in the Bill?

Florence Eshalomi: I thank the hon. Member for that point, and I am coming to some of the points on targets; essentially, this subject is why I tabled new clause 50, and I am grateful for the support of colleagues from all parts of the House. Social rent, as we know, is the most affordable housing tenure, as the rent is calculated through a national formula. Usually, the rent is set at around 50% of local market rents. That is exactly the kind of housing we need if we want to make progress towards ending homelessness during this Parliament.

The Minister told the Select Committee that the Government want to prioritise the building of new social rent homes as part of their social housing ambitions. My new clause 50 would require the Government to set a national target for the number of social rent homes that they want to deliver per year. The target would not be binding on the Government or the sector, but it would demonstrate the scale of the Government's ambition. Targets are important to how our planning system works in England. Local and national housing targets make sure that our planners, developers and housing associations know how many homes the Government intend to deliver, and they allow communities to plan effectively.

The Government have been clear on their overall national housing targets, but the Select Committee believes that the Government must set out how they intend to hit that 1.5 million target, and we want to ensure that includes a target by tenure. In the absence of a specific housing target, the number of new social rent homes has plummeted from hundreds of thousands in the 1970s to consistently below 10,000 in the past decade.

Naushabah Khan (Gillingham and Rainham) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful point, which we have discussed on the Select Committee. Does she agree that to reach the target of 90,000 social homes a year, we must set clear targets now? Otherwise, we will not be able to get a grip on the housing crisis when it comes to delivering socially rented homes.

Florence Eshalomi: I thank my fellow Committee member for making that point. As the shadow Minister outlined, a number of key sectors have made claims and are worried about the target that the Government have set. It is an ambitious target, and we want the Government to hit it, but without urgent action, that might be difficult for them to do.

In the absence of such a target, far fewer families are getting off the waiting list, out of homelessness and into secure and safe affordable homes. As the new Select Committee has not endorsed a specific number of social rent homes, my new clause does not hold the Government to a target; rather, we want the Government to consider what is needed and, most important, what is possible within the financial constraints and the sector's capacity. In recent years, several organisations have called for social rent targets at different levels. As we have just heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Naushabah Khan), the most common figure is 90,000 social rent homes per year, which has been endorsed by Shelter, Crisis, the National Housing Federation, the Affordable Housing Commission, and the predecessor of my Committee in the last Parliament.

6.30 pm

Bobby Dean (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The hon. Member has made some excellent points about the need to set a target for social homes. I believe that the destruction of council house stock is one of the most regressive actions that the country has ever taken, and that we need to replenish that stock as a matter of urgency. However, I fear that 90,000 a year is not enough. Does she agree that we need to aim for 150,000?

Florence Eshalomi: The hon. Member makes a really important point. What we are asking the Government to do, in the new clause—and what many other Members across the House are asking them to do—is ensure that, within that 1.5 million target, there is a clearer ambition in relation to how many of those homes will be social housing. We need to take a step first before we start increasing that target, but I agree that 90,000 is a drop in the ocean, given the number of people across the country who are on the social housing waiting list.

When he was in office, the former Secretary of State—now Lord Gove—said that he wanted to see at least 30,000 social rent homes a year, which he called a “stretching but achievable” target. My new clause would give the Government six months after the passing of the Bill to set their own target. By that time, we expect the Government to have published details of a new affordable homes programme and a long-term housing strategy. The Minister has told the Select Committee that the long-term housing strategy will set out how the Government will meet their 1.5 million target, and we hope that will include a breakdown of the figure by tenure and a target for social rent housing.

My amendments 129 and 130 are technical amendments to the Bill's planning fees ringfence. We know that local planning authorities are badly under-resourced. According to the Royal Town Planning Institute, one quarter of planners have left the public sector between 2013 and 2020. The sector has therefore welcomed the Bill's plan to ringfence the revenues from planning fees so that local authorities must invest those revenues in planning departments. However, in evidence to the Committee, planning representatives told us that the current ringfence in the Bill was too restrictive, as it would not allow planning departments to spend the money on developing their local plans. The Minister is up to date with local plans, and, as he knows, local plan coverage is vital if the Government's planning reforms are to succeed. The fact is, however, that only a third of local authorities have an up-to-date local plan in place. It therefore seems to be a missed opportunity that the ringfence, as currently drafted, would not allow local authorities to invest in plan-making using revenues from fees. The Government wish to see universal coverage of local plans, so I hope that the Minister might consider making this modest change in the other place to extend the fees ringfence.

With those local plans in place, and with the Government's wider planning reforms bedding in, hopefully we will start to see real progress towards building the homes we so desperately need. But even then, we must face the reality that planning reforms alone will not be enough to deliver 1.5 million homes during the current Parliament. The private sector will need to take time to adjust to the new regime, and developers will need years of lead-in time to bring forward those applications. The private sector will build homes only at the rate at which they sell without needing to reduce prices, whereas with social housing a family can receive the keys to a secure home as soon as it is built. We must remember that the last time England was building 300,000 homes a year, more than 100,000 of them were social housing.

The Government have promised to deliver the “biggest wave of social and affordable housing for a generation”, and that will require the biggest boost in social housing investment for a generation. In truth, the spending review will make or break the 1.5 million target. It is now time for the Government to be bold, and to deliver on their housing ambition. If they do so, they will find councils across the country ready to match their ambition.

I particularly welcome Southwark Council's work, and the work of its outgoing leader, Councillor Kieron Williams, in spearheading the “Securing the Future of Council Housing” campaign. In just under a year, Southwark has joined 112 other councils across England in sending the clear message that it is there to get more homes delivered, and to fix the broken housing system. I urge the Government to match that goal, back up their stated ambitions, and set a social housing target following the spending review. We must ensure that social rent housing—the most affordable tenure—forms a substantial part of the new housing that results from the Bill.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. May I remind Members that we are pushed for time? After the next Front-Bench speech, I shall be imposing an immediate five-minute time limit. I now call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Gideon Amos: Let me start by thanking all the members of the Bill Committee, the Clerks, and the officials whose joy at receiving our 78 amendments I can only imagine to have been unbounded. The House will be pleased to hear that I will now be focusing only on those that we have prioritised for this debate.

On Second Reading, the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru were the only parties to vote against the Bill. All the others were content to support it; Labour and Green party Members nodded it through, while the Conservatives—the official Opposition—abstained. I hope that they will all consider their position more seriously on this occasion, and reconsider supporting some of the measures in the Bill, but if today the Liberal Democrats are again the only party to vote against the Bill—

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Tomorrow.

Gideon Amos: Tomorrow, as the hon. Gentleman has reminded me. If, tomorrow, the Liberal Democrats are the only party to vote against the Bill because of the harm that it does to the rights of communities and local people, to fairness and to nature, all three of which are cornerstones of what liberals believe in, we shall bear that standard proudly—and we shall do so again.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): I have tabled new clause 65, which would require housing development applications to include provision for green space within 15 minutes of new homes, supporting nature and helping people to lead happier, healthier lives. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have missed an opportunity to require new housing developments to be designed in a way that would be not only good for nature and the environment, but good for the health and wellbeing of residents?

Gideon Amos: I agree with my hon. Friend, who is a great champion of green spaces in development. In our contribution, we are showing how the protections of nature could be strengthened in the Bill without entire chunks of it being deleted. I shall say more about that later.

As we heard from the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi), when it comes to rights for individuals, real freedom often depends on decent homes that people can afford and where they can bring up their families. When homes are genuinely affordable for local people, they will command real community consent and support in the planning process. Unless we give a commitment to a massive increase in the number of social and council rent homes, we will not be responding to the needs of those people, and we will fail to meet head-on the criticism that housing developments today are more about profit than about people.

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): My constituency contains less than the national average proportion of social rented housing, at 7%. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is shocking that the new Government have been asleep at the wheel, and have lacked the ambition to deal with the desperate need for more social rented housing during their first 11 months in power?

Gideon Amos: I thank my hon. Friend for championing the need for social and council rent homes, which is exactly what the Liberal Democrats are doing. We welcome the £2 billion commitment that the Government have made to social housing, and we are listening carefully to what they are saying about the spending review, but there is still no target for new social homes in either this Bill or any of the relevant Government policy. That absence needs to be put right.

Paul Holmes: We agree with many of the amendments that the hon. Gentleman's party has put forward. He outlines a target for new social homes. How would he afford that, and where would the money come from?

Gideon Amos: The hon. Gentleman leads me on to the next part of my speech. Our amendment 15, which would support the delivery of 150,000 new social homes per year, would be funded by the taxation proposal set out in our costed manifesto. That would provide an extra £6 billion per year, on top of the existing affordable housing programme and section 106 contributions. According to the Centre for Economics and Business Research, that would be enough to enable us to deliver 150,000 social homes per year by the end of the Parliament.

On the rights of communities, more people engage with their local councils on planning than on almost any other area, but far too often that engagement becomes a dawning recognition that all the key powers and levers on planning have been taken away from local areas by successive Governments, leaving local communities and the elected councillors who represent them increasingly powerless over the development that takes place around them. Housing numbers are set by a formula made in Whitehall and dictated not by population, but by demand and supply ratios, even though studies show that that has never yet reduced the price of a single house. Private builders will quite reasonably act to sustain the price of their product, and adding consents in this context is only likely to unleash development in inappropriate areas.

Martin Wrigley (Newton Abbot) (LD): Does my hon. Friend agree that we saw in the recent Westminster Hall debate that the standard method for calculating the number of homes not only does not reduce prices, but inevitably ratchets them up and increases them?

Gideon Amos: My hon. Friend is very perceptive and hard-working on this issue. He raises a significant problem with the current standard method, and I pay tribute to him.

It is not just the standard method that is dictated from Whitehall; so too are rules on second homes and short-term lets, so communities cannot stem the loss of family homes for local people—something that our new clause 20 would put right. Rules on transport and highway capacity are also set by Whitehall, so local authorities such as my own Cheddton Fitzpaine parish council cannot question them. In the battle between underfunded local authorities and developers with big profits to make, Whitehall rules also mean that commitments to deliver affordable housing and infrastructure can all too often be evaded on grounds of viability—something that our new clause 112 would tackle by requiring an absolute minimum of 20% social housing in any development.

No wonder trust in local politics is at such a low. That has only been made worse by the chaos of the previous Conservative Government: with one rule for them and another for everyone else, basic fairness went out the window. The UK may rightly be ranked among the top 20 countries in the world by Transparency International, but nothing undermines fairness more than foul play, even if it is, as we know, very rare. Our new clause 11 would ensure that never again can Ministers favour a planning application from a donor without that being exposed in the public record. It cannot ever be right for a planning decision to be taken by those who will financially benefit from it.

Trust in the fairness of local democracy is so often shaped by how much trust people have in the local planning processes. Our amendment 1 would remove from this Bill the powers it gives Whitehall to control the running of councils, and the rights of councillors to make decisions on planning applications. The powers in this Bill mean that, for the first time, even a unanimous decision by every single councillor will not be enough to enable them to change a decision that their officers or planning consultants made on their behalf. Giving employees and consultants power over the heads of the elected representatives who employ them is a dangerous step, and no Parliament should endorse it.

It is not just elected councillors who will lose their vote on planning. Members of this House will lose their vote when it comes to changes to national policy statements that set the rules for the largest national infrastructure projects, from Hinkley C and Swansea tidal lagoon to the world's biggest offshore and onshore wind and solar farms. Our amendment 128 would allow the Government to change national policy statements to reflect changes in the law, but it would preserve this House's right to decide whether national policy on massive projects should be changed.

6.45 pm

People are not the problem. Ordinary people are not blockers, and they should not be swept out of the way. As I have said, they and we want to see new homes and development, but these particular changes, which so damage rights and trust in a damaged system, will not deliver any significant growth or development, because council planning committees already approve over 90% of the planning applications that come before them. Lib Dem-run Somerset council has consented to thousands of new homes and is building hundreds of new council houses, including for the first time in a generation in parts of the county, and it wants to build more.

Just as people and communities should have rights, we need to stand up for the rights of nature. People want to see our rivers and waterways cleaned up and our environment protected—rivers such as the Tone in Taunton, where communities, by achieving new designations, have uncovered poor water quality and a desperate need for investment. Precious chalk streams across the country have no protection at all, and our amendment 16 would give them the protection they require. People want to see development that treads lightly on the land and reduces harmful emissions.

Dr Simon Opher (Stroud) (Lab): I agree with some of the things that the hon. Member is saying, but we all want to build faster. Under the local district plan in Stroud, we have been waiting four years for our housing

plan, and this Bill will free us from the quagmire that is our current planning system. Last Friday, I met representatives of the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and the Severn Rivers Trust, who have serious concerns about part 3 of the Bill. Does the hon. Member agree that we should have a short pause on part 3 and keep some of it?

Gideon Amos: I certainly agree that part 3 requires amending. Our amendments seek to do that, as I will come to shortly.

People want to see development that treads lightly on the land and reduces harmful emissions. Our new clause 2 would enforce the zero carbon standard for all new homes, on which the Liberal Democrats and Labour Ministers worked so hard before the Conservatives cancelled the whole zero carbon homes programme in 2015.

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Net zero standards cut bills as well as carbon emissions, so does my hon. Friend share my incredulity that a Government who have been forced to U-turn on winter fuel payments are refusing to back new clause 2, which would cut bills for people of all ages?

Gideon Amos: It is absolutely right to say that we should be moving to zero carbon homes. In fact, one study shows that had they been introduced in 2015, new homeowners would have saved £9 billion.

Our new clause 25, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Jess Brown-Fuller), would give key national landscape partnerships, such as in the mellow and beautiful Blackdown hills in my constituency, a seat at the planning table.

As we see species becoming extinct before our eyes, people want to see new homes and nature thrive together. Crucially, our new clause 1 would put back the pre-eminent principle in all this: wherever possible, we must first do no harm to the environment on the sites that are being impacted. Of course, there are circumstances such as phosphate mitigation, where off-site measures can deal with the problem, but by completely removing from EDPs the hierarchy of mitigating impacts first and foremost on site, the Bill provides what the National Trust has called a “licence to kill nature”.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): Does the hon. Member agree that the problem with the Bill is misdiagnosis? The problem is not nature holding up house building, or local authorities—which have been starved of cash for the last 15 years—holding up housing, but developers that are sitting on 1.4 million homes with planning permission, because they are land banking and profiteering. That is the problem that the Bill is not getting to. We do not have to destroy nature, and we do not have to undermine our future environmental protections.

Gideon Amos: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to draw attention to the thousands of homes that have planning permission and have not been built, including the 11,000 we have in Somerset. While I welcome what the Government have said about bringing those forward, a real “use it or lose it” power is missing from the Bill. The Liberal Democrats have tabled new clause 3 so that, unless those homes are built, the local authority

[Gideon Amos]

would have powers to take over the land and to build the houses. That would ensure a real “use it or lose it” penalty for those that do not build out the permissions that they have.

Pitting communities and nature as the enemies of progress and development would be a massive mistake. Taking power away from councillors is taking it away from local people, and taking power away from Members of Parliament is taking it from the hands of the people who elect us to this place. Both are examples of centralisation and “Whitehall knows best” thinking, in which local views count for little and nature for even less. There is another way to build the hundreds of thousands of homes we need. It is to invest in 150,000 social homes per year to pump-prime our industry, give communities the funding for the jobs, transport, green space and energy infrastructure that our constituents want, build the new GP and healthcare facilities before building the houses and homes our communities will need, and build them in ways that will support rather than harm those communities.

Dr Al Pinkerton (Surrey Heath) (LD): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, particularly as it sounds as though he is coming to his conclusion, but I want to give him the best possible chance to talk about new clause 115. My constituency of Surrey Heath is made up of small villages divided by green-belt land and Ministry of Defence property. Without the protections afforded by new clause 115, I fear that the distinctiveness and sense of place of those villages will be gradually lost. Can he comment on how new clause 115 would protect the distinctiveness of place?

Gideon Amos: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the point he makes. It is vital to protect the character of existing places and communities that are so valued, which is why we want a more locally driven approach to assessing housing numbers and local plan making.

Finally, if we build the GP surgeries, the healthcare and the other infrastructure before the homes, we will be building in the interests of our communities, not against them. That is the kind of community-led development that Liberal Democrats want and that our amendments would help to bring about, and I humbly urge Members to support them.

Mr Perkins: I rise to set out the case for amendments 136 and 150 and new clause 62, in my name. I am very pleased to hear what the Minister has said so far. The Bill would tackle the long-standing conundrum of how to deliver the ambitious house building targets to which the Government are rightly committed, while protecting the environment and enhancing, not reducing, protections for nature. Before I turn to my amendments, I want to speak briefly about the extent to which the Bill achieves those aims.

I absolutely share the Government’s commitment to freeing up the planning system and ensuring that fewer people are unable to get on to the housing ladder and fewer children grow up in unsuitable, overcrowded and temporary accommodation. I see the impact of this country’s failure to build the homes it needs in my surgeries every single week, so I support the Government’s

aims to speed up that process. I also agree that planning has too often been a barrier to those ambitions, and the Government are absolutely right to attempt to remove this blocker.

Freeing up unnecessary restrictions, however, must not mean allowing further nature degradation, nor does it have to. The Government have said that these ambitions will be achieved alongside nature recovery. Wildlife populations in England have fallen to around 67% of their 1970 level; as I said a few moments ago, Britain is now one of the “most nature-depleted” places on earth. Most of England’s rare and vulnerable habitats are in poor condition. Alongside building the homes and infrastructure that our society needs, we must rebuild our natural capital—the air, water, soils and biodiversity—on which our society depends.

Rebecca Smith (South West Devon) (Con): It sounds as though the hon. Member, like me, has a deep passion for ensuring that we maintain nature, so does he agree that a simple measure would be to accept new clause 30, which would extend permitted development rights for ponds of up to 0.2 hectares, providing vital freshwater habitats for up to two thirds of all freshwater species, exactly as he has been saying?

Mr Perkins: I thank the hon. Member very much for that intervention, and I look forward to hearing her speech in support of her new clause. I do think that has merit and is worth considering, and I look forward to hearing her make her case in more detail.

The Environmental Audit Committee, which I chair, initiated an inquiry into housing growth and environmental sustainability to scrutinise the Government’s national planning policy proposals. Achieving growth and delivering for people, climate and nature together is a vital but challenging task. There are many provisions in this Bill that I welcome, and I thank the Minister for his efforts and his detailed engagement. I was grateful that he made time to meet me recently to discuss my proposed amendments.

Overall, I support the Government’s intention in part 3, and I think those parties that wish to simply scrap the approach entirely are wrong. It is right to introduce a more strategic approach to satisfying developers’ environmental obligations. If done well, the environmental delivery plans and the nature restoration levy proposed in part 3 could simplify and accelerate the process of meeting existing environmental requirements, where developments impact protected sites or protected species. Importantly, I see the merit of this strategic approach in delivering larger-scale and more effective nature conservation measures where development has unavoidable impacts on protected sites and protected species.

However, the strength of concern from knowledgeable stakeholders should give the Government serious pause for thought. The Office for Environmental Protection, which was mentioned earlier, published advice for the Government stating that the existing provisions in the Bill would amount to a regression in environmental law, so it is welcome that the Minister continues to be open-minded about making further amendments. I look forward to hearing about the engagement in another place, where I am certain that further amendments will be brought forward.

The Environmental Audit Committee has heard evidence that there must be stronger safeguards for the proposed nature restoration fund to genuinely deliver on its potential for nature. My objective in tabling amendments to this Bill is to engage constructively with the Government's approach to part 3, and to strengthen it so that it delivers for nature and development at the same time.

To turn first to amendment 136, I very much welcome what the Minister had to say about scientific safeguards, and I look forward to what he comes forward with. This amendment would ensure that environmental delivery plans are used only where there is scientific evidence that they will work. In other words, there must be robust evidence that a particular negative effect on a protected site or protected species can be mitigated or compensated for at a strategic level, rather than on a site-by-site basis.

Although the strategic approaches that will be delivered by EDPs can work well for some habitats and species, such as nutrients or newts, they do not always work for others. This amendment would safeguard against the EDP approach being applied to inappropriate species or habitats. The Government have recognised this principle and have committed to a modular approach to expanding EDPs with new plans applying feature by feature, and existing protections remaining in place for those not yet covered. I support this approach, and I encourage the Government to enshrine this principle in legislation to give certainty that the scientific safeguards to which they have committed cannot be altered by any future Government without revisiting this legislation.

On amendment 150—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order.

Sir Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): In view of the pressure on time, I will limit my remarks to amendment 141, in my name. The Bill, as we have heard, seeks to do many things, but one of them is to accelerate the roll-out of electric vehicle charging points around the country to facilitate the move to electric vehicles. Drivers with disabilities, and there are 1.35 million of them, will also be expected to move to electric vehicles, but public charging points are often unsuitable for them to use. The amendment is designed to address that.

7 pm

There is a British Standards Institution standard, PAS 1899, which sets out minimum standards by which charge point operators can ensure that electric vehicle drivers with accessibility needs are able to use public charging infrastructure both reliably and safely. It was developed in conjunction with the Motability Foundation and the Government, and was published in October 2022. It addresses common accessibility concerns, such as the placement of a charge point, minimum bay size, and the height and weight of the charging cable.

The problem is that the standard is not mandatory and thus far nobody can find a single public charging point that meets that standard. That is a fundamental question of equality which becomes more acute as the charging network becomes more extensive. Even without the additional impetus that the Bill is intended to provide, a new charger is currently being installed every 29 minutes. Ensuring those chargers are accessible to people with

disabilities is therefore both urgent and sensible, not least because retrofitting accessibility on to an already installed network will be much more expensive.

The amendment would ensure that if voluntary compliance with PAS 1899 does not improve, the Government have powers to enforce compliance progressively. It would also allow local authorities to monitor that compliance and oblige charging point operators to collect and report data on the compatibility of individual charge points with key accessibility benchmarks. It does that by adding to the regulation-making powers in the Automated and Electric Vehicles Act 2018, which currently seeks to ensure that the charging network operates to the benefit of consumers with regard to acceptable methods of payment, maintenance and compatibility with different types of electric vehicle. It is surely logical to add accessibility for people with disabilities to that list and to do so now, while we have a relatively rare legislative opportunity.

I want to take the opportunity to thank the Electric Vehicle Association England, the Motability Foundation and other organisations for their work on these proposals and their support for them. I hope the Government and the Minister will look favourably on these relatively modest changes, which I argue could have a big impact on the ability of drivers with disabilities to use the charging network that we are asking all motorists to use, and which can therefore ensure we all make the journey to electric motoring together.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield Hallam) (Lab): I rise to speak in support of amendments 137 and 138 in my name. I declare an interest as the co-chair of the local nature recovery all-party parliamentary group and a proud species champion for the hen harrier. I am deeply committed to the protection and restoration of our natural world, and I have tabled the amendments to ensure there is adequate protection for protected species.

I recognise the need to take the housing crisis extremely seriously. I support numerous amendments on affordable homes and social housing, including new clause 32, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Chris Hinchliff), which would mandate that national and local housing plans incorporate and justify specific targets for both affordable and social housing. It is clear that we need to build more housing, but we must ensure that that includes enough social homes, because a just society must care for both people and planet.

In defence of nature we must remember that nature is not a luxury; it is essential. It sustains our health, our economy, our climate and the rich web of wildlife that makes our planet thrive. From the air we breathe to the food we eat and the water we drink, nature underpins every aspect of our survival, yet we are, as has been said, living in one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world and the consequences are becoming impossible to ignore.

Our peatlands, woodlands, wetlands and seas, once vibrant with life, are deteriorating. These ecosystems are not just carbon stores; they are vital habitats for countless species. As they degrade, they not only release more carbon than they absorb, but drive wildlife into decline. Iconic species are vanishing, pollinators are disappearing, and once common birds and mammals are becoming rarer,

[*Olivia Blake*]

pushing many species closer to extinction. Without urgent action to restore these ecosystems, we cannot hope to meet our climate goals, or halt the alarming loss of biodiversity. Every species lost weakens the resilience of nature and our ability to adapt to a changing climate. Protecting nature is not just an environmental imperative; it is an economic, social and moral one. The loss of pollinators threatens our food supply. The destruction of our coastal habitats increases our vulnerability to storms and flooding, and the collapse of ecosystems puts both human and animal lives at risk.

My amendments require that if a protected species is identified as an environmental feature, the environmental delivery plan must include a clear strategy for conservation measures to address the impact of the development on that species within local recovery strategy areas. If Natural England determines that that is not possible, or there is an overriding public interest not to do that, it must aim to conserve the same species at a different site. Recognising the realistic risk of local extinctions and the threats facing specific species, this approach reflects a fundamental truth: protecting nature is not optional; it is essential. Our ecosystems are interconnected, and the loss of even a single species can have cascading effects on biodiversity, climate resilience and human wellbeing. By embedding strong, enforceable protections for species into development planning, we are not only safeguarding wildlife but reinforcing the natural systems that sustain our economy, our health and, importantly, our future.

Carla Denyer: Given the really important points that the hon. Lady is making about the environment and how it is so strongly connected to our economy and public health, does she agree with me—I appreciate that this is on a slight tangent, but she will see where it is going—that the planning rules for big digital billboards, which themselves can emit 11 homes-worth of energy, not to mention the light pollution that seriously affects nature and human health, are illogical and inconsistent? The rules say that planning applications can only be considered on highway safety and immunity grounds, and not on environmental impact or on the impact on human health. Would it not be better if local authorities could make decisions on those grounds as well?

Olivia Blake: The hon. Lady makes an interesting point and I am sure the Minister is listening.

In a time of ecological crisis, every action must contribute to halting and reversing nature loss, because nature is not just part of the solution; it is the solution. I hope the Minister will sit down with me to discuss these points further, as the Bill enters the other House.

Dame Caroline Dineneage (Gosport) (Con): I rise to speak to new clause 59, in my name, which considers the impact of our planning system on our creative and cultural industries and infrastructure. These spaces are the foundation of our world-beating creative industries and are also very important for our local communities. They are the engine of an industry which is growing at twice the rate of the rest of the economy. They are the R&D labs of a sector that is bigger than our automotive, aerospace and life sciences industries combined. Yet the creatives industries are under threat, including from our disruptive planning system and onerous licensing regime.

My Culture, Media and Sport Committee has heard that live music venues will be back to shutting at the rate of two a week by the end of the year. That is in addition to electronic music venues and clubs, which have been shutting at the rate of three a week. My amendment seeks to help prevent those closures by putting a duty on planning decision makers to apply the agent of change principles, which have existed since the national planning policy framework in 2018. They require developers to ensure that their developments do not disrupt existing businesses in future, as well as places of worship, schools, transport infrastructure and so on.

First, the new clause would be good for venues. Of the 86 grassroots music venues that closed in 2024, one in four shut for operational reasons, including noise abatement orders, neighbour disputes and interventions by the local councils. In the previous Parliament, the Committee I chair held a roundtable in Manchester at the Night and Day Café, an iconic venue. We were there to meet representatives of live music venues from across the north, yet the operators could not attend their own roundtable because they were instead attending a court hearing with Manchester city council to settle a three-year noise abatement dispute—a costly and pointless legal dispute at that, as it started due to a single complaint by a tenant who had moved out long before the issue was resolved.

Secondly, the new clause would be good for developers and new neighbours. Consistent application of the agent of change principle will de-risk and speed up planning and development. It will ensure that the needs of an existing cultural venue are considered from the start and save developers from late-stage objections and lengthy, expensive legal disputes down the line. It will require developers and decision makers to think about the presence of existing venues and will benefit future tenants and homeowners, who should be less impacted overall.

Finally, the new clause would help local authorities. It is councils that have the duties to detect statutory nuisance and investigate noise complaints; it is councils that serve noise abatement orders; and it is councils that get dragged into expensive and often pointless bun fights with local venues, as the Night and Day Café example illustrates. Encouraging councils to consider at the planning stage how developers and venues can find a nice equilibrium in their interests can only help to save them time and money, which is surely more efficient than settling matters in court.

The new clause has widespread support. It takes forward the recommendation of the CMS Committee in the previous Parliament and is supported by the whole live music sector, from the operators of our smallest clubs, pubs and venues to the biggest arenas and stadiums. It will benefit the breadth of our cultural infrastructure, from our historic theatres to our pulsating nightclubs. It is built on evidence given by LIVE, UK Music Creative UK, the Music Venue Trust, the Night Time Industries Association and the National Arenas Association.

The new clause is not about venues versus developers; instead, it is about ensuring we have the balance right between building enough good homes and making sure the places we are building keep the things that make life worth living. Everyone in Westminster and our constituencies agrees that our high streets have been in decline, so it is vital that we protect the places that are

special to us, our constituents and our communities—the places that provide a platform for our creators and our world-beating creative industries, where we can make memories, celebrate and have fun.

I hope the Government will support my new clause and, if not today, commit to making this law as soon as possible. Live music is in crisis. The Government need to listen.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to speak to amendment 87, in my name and the names of most Select Committee Chairs—certainly most of those who cover Departments—including the Chair of the Business and Trade Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North (Liam Byrne), the Chair of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins), the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi), and the Chair of the Transport Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury).

The amendment relates to the Government's new approach to the consultation around national policy statements, and in particular to the parliamentary scrutiny of those statements. There is currently a process by which Select Committees join forces to examine national policy statements and provide recommendations to the Government, but the Government are proposing to introduce what they call a new “reflective amendment” procedure where an amendment to planning policy reflects new legislation, changes to Government policy or a relevant court decision since the policy guidance was put in place. We all know that the Government's aim is to speed up the planning process, but we need to be clear that reducing parliamentary scrutiny can have long-term consequences. I am therefore seeking reassurances from the Minister as to how this will be managed.

This proposal will remove the requirement to respond to either a resolution of either House of Parliament or recommendations from a Committee of either House of Parliament on the proposed changes; instead, the Government would write to the appropriate Select Committee at the start of the public consultation period, which is typically six to 12 weeks, and the Committee would then have the option of inviting Ministers to discuss the proposed changes during that time. My fellow Chairs and I are concerned about this change reducing the Committees' influence and enshrining in law that the Government do not need to respond to the scrutiny or recommendations of Select Committees.

Gideon Amos *rose*—

Dame Meg Hillier: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has tabled a similar amendment.

Gideon Amos: I am grateful to the hon. Lady and the other Select Committee Chairs for taking up an issue that we took up in Committee, and about which there has been concern across the House. The Government

may wish to change NPSs in the light of legal judgments, but does she agree that changes to them for policy reasons, particularly when they affect massive projects like Hinkley Point C and Sizewell, should continue to come before the House?

7.15 pm

Dame Meg Hillier: If I move on to what will happen, I think the hon. Gentleman will be reassured. There is a bigger point here, which I do not have time to elaborate on in this debate. This change is part of a trend of Government not appreciating the role of thoughtful, thorough scrutiny from outside the Whitehall bubble—that is a disease affecting Governments of all parties—and of scrutiny from MPs with detailed knowledge of the subject matter. The hon. Gentleman, of course, has a strong track record on this issue outside this place, from before he became a Member of this House.

Those who scrutinise through Select Committees often understand the system, and how a change in policy or law can have a different effect within policy guidance because of the interactions it will have. The worst-case scenario here would be that a Committee did not have time to examine a proposal, or, if it did have time, that the Government ignored the recommendations. I am grateful to the Minister and his officials for the time they have spent engaging with me and the Clerk of the Liaison Committee, on behalf of the Select Committees, to try to mitigate those worst-case risks. In theory, these changes could sound quite reasonable, but in practice, there is a risk that the Government could lose a useful voice that also reflects the views of other bodies. Select Committees also get the chance to question Ministers in public, which is important for transparency and accountability. Select Committees can also give force to the views and expertise—shared in public, very often orally—of bodies with knowledge of the technical changes that could be introduced and wrapped into new or revised policy guidance.

We have all been there when, at the Dispatch Box, a Minister promises that another Minister will attend a Committee and be questioned, but we are talking about having as little as six weeks to work with. We have all been in a situation in which a Minister's diary is so busy that it is difficult for them to attend, and that would not be good enough in this case. I hope the Minister will give some reassurance that he will, through the normal channels in Whitehall, ensure that every Department is aware of the requirement for a relevant Minister to attend within a period that allows the Committee to produce a report or respond to the Government, which does not mean at the end of a six or 12-week consultation period.

I hope the Minister can give me those reassurances. I would like him to be very clear on the record. I acknowledge the efforts made in Committee to talk about this, and some of the pledges made then, but it is important that these changes and the Minister's views and pledges are made clear in this Chamber. In Committee, the Minister said that

“Ministers will make themselves available to speak at the Committee during that period, in so far as that is practical.”

He also said that

“not all select Committees will respond in the relevant period, therefore elongating the process”.—[*Official Report, Planning and Infrastructure Public Bill Committee*, 29 April 2025; c. 103.]

[*Dame Meg Hillier*]

I can clarify for and reassure the Minister that it is the intention of those on Committee corridor to ensure that these things are dealt with in a proper and timely fashion.

I hope that the Minister will ensure both that Ministers attend in a timely fashion, and that there is a proper approach that ensures that Committees get advance notice of a new planning policy statement or revised statement, so that they have time to plan and get their ducks in a row in order to enhance the work of Government by giving them, if necessary, critical-friend comments. Scrutiny in whatever form is absolutely vital. If, as I hope, the Minister will put that on the record today, I will not push my amendment to a vote. It is vital that parliamentary scrutiny be protected as much as possible.

Andrew George: It is clear that we are today debating methodologies, rather than values. Certainly, I do not dispute the Minister's values at all; we all want to see growth, need met, and the environment protected. The question that we are debating today is the best methodologies for achieving those outcomes. I have submitted a number of amendments covering three areas, which I will rattle through as quickly as I can, all of which support the themes that my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos) advanced today, and indeed that he has pursued in Committee in previous weeks.

Amendment 148 relates to housing targets. It proposes allowing local authorities to adopt targets that reduce housing need, rather than simply targets to build homes. House building targets are in many areas part of the problem, rather than the solution to housing need. For example, since the 1960s, Cornwall's housing stock has been among the fastest growing in the United Kingdom. It has almost trebled, yet housing problems for local people have got significantly worse over that time.

Simply setting house building targets results in massive hope value being attached to every single community around Cornwall. Having worked as a chief executive of a charity that tries to build affordable homes, I can say that establishing house building targets makes it more difficult to address the housing needs of local people. Targets that are about reducing need would change the dynamics of the planning system in places that face these problems.

Unfortunately, the approach to house building targets that has been adopted by parties over the previous decades is built on the delusion that private developers will collude with Governments to drive down the price of their finished product. We can no longer carry on in that delusion. We cannot and should not pursue counter-productive methodologies. Amendment 149 and new clause 108 are consequential on the fundamental change proposed in amendment 148.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington has spoken about introducing a use class order to address the prevalence of non-permanent occupancy in some areas. The previous Government were looking at bringing in a use class for holiday lets, but that should be extended to second homes and all homes of non-permanent occupancy. New clause 92, which is consequential on new clause 91, proposes introducing a sunset clause for planning permission to ensure that there is not a perverse incentive

for people to apply to change a property's use in order to enhance the value of their property when they sell it. This is not about the politics of envy but the politics of social justice. I think those who represent areas or constituencies with large numbers of second homes properly understand how these things operate.

Finally, I tabled a number of amendments relating to affordability, including new clause 89 on affordable development and new clause 90. New clause 89 would prohibit cross-subsidy—or at least open-market development—on rural exception sites. Those sites should not be called rural exception sites; they should be called rural norm sites. That should be the methodology for delivering affordable homes in rural areas. It should be driven by wanting to have affordable homes in such locations.

Steff Aquarone (North Norfolk) (LD): My hon. Friend is making an excellent case. In North Norfolk, people want house building that genuinely meets local need and helps address the housing crisis, which is affecting everyone in my constituency. On affordability, does he agree that we need to empower local authorities to define what “affordable” means in their areas?

Andrew George: My hon. Friend is right about that. Affordability is defined for rented accommodation—either 80% of market rent or the local housing allowance, whichever is lower—but it is not sufficiently defined for the intermediate market in rural areas, which includes shared ownership and discounted sale. There are ways that affordability can be achieved, and that should be done within local planning. We should give local authorities the power to define, for the purposes of their communities, what is and is not affordable, and we should strengthen the role of neighbourhood development plans in that respect as well.

New clause 90 would put a cap on developer profit. A lot of people do not understand how planning authorities make their viability assessment when developments are brought forward. There is an assumption of a developer profit of 20%, but when developers ask for amendments to the way that their planning applications are viewed, they will often have undertaken two different valuations, and will come with both. One they present to the planning authority, and one they keep in their back pocket. One of the valuations comes with violins, and a sob story about how they will lose out because of the development, and how they are doing it only for the community. The other valuation is the reality. We know that they are making a killing out of other people's poverty.

Olivia Bailey (Reading West and Mid Berkshire) (Lab): I am pleased to support this important Bill and the Government amendments to it, which will deliver the housing, infrastructure and environmental protections that my constituents need.

First, I welcome the Government's enhancements to the environmental delivery plan. They provide greater clarity, legal safeguards and appropriate flexibility to ensure that the plan restores and enhances our precious natural habitats. The current piecemeal approach to offsetting environmental harm is not working. The Government's sensible approach maintains existing protections for nature, and adds to them with the ability to fund high-impact strategic nature recovery projects. I am very lucky that

there are several significant nature recovery projects in my constituency, such as Sulham woods and meadows, which I had the pleasure of visiting last week. This project is maximising biodiversity on 130 hectares of marginal arable land, and is planting 24,000 trees, 4 km of new hedgerow and a new walnut orchard. We need more big projects like this.

I would like to highlight the opportunity the Bill presents for our country's chalk streams. I am proud to represent a constituency that boasts many wonderful waterways, including the entire length of the River Pang—a beautiful, winding chalk stream that is a point of local pride. It is said to be the inspiration for the “Wind in the Willows”, and it is loved by families, dog walkers and anglers alike. But the precious Pang is in crisis. In just a few short years, the water quality has plummeted to poor. Citizen scientists and anglers testing the river, such as Professor Mike Wilson and Pete Devery, consistently report samples with completely unacceptable levels of phosphate and *E. coli*. The phosphate pollution from Thames Water sewage works is so bad that luminous green from the resultant algae can be seen in satellite images.

I thank all the campaigners, citizen scientists and volunteers with whom I have been working throughout my campaign to restore the Pang. I also thank the Action for River Kennet—ARK—project, the Rivers Trust, the Angling Trust, Pang Valley Flood Forum and Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust, as well as all members of the Pang Flagship Chalk Stream Partnership, which supports a range of initiatives to restore the Pang. They are all dedicated advocates whose restoration efforts are making a real difference. Chalk streams are rare and valuable habitats. Their mineral-rich, stable waters are home to a plethora of species.

Victoria Collins (Harpenden and Berkhamsted) (LD): The hon. Member is talking about chalk streams, which are the rainforests of the UK. A chalk stream in my constituency has had over 4,000 hours of non-stop sewage, and it sounds like the River Pang has been a victim of something similar. Amendment 16 is so important to protect our chalk streams, and local people say to me, as development comes, that this is actually groundwater. Would she support amendment 16?

Olivia Bailey: I thank the hon. Member for her contribution. I will come to my view on that amendment.

Given that 85% of the world's chalk streams are in England, it is right that we consider chalk streams England's rainforests. We have a duty, as their custodians, to protect them for future generations. While some chalk streams have protections, such as site of special scientific interest status, many, including the Pang, lack even that. The Bill, alongside our landmark water legislation, is an opportunity to expand the protections for chalk streams. I am grateful for the conversations I have had with the Minister on this issue, and I know how committed he is to our chalk streams, so I ask if he will commit to strengthening the protections for our chalk streams as this Bill progresses.

The Bill is an opportunity to build the homes and infrastructure that this country needs, boost our economy, and protect precious habitats like the Pang. I look forward to continuing to support it.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): I rise to speak to new clause 74 in my name. First, I thank all Members from parties across the House who signed up to my new clause. I also thank Mr Speaker and his team for the novel offer he made this morning on how we might have dealt with new clause 74.

New clause 74 is very simple. It seeks to ensure that promises made to all of us as MPs by prospective developers when considering applications for large-scale housing developments are honoured. I have lost count of the number of developers who have made promises about so-called flagship housing developments, gained the support of the MP and other local community stakeholders, applied for outline planning permission and then been granted it on the basis of a good mixture of homes. In one case—that of Lutterworth East—a pledge was made by the developer to build a minimum of 40% affordable homes. Those developers give the pledge, obtain the support and gain outline planning permission, but then, a few months or a year or two later, they seek to renege completely on the pledges given.

7.30 pm

Lutterworth East is one such example that should be informative for all hon. Members. It is a cautionary tale that we ought to have at the forefront of our minds when developers come to us making pledges. Lutterworth East was the development where 40% minimum was to be affordable housing. But what has the developer done, a mere two years after being given planning permission? That developer, without having to seek new planning permission, simply applied to amend the section 106 legal agreement—putting a gun to the head of the local planning authority, which had no choice other than to accept it for fear of losing housing for its targets—to reduce the 40% affordable housing not to 30% or to 20%; it sought 0% affordable housing. That was a disgraceful breach of trust. The local planning authority, whose local plan requires 40% minimum affordable homes, allowed a significant decrease. They settled on 10%, which means that, in the case of Lutterworth East, over 800 families will be denied an affordable house.

The Minister is not currently in his place, but I say to the Government that the Bill wholly lacks any suggested power to deal with that. I ask them to take on board the case of Lutterworth East and examine why the developer was allowed to renege wholly on its commitments in a way that totally excluded the local community. There was no public consultation, because it was not an application for planning permission; it was merely a change.

Rachel Blake: I am really moved by what the hon. Gentleman is talking about. Many of us will have had similar experiences. We have been hearing so much about the importance of local decision making. I cannot help but think if only there had been the necessary investment in skills in the planning team who made the decision and determination, and that they had had a planning committee behind them who, by all accounts, could have said, “You need to bring the application back in.” Does he agree that we need to invest in local planning teams so that they can resist such totally inappropriate applications from developers?

Alberto Costa: I welcome the hon. Lady's suggestion, and I would welcome more resources going into local planning teams, but what we have here is a problem,

[*Alberto Costa*]

which she may well encounter in her own constituency. Hon. Members should be very careful indeed when developers promise X, Y and Z affordable, social and accessible homes, even with legally binding section 106 agreements, because those agreements can be changed at whim when a local planning authority is put under pressure.

Martin Wrigley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the Liberal Democrats that, given the unreliability of section 106 agreements and developers living up to them, as he demonstrated, the best way to get affordable homes for his constituents and mine is through an increased amount of social housing delivered by the local council?

Alberto Costa: I would welcome that. The Government need to take into account Lutterworth East and to ask themselves why a Labour parliamentarian and a Conservative parliamentarian have had to go begging to the Government to look into the matter. The Government purport to want to see more social housing, more affordable housing and more accessible housing, but with Lutterworth East they have had the opportunity to look into that and have chosen not to rectify the issue. In concluding—I am aware that others wish to speak—I simply ask the Government whether they are willing to have a meeting with me and the Labour parliamentarian in question to discuss what they could do on this matter, given that the developer, incredibly, is none other than a county council.

Chris Curtis: May we please start by acknowledging something that still has not been acknowledged enough: the current planning system is broken? Nowhere is that clearer than in our environmental and habitats regulation, which part 3 of the Bill is hoping to fix, and which many amendments—amendment 69 in particular—would make significantly worse.

Let us start with a couple of clear examples. First, we have the lower Thames crossing. Some £250 million was spent on a planning application spanning over 350,000 pages. That is more than 250 times the length of “War and Peace” at a cost that is more than Norway paid to build the world’s longest road tunnel. Fifteen years on, not a single spade is in the ground.

Secondly, we are currently building the most expensive nuclear power station in the history of the human race at Hinkley Point. Why? For the last eight years, EDF has been stuck in regulatory wrangling over—I kid you not—a fish disco: an acoustic system designed to guide fish away from water intakes. Millions spent and still not a single resolution.

My personal favourite is the infamous bat tunnel, where £120 million of taxpayers’ money was wasted on a tunnel that might save a handful of bats from a nearby forest, though many experts argue it will more likely put them in harm’s way. That is not planning; it is parody. While we argue about newts and bat tunnels, what is really happening in Britain is that 150,000 children or more are growing up in temporary accommodation, with all the consequences mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi).

Rachel Blake: My hon. Friend said we have not confronted how the planning system is broken. Does he agree that we have not heard enough about how many children are homeless this evening and will be in the months ahead because we are not grappling with the housing crisis, and that we cannot do that until we address the infrastructure crisis?

Chris Curtis: Hundreds of thousands of children will wake up tomorrow morning in temporary accommodation as a consequence of this, and millions of families will continue paying some of the highest energy bills in the western world. When Russian tanks rolled into Europe, we were dangerously reliant on foreign oil and gas because our planning system consistently blocked the clean, home-grown energy generation that we so desperately need. I see some Liberal Democrat Members laughing. I note that, in many cases, it was their councils that blocked that energy infrastructure from being built.

Gideon Amos: Will the hon. Member give way?

Chris Curtis: In one of the wettest countries in Europe, we could face summer water shortages because we have not built a single major reservoir in over 30 years. Here is the real kick in the teeth: we have paid all those prices for rules that have failed even on their own terms. We have created endless hoops to jump through and poured public money into bizarre mitigation schemes while Britain has become one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. We have lost over half our ancient woodland and one in six species are at risk of extinction. We have got fewer birds, fewer butterflies and fewer mammals, and yet more paperwork than ever before.

We should ask this: if these rules are not helping people and they are not helping nature, who on earth are they for? We throw money at scattergun mitigation—fish discos and bat tunnels—while failing to invest in strategic, landscape-scale restoration that actually works. We force every project to fit every issue on site, even when that is more expensive, less effective and totally irrational. That means tens of thousands of individual site-by-site protections, which are bureaucratic, inconsistent and scientifically out of date, and all despite the fact that modern ecological science is clear that nature recovery depends on scale and connectivity, not isolated microprojects.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Middleton South) (Lab): When I was building the second runway at Manchester airport, I had similar rants to my hon. Friend’s. I came to hate great crested newts, which were getting in the way of building that second runway. Surely there has to be a solution with balance, one that does not cost a quarter of a billion pounds for looking at the land around the lower Thames crossing, but allows Government and local government to put things such as swift bricks into housing. There has to be balance.

Chris Curtis: I start by appreciating the description of a rant—I will keep ranting on this point until I do not have to speak to my constituents waking up in temporary accommodation because of this country’s failure to build. I note that there is a middle ground; in fact, it is even better than a middle ground, because through this Bill and the changes we are proposing we can improve the situation for nature and improve the situation for

building, including incentivising developers—for example through the biodiversity net gain process—to put swift bricks in place.

What we currently have is not a conservation system, but a cargo cult, mimicking the symbols of protection while the reality on the ground gets worse. Contrast that with what protecting nature actually looks like, from this Government: a strategic land use framework that supports farmers to deliver climate and nature benefits across 1.6 million hectares of land—more than half the size of Wales; banning bee-killing pesticides; backing a transition to regenerative farming and planting forests on double the amount of land that will be needed to build the 1.5 million homes.

Matt Rodda (Reading Central) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Chris Curtis: I will make some progress.

Now we have a Bill that will finally move us towards environmental delivery plans that take a far more strategic approach to improving nature and increasing the building that this country so desperately needs. I want these changes to go further. We need to look at the culture within our regulators, especially Natural England, which has become too much of a blocker to building, but this Bill is a step forward, and the amendments proposed would be a step backwards.

I end with this plea, especially to hon. Members on my own Benches who seem to find themselves defending this broken status quo: “Before you vote tonight, talk to the people who will still be here after you’ve gone home. Speak to the person cleaning your office this evening, and ask them what it is like when rent swallows up over half your salary because we have failed to build our way out of this housing crisis. Speak to the person who cooked your lunch in the Tea Room, and ask what it is like to raise kids in a country with sky-high energy bills because we failed to build home-grown energy generation. Ask yourself who you are here to serve: the broken spreadsheets or the people who sent us here?” If we keep putting more and more barriers into our planning system, it is hard-working families across this country who will pay the price. Let us fix our planning system and get Britain building again.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): I thank the Minister and the members of the Bill Committee for their hard work on this legislation. I regret, however, that the Minister has been so resistant to amendments from my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos) and from others on the Liberal Democrat Benches, which I now rise to support. My constituents in Bicester and Woodstock want to see a planning system that delivers decent, affordable homes for those excluded from housing, that recognises that investment in infrastructure must come before housing development and that does not create a false distinction between development and protecting nature.

Linda and Gary live in my constituency. Gary has complex needs and Linda is his carer. Their property is not suitable; Gary cannot shower or get to the garden by himself. Linda and Gary have been bidding to West Oxfordshire district council for a property suitable to meet Gary’s needs for more than a year, but they have been continually unsuccessful. As many hon. Members have stated, we have a crisis of social housing in this country.

That is why Liberal Democrats want to see an additional 150,000 social homes built every year through amendment 15, and why new clause 112 is so important, preventing developers from ducking the delivery of social homes.

We also need developers to develop the buildings that have been consented. In Cherwell district council in my constituency, more than 8,000 homes have been consented but not built. That has led to a crisis, with villages such as Ambrosden and Launton at the mercy of opportunist developers who have hoovered up sites not contained in the local plan. New clause 3 would put an end to the land banking of consented sites, forcing developers to use them or lose them.

7.45 pm

On Second Reading I highlighted to the Secretary of State that there are three nationally significant infrastructure projects proposed in my constituency. These mega-schemes relate to energy and transport. They may bring local benefit, but my constituents are deeply concerned by the way decisions are taken out of the hands of local representatives. They are especially concerned that these NSIPs sit outside local plans, so that their cumulative impact is not considered when other decisions are taken. Amendment 128 would ensure oversight of national policy statements and allow Members of this House to scrutinise the Government’s approach to national projects.

Local infrastructure is also critical. In my constituency, Bicester, Kidlington and a number of villages anticipate rapid housing growth in the coming years, yet our physical and social infrastructure is already struggling to cope. My constituents want assurance that housing growth will be preceded by sufficient investment in GP surgeries, dentistry and school and college places, as well as water infrastructure, energy capacity and transport networks. New clause 46 would require local infrastructure to be completed, while new clauses 4 and 23 would ensure that water and drainage infrastructure is sufficient for development.

The Minister acknowledged in his speech that many organisations and leaders devoted to protecting nature, such as the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust and, I believe, the chief executive of the RSPB, Beccy Speight, are deeply concerned by the way Ministers have characterised measures to address the nature emergency as blockers to development. The Minister disputed that, so it is disappointing that the Government have not accepted new clause 9, which would have had the modest goal of encouraging swift bricks and other measures for wildlife in new developments. I hope he will also reconsider new clause 1, which sets out the Government’s principal commitment to take all reasonable steps to avoid adverse environmental effects, and I urge the Government to accept new clause 17, which would ensure a fairer level of community benefit for new energy infrastructure projects.

At the same time, this Bill misses an opportunity to raise the environmental standards of new homes. I welcome the Minister’s commitment at the weekend that new homes will have solar panels by default, and the tribute he paid to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson) for campaigning on that issue. However, I regret that the Government have not accepted new clause 2, which would have set a zero carbon standard for new homes.

The Minister and I have frequently discussed the written ministerial statement of December 2023 under the previous Administration, which undermined the effort of West Oxfordshire district council in my constituency to set a low carbon standard for the development of Salt Cross. I appreciate that he may not accept new clause 2, but will he at least agree today to withdraw that written ministerial statement and to release the development of high-quality homes that will be good for the environment and good for their new residents?

Tom Hayes: I rise to speak in favour of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill because it will build high-quality housing, reform energy grid connections and deliver critical energy infrastructure. I also rise to speak in favour of new clause 82, tabled in my name and backed by 71 MPs with cross-party support, to achieve happy, healthy childhoods. We should bring forward a statutory duty in England, like those in Scotland and Wales, to ensure inclusive and sufficient play opportunities.

The foreword to the first and only play strategy to be published, by a Labour Government in 2008, states:

“Time and space to play safely is integral to our ambition to make England the best country in the world for children and young people to grow up”.

That ambition remains, but the strategy was scrapped because, a few years after its publication with a £235 million budget, the coalition Government drew a red line through everything. We need to prioritise play in this Parliament. Why? Because in the intervening years, hundreds of playgrounds in our constituencies have been boarded up and allowed to rust.

This has been especially true in disadvantaged communities. Our poorest communities have been the greatest casualties of austerity, and we know the consequences. Screen time dominates and we have a rise in social media. Politicians are very good at telling children to get off their screens without providing the alternative play opportunities. With more play and less screen time, we can have better mental health outcomes for children. We can have more safety in our streets and we can have better social development opportunities. Play is prevention. When we improve life quality and life chances, we save the public purse significant sums in the long run because we reduce demand on the NHS, on our councils and on our social services.

Matt Rodda: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, and he is clearly speaking on the basis of a great deal of experience as a former senior councillor in Oxford. I wonder if he would like to dwell on some other aspects of this, because in many ways, play also benefits children’s social development and their ability to work and concentrate on learning at school. Does he agree that there are many other benefits to play, and will he praise local authorities such as Reading that are actively promoting play areas?

Tom Hayes: My hon. Friend will know that I have spent a lot of time in Reading getting to know his constituents and the community, and I do indeed praise the people that he is talking about. I agree that, with time and space for play, children will have the very best start in life, but this is not just about children; it is also about their families. We are in an ongoing cost of living crisis. With play, and outdoor play in particular, we have

free opportunities for parents and guardians to give their children the support, the social development and the leisure opportunities that they need and deserve.

Alison Hume (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. In my constituency, the Scalby school playing fields long served the community as vital green space, but that space is under threat as the council is seeking to remove protections, which could lead to its being sold. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is why this new clause is so necessary, as it would ensure that the council either kept the fields or made equivalent provision of land for children to play on?

Tom Hayes: I make it a habit to agree with my hon. Friend and I will keep that tradition today. I do indeed agree, and she rather anticipates the points that I am about to make.

New clause 82 is so important because it provides key things that our children need. It would require developers to deliver and fund adequate play in their communities. It would ensure no net loss without equivalent provision as a consequence of development, but let me be clear: this is not about requiring every development to have a blanket requirement. It is not about holding every development hostage, because we know that development is important for growth in our communities. It is about ensuring that councils are well equipped and that planning authorities are supported to take a view in the round of what play sufficiency would be in a given area, and indeed to use contributions from developers to fund adequate—indeed, excellent—play provision.

Leigh Ingham (Stafford) (Lab): I know that my hon. Friend is passionate about this issue, as am I as a signatory to this new clause. In my constituency of Stafford, Eccleshall and the villages, I have been working with a group of local parents on a joint campaign for safe, inclusive parks for neurodiverse children. Those spaces benefit not just neurodiverse children but parents who also need somewhere safe to go with their children and young people. In recognition of the cost of living crisis, does my hon. Friend agree that these spaces should be provided for all children, not just those who are neurotypical, and that they should provide space for their parents too?

Tom Hayes: My hon. Friend and I have talked many times about the importance of inclusive play, and I commend her as a fantastic champion for children with special educational needs and disabilities to access those play opportunities. I agree with her entirely, and one thing that my new clause 82 would do is to introduce a requirement for planning authorities to assess play sufficiency, particularly inclusive play sufficiency. That is a critically important point.

In a nutshell, we need to have national policy frameworks and national planning actions that will ensure that the voices of children and their families are properly listened to, that they are consulted on their needs, and that planning authorities are required and supported to introduce the outdoor play equipment and areas that can so enhance their life chances. In so doing, we would be building on the work of that last Labour Government that I was just talking about. If you ever want to enjoy a beautiful photograph that sums up all of what the last

Labour Government were doing, have a look at Ed Balls and Andy Burnham on a swing announcing the 2008 national play strategy. It is a fantastic sight. Genuinely, you can see in their faces the joy that comes from play and extending play opportunities. You can see that they are Ministers who are fantastically enjoying their jobs, and that is because they are delivering for children. That 2008 strategy was a critical development in the world of play, and the play sector responded so positively to it. It came with £235 million of investment to provide up to 3,500 new or refurbished playgrounds. I still get sent photographs by people who have seen those playgrounds with the Department for Children, Schools and Families logo on them, with its beautiful rainbow, and we should have more of that.

To conclude, this Bill is critical for children's development. This is also a pro-growth new clause because we have in our play sector small family businesses who contribute to our economy to the tune of £250 million and are powering employment and economic opportunity in our communities. Our country feels like it needs a lick of paint at times. We need potholes filling, we need litter collecting and we need playgrounds repairing. In so doing, we can bring hope back to our communities, and in doing that we can help people to feel positive about the potential for politics to make change.

Danny Kruger (East Wiltshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Tom Hayes). That was an important speech and I concur entirely with his priority there. It is really important that we invest in the social infrastructure of play for the benefit of children, although not necessarily for the benefit of Ed Balls and Andy Burnham—an appalling image was conjured by the hon. Gentleman there—but I concur with his general point.

I want to speak in support of my new clause 87, which would require the Government to designate more chalk streams as protected sites within six months of the Bill passing. We know that 85% of the world's chalk streams are in this country. There are only 220 of them, so they are a rare and very special habitat. Most of those chalk streams are in southern England, and I am glad to say that most of the most important ones are in Wiltshire. Morgan's Hill on the edge of my constituency is a hydrological dividing line where a drop of rain can end up in the River Kennet and then the Thames, flowing out to the North sea. Alternatively it can go down the Hampshire Avon into the English channel, or it can go out west along the Bristol Avon and end up in the Atlantic. This is a very significant place, with water from Wiltshire flowing through the whole of southern England.

Those chalk streams are 60 million years old and they have flowed clear and clean all that time until very recently in the modern era. They are over-abstracted; too much water is being taken out because of overdevelopment and bad house building. They are contaminated with agricultural run-off and, of course, sewage spills. I pay tribute and give my sincere congratulations to all the campaigners in my constituency. We will all have similar organisations locally, but Action for the River Kennet in particular is doing great work to support that river and anglers, schools and farmers in our area. I also pay tribute to the Southern Streams initiative that supports farmers across Wiltshire to restore the health of the soil and the water in our area.

The last Government introduced some important new measures to restore and preserve the health of our chalk streams. These included the water restoration fund, which ensured that the fines levied on water companies for sewage spills went to restore nature in the areas that had been harmed. We introduced a storm overflow discharge reduction plan, stewardship schemes that addressed the question of agricultural run-off and, in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, we ensured that chalk streams were considered as part of environmental assessments for new developments. We also introduced the chalk streams recovery plan, which was sadly halted by the Labour Government when they came into power last year. They kept some of our legacy, I am glad to say, but they have paused the sustainable farming incentive and I am afraid to say that we expect cuts to stewardship schemes in the spending review this week. Crucially, they scrapped the water restoration fund itself. Thames Water was fined over £100 million last month because of sewage spills in our area. That money should have gone to supporting natural restoration in the Thames Valley area, including in Wiltshire. It has been taken by the Treasury. We do not know where that money will go. The Government have also scrapped the chalk stream recovery plan.

My concern about the Bill, and why I tabled the amendment, is that it will put additional pressure on our chalk streams. Yes, we need new building—absolutely, that priority is right and what we need—and building in our backyard, but the backyard of Wiltshire is Swindon. We need to see more intense development in urban areas where the real demand for housing is. That will be a great blessing to Swindon and Wiltshire if we can make that happen.

The new clause in my name would protect more chalk streams as protected sites. I am glad to say that the Kennet and the Hampshire Avon are already SSSIs, but we need to see more streams designated in that way. It is not enough to protect only 11 of the 220 chalk streams in this country; the more designations, the better. That would create genuine momentum behind the preservation of chalk streams, so that when developments are being considered, we can be sure that these vital national natural assets are properly protected for the future.

8 pm

Dan Tomlinson (Chipping Barnet) (Lab): The Bill before the House has the potential to be one of the most pro-growth pieces of legislation passed by this place for decades and to transform our country for the better, but the amendments proposed will blunt its impact and make us all worse off. We should reject them for the prosperity of our constituents and the future of our country.

Every day in this place has to be about our constituents and the lives they lead. In Chipping Barnet, time and again I see the impact of our failure to build homes. Take Maryam—a victim of domestic violence and mother of a seven-year-old, working a zero-hours contract. She found herself with nowhere suitable to live to the point that she was living in a car. Or take Hayley—a wheelchair user living in a property that is not accessible for her. Due to a lack of available housing that is appropriate for her, she is often housebound because she simply cannot leave her home without support.

[*Dan Tomlinson*]

These are the stories of Britain today, but it does not need to be like this. This Bill gives us a once-in-a-generation opportunity to fix many of the things holding our country back. For too long, we have not built enough in this country, and we are paying a huge price for that. Under-investment in our homes and infrastructure has made us all worse off, both financially and socially, living in homes that skewer the prospect of a good life. That is why I do not support the Opposition amendments.

I also do not support amendment 69 proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Chris Hinchliff), which sadly misses the mark. Labour was elected on a manifesto that sought to prioritise growth and making people better off. The Bill demonstrates how that is possible, alongside improved protections for nature. The nature restoration fund is a genuine win-win, but its successful and timely implementation is put at risk by the amendment.

Ellie Chowns: Will the hon. Member give way?

Dan Tomlinson: I will make a bit more progress.

Let us take the example of nutrient neutrality. It is estimated that no fewer than 160,000 homes across the country have been blocked by Natural England on that basis. That is because on-site mitigation on a site-by-site basis is often virtually impossible, and those homes remain stalled. The environmental delivery plans that Natural England will produce will mean that rather than homes being held up by those rules, the very issues causing nutrient neutrality challenges can be addressed in a strategic way—better for building, for nature and for people. EDPs take the challenge of nutrient neutrality seriously and mean that builders can get stalled sites built, providing much-needed new homes.

Chris Hinchliff (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): My hon. Friend may have slightly confused the point of amendment 69, which is merely to address the concerns raised by the Office for Environmental Protection and to ensure that the nature restoration fund works to deliver exactly the points that he describes with the right nature protection.

Dan Tomlinson: I will come to the point my hon. Friend raises in a second.

If the amendment were adopted, the homes that have been blocked to date would continue to be blocked, and vast numbers would face unacceptable delays or, indeed, never be built. What would happen under the amendment, as we can interpret it, is that we would first have to wait for the EDP to be drafted, for the relevant funding to be secured and for the funding to be distributed to the relevant farmers or others who can help with the mitigation. The works would then have to take place; the impact of the mitigation would have to be monitored; and the monitoring would then have to conclude that it had been a success before any new homes in an area could be built where nutrient neutrality is a concern.

Chris Curtis: Does the hon. Member agree that what he has just described would lead to more delays in the system, which would mean that more planning permissions were held up—something that Opposition Members

have complained about? If the amendment were passed, the requirement would also add a lot more expense to the system, which would mean more viability problems and fewer social homes being built.

Dan Tomlinson: I agree with those points. It would also make it virtually impossible to meet our manifesto commitment, on which we were elected, to build the 1.5 million homes that we need over this Parliament.

Paul Holmes: The hon. Member knows that I am a big fan of his. He makes a speech about our and other amendments blocking the delivery of homes. Will he therefore criticise his Government, who have reduced the number of homes required in his constituency through reducing the number of houses being built in London under his mayor?

Dan Tomlinson: I expect the hon. Member knows that the housing targets have been reduced in London because of the additional premium that was put on by the previous Government just to make life more difficult for the Mayor of London, which we all know Conservatives love to do. We are trying to be reasonable and proportionate in the location of the new homes.

As I was saying, it is important for us to do all we can to ensure that we can hit our target of 1.5 million new homes. As much as I respect my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire and his work in this space, I hope his amendment will not command the support of the House today.

I know my hon. Friend and Members on both sides of the House are strong supporters of social housing, but without the unamended changes in the Bill, we will not get the social homes that we need to be built. People have spoken movingly about those living in temporary accommodation. I spent four years or so as a child living in emergency and temporary accommodation. I was homeless for a number of years. Back then—15 or 20 years ago—there were not that many young children who were homeless and in temporary accommodation. There are now 160,000 children—one in 21 children in London, one in every single class—in temporary accommodation. We cannot allow a system that fails both nature and those children to persist. I implore any colleagues thinking of voting for the amendment to think of those children and the vital homes that could be built, and built quickly and at pace.

Sean Woodcock (Banbury) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dan Tomlinson: I should make progress so that others can speak; my hon. Friend and I will have to talk later.

This Bill and this Government are all about the economic growth that ultimately is the route to more jobs, more opportunities and higher living standards—a better life for all of us in every part of the country. That is the potential of this Bill, and we must match the scale of the problem with the scale of our ambition. Britain's economic decline has gone on for too long. Families are suffering with a crippling cost of living crisis, driven by high housing costs in many parts of the country and high energy bills everywhere. We just do not invest as a country; we do not build, and year after year we find ourselves surprised that we are worse off and that we

are stuck in a doom loop from which no politicians in recent decades, if we are honest, have had the guts to pull us out.

We finally have a Government elected on a promise to wrest us from this decline, and legislation that takes steps in the right direction to do just that. Of course, there is more to do—much more—but this is a strong legislative start. For the prosperity of all our constituents, I hope the Bill passes unamended today.

Blake Stephenson (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): I rise to speak in support of new clauses 43, 44, 52, 53 and 81, if I have time. Mid Bedfordshire is a fast-growing area and has accommodated more than its fair share of new homes in the past decade. Since 2012, the two districts that my constituency covers have delivered over 35,000 new homes, including the new town of Wixams. Yet this Government would have us believe that those people in my constituency who have seen housing growth outpace services, who are still waiting for the long-promised GP surgery, for train stations and for other infrastructure, and who fear that the character of their historic Ends villages is being lost, are all blockers because they are concerned about what more badly planned development would mean for the overstretched amenities and services in their area.

The Bill is an opportunity to lead. It is an opportunity not to pit blockers against builders but to deliver a system that turns blockers into builders. Regrettably, as it stands, the Bill will fail, but it does not have to fail. My new clause 52 would create a fairer way of managing new towns by reforming the new towns programme, which seems expressly designed to make local communities resent the towns foisted upon them. It would replace that new towns model with one that does not involve a double whammy of house building—currently, communities that want to do the right thing and build the houses that people need find every patch of countryside is hoovered up because the Government have added a new town on top of the developable area in their district.

My new clause 53 would close the loophole that allows planning authorities to grant developments on floodplains. That is a perfectly sensible and pragmatic position. People in Maulden in my constituency know all too well how bad development compounds the risk of flooding. They are honest hard-working people who want to enjoy the warm and dry homes that their hard work has paid for, but the Government are backing big-box developers, not them. The new clause would prevent developers from getting away high and dry with their profits while our constituents pay the price in flooded homes. New clause 44, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), would do the same by ensuring that where development does happen, developers must deliver and maintain sustainable urban drainage infrastructure. The current guidance is too vague and the current rules too lax to ensure that our residents are protected.

My Mid Bedfordshire constituency has lots of beautiful villages, but they are under threat from the creeping spread of urban sprawl that threatens to merge them into a conglomerate mass of development, which flies in the face of the historically gentle and natural evolution of our beautiful estate villages. I therefore endorse new clause 43 for its efforts to stop our beautiful villages from being lost to future generations.

Wendy Morton: To put it more simply, the sense of urban sprawl is about the green belt not just between specific villages but between communities. We see that between Streetly and Pheasey in my constituency on the edge of Birmingham. Does he agree that it would help to tackle the problem if the Government adopted a truly brownfield-first approach by developing the 1.2 million homes that it is estimated are available on brownfield sites?

Blake Stephenson: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. Those green spaces on the edge of and between towns are at risk. It is not just the fields that are at risk but people's access to green space, which is vital for mental health and wellbeing.

Paul Holmes: In relation to new clause 44, which my hon. Friend supports, does he agree that the Government could very easily accept it because it enables and encompasses an existing piece of legislation and could make a vast difference to many of the developments proposed? Why does he think the Minister will not accept it?

Blake Stephenson: The shadow Minister makes the case for me, so I do not think I need to. I absolutely support new clause 44.

I will make a final point so that we can hear from another speaker. I am proud to support new clause 81 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Leicestershire (Mr Bedford). Communities such as Wixams in Mid Bedfordshire too often find that the housing-first, infrastructure-second approach that our planning system prefers mean that they get all of the housing but none of the infrastructure—that is just not right. It is not right that, nearly two decades on from the first shovel going into the ground, it is still not clear when Wixams will get its long-promised GP surgery, while more and more houses are planned around it. We must end that cycle and ensure that where infrastructure is promised, infrastructure is delivered. That is what the new clause will do.

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a planning systems that turns blockers into builders. We must do better than this Bill, which I fear will only build more blockers.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I give Members notice that I will take the time limit down to four minutes after the next speaker.

8.15 pm

Chris Hinchliff: I rise to speak in favour of the amendments in my name, particularly amendment 69, which has 53 supporters from across the House.

Every family stuck on a housing waiting list, and every child suffering the insecurity of temporary accommodation, represents a moral stain on our country. I welcome Ministers' urgency in seeking to address those corrosive failures, which, for millions, underpin a lingering sense that our country is deeply broken. However, I fear that the Government have misdiagnosed the root cause of the housing crisis, which is fundamentally that private capital will never deliver the public good that we need.

[Chris Hinchliff]

The evidence is clear that processes that uphold democracy and nature are not the problem; profit maximisation is. The planning system consistently approves more homes than the private sector delivers, and when homes are built, they are too often unaffordable for those at the sharp end of the housing crisis. Last year, less than 2% of homes delivered through section 106 were for social rent. After 20 years of deregulation, hoping that just one more wave will finally make the market deliver is simply not credible. It certainly does not justify stripping away the few protections that we have left for our natural environment, especially when the Government's own assessment could provide no concrete evidence that it would work.

We are already one of the most nature-depleted nations in the world, and we can spend what little remains of our natural inheritance only once. If the Government press ahead with their proposals, the national account will soon be empty. There is the kernel of a good idea in a nature restoration fund, but the weight of evidence against the way that it has been drafted is overwhelming: nature organisations, academics, ecologists and the Office for Environmental Protection have all raised serious concerns. I welcome the tone of earlier commitments from Government Front Benchers, but amendment 69 gives Ministers the opportunity to rescue something positive from the wreckage of this legislation by ensuring that environmental delivery plans serve their purpose without allowing developers to pay cash to destroy nature, and that conservation takes place before damage, so that endangered species are not pushed close to extinction before replacement habitats are established.

The amendment outlines that conservation must result in improvements to the specific feature harmed. That will protect irreplaceable habitats such as chalk streams. Our natural capital, which underpins all prosperity in this country, declined by a third from 1990 to 2014. This is a chance to reverse that trend. Given that Letchworth Garden City in my constituency sprang into life without a single mature tree being felled, we can build the homes that we desperately need to clear our housing waiting lists in harmony with nature.

To conclude, the primary value to which our politics has sought to appeal has for decades been self-serving ambition, but as the party of change and of the people, Labour has a duty to serve a higher virtue: hope. I am talking about hope for a future in which our nation no longer imagines housing as an ever-appreciating financial asset, and instead builds homes that provide the secure and healthy environment essential for our physical and mental wellbeing, and that allow everyone to put down the roots necessary to grow and fulfil their truest potential; hope for a future in which we create connected communities of friendship and co-operation, rather than having the grey and miserable utilitarianism of commuter dormitories; hope for a future in which we take every possible opportunity to restore the glories of British nature and can meaningfully say, for the first time in generations, that we have left the nation richer than we found it; in short, hope that we choose by design to surround every man, woman and child in these islands with constant proof that life is beautiful.

Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): I declare my interest as co-chair of the all-party group on local nature recovery.

When the Government first introduced this Bill, they branded it a win-win. They said that we could build the homes and infrastructure that this country desperately needs and protect and restore nature. We have seen in my constituency—one of the fastest growing areas of the country, with a Liberal Democrat-run local planning authority—that it is indeed possible to demand from developers both ambitious house building and high environmental standards that restore nature. We Liberal Democrats believe that a healthy childhood for all children includes homes that are energy-efficient and warm, not cold and damp; access to green space for mental and physical health; and infrastructure, including public transport, GPs and schools.

When done well, nature is a partner to the healthy homes and green energy that our country needs. However, through this Bill, the Government risk taking a wrecking ball to good-quality development. Nature is not a blocker to development. We are pointing the figure at the wrong culprit, and this is cheap, false rhetoric. Nature is not to blame. The Government's own watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection, has publicly warned that the Bill in its current form will be a regression from current environmental protections, rather than increasing the number of homes, helping nature and helping us to meet our binding climate and nature pledges. Instead it will remove vital safeguards and put protected sites and species at risk.

Over 30 leading environmental organisations, including the RSPB, the wildlife trusts and the National Trust, have raised the alarm about part 3 of the Bill, with its very worrying plan to move to a “cash to trash” model for the nature restoration fund. I know the Minister has rejected that characterisation, but in the Environmental Audit Committee we heard robust evidence from expert witnesses that we could call it a “pay some amount later for something, somewhere” fund.

Gideon Amos: Does my hon. Friend share my dismay that the Government are not receptive to amendments to part 3 that would restore the mitigation hierarchy and protection for irreplaceable species and ancient woodland?

Pippa Heylings: I completely concur. We appreciate the work done by my hon. Friend and others in the Bill Committee, and by tabling numerous amendments at this stage to help the Government improve the Bill.

Why do we need more stringent regulations and demands on developers, rather than less? Why do we need evidence and mitigations approved prior to development, rather than a “pay later for something, somewhere” nature restoration fund? It is because we have the evidence to show what happens without much-needed investment in enforcement capacity for local councils. On the Environmental Audit Committee, we heard the conclusions of the Lost Nature report: for nearly 6,000 homes across 42 developments, only half of the environmental pledges were kept. The others were missing in action—a staggering 83% of hedgehog highways, 100% of bug boxes and 75% of both bat and bird boxes. We need more. That is why I am speaking to the targeted amendments my hon. Friend has mentioned, to make sure we can have this win-win. His ew clause 1 would reinstate the mitigation hierarchy as a legal duty. Simply put, the duty is: first, avoid harm; then mitigate if that is not possible;

and only compensate and offset as a last resort. This principle has underpinned environmental planning for decades and cannot be cast aside.

Amendments 6 to 10 and new clauses 26 and 29 aim to address the Office for Environmental Protection's concerns and strengthen the overall improvement test for environmental delivery plans. I support new clause 21, which requires local plans to have due consideration to the local nature recovery strategies, which are currently silent in the planning system. Amendments 16 and 70 would give protections to England's globally rare chalk streams—our rainforest and our groundwater. We have 85% of the world's chalk streams, many of them in Lib Dem constituencies, including mine, yet they remain unprotected.

I hope the Government will consider amendments to the Bill, because we face a choice: pass this nature-wrecking Bill as it stands, or fix it by adopting amendments to protect chalk streams, restore wildlife and create a planning system that works with nature, not against it. I know what the Liberal Democrats will be voting for.

Naushabah Khan: I rise to speak as a member of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, and in support of new clause 50.

For too long, affordable housing has become a catch-all term that means anything but. Shared ownership and discounted market schemes are products that may work for some, but for many, they offer no real housing security. What those people need is not the option of getting a foot on the property ladder in the distant future, but a roof over their heads now. They need security, stability and homes that are truly affordable, and that means social rent. If we are serious about tackling the housing emergency, then clear, national targets for delivery of social rent homes are essential. That is why I support new clause 50, which would bring forward the accountability and direction that we need to get building and start delivering for those who have been let down for too long.

As housing charity Shelter identifies, building more social rent homes is the only lasting solution to the housing emergency. Those homes are genuinely affordable because their rent is linked to local income; there are secure tenancies; and any rent increases are more predictable. In my constituency—I know colleagues from across the House will recognise this from their inboxes—families are trapped in substandard housing or temporary accommodation for years on end. Many of us have, I fear, become desensitised to the stories of families with no kitchen to cook in, no quiet space for children to learn, and no peace in which to rest.

That is the daily reality for far too many families in the UK. This is a national scandal. Let us be honest: it did not appear overnight. For over a decade, the previous Government failed to build the homes that this country desperately needs. They dismantled council house building, slashed local authority budgets, and left the private rented sector unchecked. Those failures have left this Government with an inheritance of a hollowed-out system that responds to homelessness after the fact, instead of preventing it at root.

I welcome the fact that this Labour Government are changing this reality for families in my constituency through significant policy changes, and by allocating

£800 million to the affordable homes programme, and I am proud that a significant proportion of those homes will be for social rent, but we need to go further. Publishing or updating planning guidance on how local and national decision makers can contribute to the delivery of social rented homes can make a significant difference. That would align planning, investment and delivery with a shared goal.

We know the scale of the challenge. As many have noted, we need to build 90,000 social rented homes each year, not just for the remainder of this Parliament, but for the next decade, to meet current demand and get on top of the deep backlog. We must equip councils and delivery partners with the resources, planning powers and clarity of mission that they need. New clause 50 supports that clarity, making sure that every local and regional planning decision is pulling in the same direction.

I agree with the Minister on the need for strategic planning, the potential that spatial development strategies have to unlock large-scale regional housing solutions, and the power of land value uplift to fund affordable homes. These are important tools, but they would be better supported by clear targets. Setting a national target for social rented homes is not about Whitehall dictating numbers from above; it is about saying that we are serious about tackling homelessness.

I echo the words of this Government: this country needs builders, not blockers. Central to that sentiment must be setting a clear social housing strategy, so that we know not just that we must build, but how much we must build, and hold ourselves accountable for delivering those homes.

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): I will be brief as many colleagues are waiting to contribute. I will speak only to new clause 40, which calls for a review of the standard method of assessing local housing need. A couple of colleagues have already mentioned aspects of it, but I will talk about it for three reasons: it puts too many housing development requirements on rural areas, rather than cities; in areas like mine there are physical constraints, such as national parks, which can cause difficulties; and, as specified in the new clause, the system needs to take account of different types of housing and their affordability.

First, the new formula means that too much housing is being put into rural areas, away from urban areas. As we have heard, in some parts of London and Birmingham targets are being reduced, but there has been a 50% uplift in housing numbers nationally and a 100% uplift in my constituency. This is not a north-south issue; it is repeated in rural areas throughout the country, including in the far north-west and the far north-east. It does not correct what some people may think of as an historical imbalance, where all the developments are in towns and not in the country, because over the past couple of decades developments have been disproportionately in predominantly rural areas rather than predominantly urban areas. This is also bad for the Government's growth agenda because, as the Resolution Foundation and others have pointed out, skewing development towards cities and towns is better for growth because of connectivity.

Secondly, I am concerned about physical constraints such as national parks. Development in a constituency such as mine, where over half the land area is inside a national park, creates particular issues in the areas just

[*Damian Hinds*]

outside the national park. The Minister and his officials have been listening and they have been very helpful; I hope that they will continue to give the issue full consideration and that there will be a change.

8.30 pm

Thirdly, a big thing that is included in the text of the new clause is about the mix in housing. New clause 40 states that the Secretary of State should

“review the standard method for assessing local housing need”
and

“should consider different types of property”

looking at the

“price per square metre rather than price per unit.”

In areas such as mine, and in many constituencies across the country, we want more affordable houses to be built, but that is not what the formula delivers because often—not exclusively, but disproportionately—it is more attractive to developers to build larger, five-bedroom executive houses. That, combined with the fact that overall new build homes trade at a premium to the existing housing stock, means that the unaffordability of an area gets worse as a result of the formula, not better.

The formula then reacts upon itself to say, “You are now a more unaffordable area—now give us more of these executive homes.” I do not think that is what Ministers want, so the new clause is a helpful proposal from the Opposition. I hope that Ministers will give it serious consideration, to ensure that the housing formula creates incentives for high-quality but lower-price housing. The new clause does not prejudge exactly how that should be done, but calls upon the Government to look again at the system. I know the Minister is a reflective Minister and I hope he will do just that.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): I rise to speak to my amendment 134, which seeks to address a long-standing and deeply entrenched failure in our planning system: the chronic undersupply of Gypsy and Traveller sites across England.

My amendment seeks to increase fairness in the system and to enable, rather than hinder, the provision of adequate, culturally appropriate accommodation for Gypsy and Traveller communities. For too long the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers have been overlooked by the planning system. Research by Friends, Families and Travellers and Dr Simon Ruston looked at 100 local planning authorities and found that site provision has barely changed since the legal duty to provide them was scrapped in 1994. Of the 149 public sites in those areas, 119 were built before 1994, meaning that just 30 have been developed in the past 30 years—that is only 30 new sites across all 100 local authorities in three decades.

Decisions on Gypsy and Traveller sites have frequently been underpinned by prejudice, whether overt or institutional. Too often, proposed developments are blocked or delayed by local opposition that is not met with political will or leadership. Site delivery also suffers from a lack of inclusion at the strategic planning level, where Gypsy and Traveller site provision can be absent from local plans and excluded from land allocations. This absence is not an accident; it is the result of years

of structural marginalisation that the Bill must now correct. I acknowledge the positive steps that the Government took in 2024, which work toward addressing some of those failures. However, we must go further if we intend to support provision and address inequality in the planning system.

We have seen an increase in private sites, which is welcome, but we often hear about the long, drawn-out, difficult and expensive processes that individual families go through to achieve planning permission. It is crucial to acknowledge that, just as with other communities, home and land ownership is not within reach of many and social provision is much needed. We are still seeing a troubling trend: the number of socially rented pitches is declining. According to the Traveller caravan count live tables, the number of socially rented pitches has fallen in the past five years, with a reduction of 179 pitches.

My amendment would ensure that Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs are explicitly included in strategic planning, which means embedding the site provision in the spatial development strategies under proposed new section 12D to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Those new strategies would help to shape housing across whole regions. Leaving out Gypsy and Traveller sites would repeat the mistakes of the past. Other key planning changes need to be addressed in this Bill, but I will speak with the all-party parliamentary group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in due course.

Finally, I remind the House that the Government have committed to delivering 1.5 million new homes by 2029. If that ambition is to be truly inclusive, it must include everyone. That means making space—literally and politically—for communities that have been moved on, fenced off and forgotten. I urge the Government to consider these amendments at a later stage, not just for the sake of legislative clarity, but for the future of Gypsies and Travellers across the country.

Ann Davies (Caerfyrddin) (PC): I rise to speak to new clause 61, on the issue of cable ploughing—specifically, on the plans put forward by Green GEN Cymru. It proposes a 90-km power line, much of which would be suspended on pylons, across the breathtaking Twyi valley, and an additional 65 kilometres of power line across the equally beautiful Teifi valley. This is not just any landscape; it is the heart of rural Wales. These are not just two valleys across rural Wales; they are treasured by communities that have lived and worked there for generations.

From the beginning, residents and farmers made one thing clear: we support green energy, but it does not have to come at the cost of our countryside. We have called persistently for cables to be placed underground so that we can embrace a sustainable future while preserving Wales’s natural beauty and agricultural land. Unfortunately, our voices have gone unheard. Surveyors have come on to the land without proper respect, disregarding the rights of landowners, and in some cases people have felt intimidated and pressured into signing away land that has been in their families for centuries.

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter (Suffolk Coastal) (Lab): I welcome the hon. Member’s contribution, as she is speaking to my new clause 61. This is a huge issue in Suffolk Coastal, where we have National Grid and ScottishPower Renewables making landfall, and farmers

in my constituency have a similar experience to farmers in her constituency. After this debate, perhaps we can request a meeting with the Minister and share these examples in person.

Ann Davies: I would love to have that opportunity. I thank the hon. Lady for putting forward her new clause—it was a pleasure to sign up to it.

We should not expect the behaviour that I mentioned from those who claim to be building a greener future. Let us be honest: if Green GEN Cymru had chosen to place the cables underground from the start, as the new clause proposes, it would have saved itself significant trouble. It argues that that is too expensive, but what about the cost of delay and the legal cost of taking landowners to court, which is what has been happening?

There is another cost: the cost of resilience. Just look at what happened over the last winter during Storm Darragh and Storm Éowyn: overhead lines failed, power was lost in my area for up to seven days and compensation from the National Grid had to be paid. If those cables had been placed underground, the impact would have been minimal. Long-term thinking is not just the right thing, but the practical thing to do.

I remind the Chamber that Wales has the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which is a commitment to development that is truly sustainable and does not compromise the ability of our children and grandchildren to thrive just to cut costs today. Let us ensure that the transition to clean energy serves the needs of both the present and the generations yet to come. Let us ensure that it is not done to our communities, but done with them. Let us deliver a future that is both green and grounded.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I rise to speak to amendment 91, on allotments and community gardens, and to new clause 60, on landfill sites, both of which stand in my name.

The UK currently has a shortage of allotments, with nearly 160,000 people on English local authority waiting lists. We need more space to grow. For the 8 million people in the UK who have no garden at home, shared spaces such as community gardens are a vital lifeline to nature. I am proud that my amendment 91 is supported by the Royal Horticultural Society, the Horticultural Trades Association, members of the National Network for Community Gardening and the National Allotment Society, as well as by Members across the House.

Without being overly prescriptive, my amendment aims to tackle the erratic provision of allotments and community gardens across the country, making them an essential part of all spatial development strategies. In her correspondence with me, the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Rushanara Ali), said that because there was “nothing preventing” local authorities from including those green spaces in their strategies, amendments such as mine were not needed. I would like to refute that—that is precisely the problem. A person’s space to grow should not be dependent on their postcode or the whims of their council. That is especially the case given that the loss of allotment land over the past 75 years—60%—has been eight times greater in deprived communities such as mine.

In his 2024 annual report, Sir Chris Whitty said:

“Making...access to green space easier and more equitable, would go a long way toward removing barriers to improving physical activity levels and could significantly improve the health of England’s increasingly urban population.”

These small but mighty green spaces are about more than just vegetables; they are essential to supporting health, nature recovery and food security. They also supercharge biodiversity, because the quality of soil on allotments creates a unique environment in which life can thrive. In the midst of a nature crisis, gardeners and amateur horticulturists are our secret weapon. What is more, allotments create space for education and social projects. With so many on waiting lists or blocked from turning an unloved patch of land into a community garden, and with a desperate need for nature recovery, my campaign represents a win-win for the Government.

I now turn to my new clause 60, which comes in direct response to a gross injustice for my own constituents. Droppingwell tip in Rotherham was closed in the 1990s following a determined campaign by local residents. It was subsequently capped and returned to a natural state. Two decades later, in 2016, a permit variation was granted by the Environment Agency, allowing landfill operations to resume without any notice to residents. While the Environment Agency had the power to conduct a public consultation, it chose not to do so. Its argument was that as planning permission had been granted in the 1950s, no further scrutiny was required. Vital issues such as traffic, noise, pollution, and the impact on neighbouring properties were given no consideration whatsoever.

It cannot be right that landfill operators can so easily evade public scrutiny simply by reopening long-dormant sites, nor can it be right that my constituents’ views have been totally ignored. While my new clause comes too late for Rotherham, it would prevent the rights of other communities from being trampled by ensuring that planning permission for landfill sites would automatically lapse after 10 years of dormancy. Any proposals to resume landfill operations would be required to be subjected to full scrutiny through the planning system. My amendments can make a real difference, and I hope Government Front Benchers will support them.

Greg Smith: I have always been very clear that my top priority is the protection of the Buckinghamshire countryside and all of our farmland for the production of food, not for development. It is through that lens that I rise to speak to a number of amendments that I think will make this horror show of a Bill that tiny bit better.

First, I will speak to new clause 44, which deals with sustainable drainage, and new clause 53, which would stop development on floodplains. I can think of so many examples in my constituency where development has either happened directly on the floodplain or caused horrendous flooding concerns in communities. In Ickford, the developer’s expert said that flooding would be a “once in 100 years” eventuality, in an area that flooded six times in six months. I stood with the water lapping at the top of my wellies before that development was built to try to make a point, and now those homes are built, guess what? On Worminghall Road in Ickford, the houses that were there before are regularly flooded. Likewise, the construction of HS2 has had an impact

[Greg Smith]

on flooding in Calvert Green. Calvert Green simply did not flood before HS2 poured concrete into the fields next door, and now, guess what? It does.

I also support new clause 45, which would stop planning permission in cases where illegal development took place. I can think of examples in my constituency, such as between the villages of Askett and Longwick, where illegal development took place, yet the planning inspector has perversely now rewarded that bad behaviour by giving planning permission. Bad behaviour should not be rewarded and that new clause would stop it.

Others have spoken about chalk streams, which are incredibly important in Buckinghamshire, and new clause 87, which would designate chalk streams as protected sites, is incredibly important.

8.45 pm

I want to spend a couple of minutes focusing on the big new clauses. New clause 43 is about the protection of villages. Mid Buckinghamshire is made up of many villages, some of which can no longer be recognised as villages. Haddenham, which is not really a village any more, has grown exponentially and is now struggling for infrastructure, and now sees the threat of another 700 homes on top. Stoke Mandeville has 650 more homes proposed, which would see it essentially merge with Wendover. This is unsustainable and challenging the rural identity of Buckinghamshire. I strongly believe that those new protections should be put in place.

New clause 51 would stop all solar development and battery storage development on any grade of agricultural land. This inefficient technology will not solve the problems we face as a country. The World Bank itself has said that only one country anywhere in the world is less suited to solar than the United Kingdom, and that is Ireland. It is simply not an efficient technology to solve our energy crises. Small modular reactors and nuclear power is the answer, not trashing our countryside with solar and battery storage.

Finally, new clause 55 is an appeal on the basis of fairness. My constituency has already suffered at the hands of big infrastructure—predominantly High Speed 2, but other projects too. It is about fairness. Where communities against their will have been forced to take these huge, massive infrastructure projects—my constituents will live for more than two decades in a construction site—they should be let off some of the other housing targets that are coming along. They should be let off that further unwanted development, because they have already taken enough.

John McDonnell: There have been many references to the housing crisis and impassioned speeches, which I have welcomed. Like every other constituency in London, we have a housing crisis on a scale not seen before, and it has largely been caused by council houses being sold off and not replaced.

What has happened in my area is a salutary lesson about infrastructure developments. Crossrail is going through and the Elizabeth line has now gone through, so land value prices have gone through the roof. In central Hayes, I have more than 4,500 properties being built. We have no lack of planning permissions—in fact,

we have planning permissions coming out of our ears—but most local people cannot even think of affording what is being built. Many have tried to become leaseholders, and now they are being hit by huge increases in service charges, and some cannot even sell on their properties as a result.

With new clause 49, which no one has mentioned so far, we are asking the Government to look at how we can capture land value. There is a discussion to be had about a land value tax, and I think its time is coming. Many of those 4,500 properties are described as affordable, but they are not affordable to local people. That is why new clause 67 is so important, because we do not want affordable properties; we want social rent properties. In fact, I would like simply to give our local authorities the resources and to let them start building again, so that we can have places of a decent standard with a rent that people can afford.

Some 45 years ago, I was on the Greater London Council's planning committee, and I was chair of finance, too. By the way, we should have some confidence in local government being able to undertake infrastructure projects, because were it not for the GLC—and me as well, actually—building the Thames barrier, most Members here would be swimming. That shows what local government can do. We decry local government too often. I dealt with developers throughout that process, and I can say that I have dealt with some good developers and also some atrocious ones. Often they do not deliver, and often they do let us down, and that is why new clause 69 is so important. It merely asks for measures to be put in place during the planning process before a development is properly allowed to go ahead: in other words, the mitigation is there. Deals have been done in my constituency, such as section 106 deals, that have not really stood up, and the developers have walked away leaving us to clear up the mess.

New clause 74, tabled by the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa)—who is not in the Chamber at present—draws attention to a classic example of what almost constitutes betrayal on the part of developers who come along, develop the site, take the profits and walk away. In many instances, our local council does not even have the financial resources to challenge them legally. For that reason, I am also attracted to new clause 33, which says, “If a developer has let you down in that way, do not give them any more planning permissions.” It gives the authority the responsibility of saying, “No more: you are not going to do that to us ever again.”

In our area, we will, if we are serious, have to go for compulsory purchase orders. Amendment 68 would take “hope value” out of the CPO calculations, which is significant because in the past too many compulsory purchases have failed because developers have applied hope value, which has escalated the cost and prevented us from acquiring property.

John Milne (Horsham) (LD): I wish to speak about my new clauses 46 to 48.

The Bill concentrates entirely on removing perceived barriers to development. Unfortunately, in the Government's view those turn out to be nature and the general public, and to that end the Bill proposes a huge reduction in the ability of local residents and councillors to make their

voices heard, or to have any meaningful influence over outcomes. That is such a pity, because gaining consent is not an impossibility.

Neighbourhood plans were introduced under the coalition Government. Done well, they represent the best version of local knowledge and local wishes, but there is not so much as a single mention of them in the entire Bill. Nothing could reveal more effectively how far the Government's focus is from the views of local residents, who are to be treated as "hostiles" who must on no account be allowed to have their say. For that reason I have tabled new clause 48, which would require neighbourhood plans to be taken into account in decision making. Otherwise, I am not sure why they exist at all.

I have also tabled new clauses 46 and 47, which are directed at the need for local infrastructure. New housing development comes with two key promises: that it will bring affordable homes for local people, and that the extra funds it brings will mean more civic amenities. Both these promises are routinely broken. For the last decade, the pace of house building has been rapid in my constituency. Residents have been asked to support large-scale development because, they have been told, it will bring new schools and clinics along with it. In reality, they have seen the houses built but not the services. Why does that keep happening? People usually blame greedy developers, but the real fault usually lies with the Government.

Incredibly, although a school may in good faith be written into a local plan, signed and sealed via a section 106 agreement, that guarantees nothing. When the time comes to build the school, the Department for Education will often withdraw its support, and no DfE support means no school. Similarly, an apparently solid commitment to build a new GP surgery is so many empty words if the integrated care board later decides that it does not want to staff it. As budget pressures increase year on year, Government bodies will decide that it is cheaper to cram more children into existing schools, and more patients into existing clinics, than it is to add new ones.

Unfortunately, the Bill does little to fix those problems. Every time the Government mention supporting infrastructure, it turns out that they mean big national infrastructure. That is important too, but it does not solve local problems. The Government are viewing this problem through urban eyes. Urban centres usually already have sufficient infrastructure in place, but in rural areas such as Horsham, settlements are literally doubling in size, but with the same level of services. As a former local councillor, I have experienced at first hand how hard it is to shape development to meet local needs when planning authorities lack control over so many of the essential factors. No wonder residents object to new housing, when all they see is more strain on services that are already at breaking point.

I hope the Minister will support my amendments. They are intended to improve this Bill, not to sabotage it. Local participation is not something to be feared; rather, it should be embraced.

Nesil Caliskan: I was pleased to be a member of the Public Bill Committee, and I welcome the opportunity to speak in favour of the Bill. I will also speak to clauses 4 and 46, and to new clause 55 and amendment 1, which I worry will further frustrate the planning process—the opposite of what the Bill tries to achieve. As the

Member of Parliament for Barking, I see and hear at first hand the impact of the housing crisis, as others do in their constituencies. Every week, I meet constituents who share with me their personal and desperate stories about overcrowding, years spent in temporary accommodation, poor-quality housing and sky-high rents.

Let me say this about hope. Hope is demonstrated through the actions of a Government who are committed to delivering 1.5 million homes and who will tackle the housing crisis—a challenge that has been absolutely ignored for decade after decade. Supply is one of the fundamental reasons why communities like mine are facing a housing crisis. Our planning system is hindering supply in a housing market that is already experiencing huge demand. It is a planning system that too often blocks or delays the necessary infrastructure that would support new homes being built, particularly as overall business cases for house building are intrinsically linked to infrastructure delivery.

On Second Reading, I spoke about the pre-application consultation requirements for NSIP. Like others, I have previously highlighted the lower Thames crossing, so I will not repeat that example, but it is really important that Members keep in mind the amount of money that is wasted through such processes. That is why I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister considered representations made by me and others in respect of reforming the pre-application procedure specifically. I welcome clause 4—alongside Government amendments 58, 60 and 67, and new clauses 44 and 45—which removes the statutory requirement to consult as part of the pre-application stage for NSIP applications. The changes will mean that delays are reduced and essential infrastructure is consented to faster. That will save up to 12 months from the pre-application stage and millions, if not billions, of pounds. It could make the difference between whether an infrastructure proposal is viable or not, and between whether homes are built in an area or not.

To be clear, that does not mean that applicants will avoid a duty to consult. As the Minister outlined in his statement to the House on 23 April, local communities and local authorities will still be able to object to applications, provide evidence of any adverse impacts, and have their say as part of the post-submission NSIP process. As a vice president of the Local Government Association and a former council leader, I understand all too well how important it is that local people have a voice, but I also understand that a national housing crisis needs a national solution, and this Bill is an important step in trying to achieve that.

At the heart of the debate is a recognition that the housing crisis cannot be solved by individual local politicians seeking to gain political favour by campaigning against new homes in their area. I know how difficult it is for local authorities to develop and agree local plans, but we cannot have a situation in which even though 90% of planning decisions are currently made by planning officers, key projects that would see infrastructure delivered in this country are held up, as are the thousands, if not millions, of homes that we need to deliver. I absolutely support this important Bill, and I look forward—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order.

Lewis Cocking (Broxbourne) (Con): I rise to speak to a number of the amendments before us. I spent a lot of time with colleagues on the Public Bill Committee,

[*Lewis Cocking*]

and some of the amendments are very good and some are not so good. I will try to rattle through as many as I can.

I support new clause 43, which stands in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds). Our villages should have the same protection as our towns. Villages have a unique character across all our constituencies, and I am privileged to represent six of them—Brickendon, Hertford Heath, Great Amwell, Stanstead Abbots, St Margarets and Goffs Oak. I have seen a local council that has built probably too much development in a village, and I have seen that change the fundamental character of Goffs Oak. We should be trying to protect that character, because when people move to villages, they do so for the rural way of life and their unique character and identity. We should stop urban sprawl, and we should stop villages linking together.

9 pm

I support new clause 39, because we should not be putting solar farms on all our agricultural land across the country. I do mind about that, even if it is only 1%, as the Minister and a number of Labour Members have made out—1% is 1% too much. Of course, I support solar panels, but why not put them on the roofs of new houses and factories? [HON. MEMBERS: “We are.”] They are not. I did not see the Government coming forward to support the sunshine Bill—the New Homes (Solar Generation) Bill—which was a private Member’s Bill about putting solar panels on new houses, so we will not take any lectures from the Labour party on that.

I fully support amendment 74, and I am surprised that the Government are not supporting it. They have made a number of announcements about “brownfield first”, so why have they not put that in legislation? Why do they not accept this amendment and put that in the Bill if they are so determined to protect our green belt? I am hesitant about saying that, because I do not think they are determined to protect it. I do not think the Government care about the green belt in this country, because if they did, they would amend the Bill to safeguard the green belt and make development “brownfield first”.

I also support new clause 46, and I have spoken a number of times about development, particular in my constituency of Broxbourne. As several Members have said, developments come forward, particularly under outline planning permission, painted in gold. As I have said before, there is to be a new school, a new GP surgery, a new road, a park, lots of community facilities and lots of community money, but they are changed completely in the full planning application, because the developer has taken away all the infrastructure, and there is no new GP surgery, no new schools, no new infrastructure and no new community facilities. New clause 46 would go some way to making the infrastructure first, which is what our residents want. When planning permission is granted, it is easier for us as politicians to support it and to get our residents more in favour of it if the infrastructure is going to come first. If our constituents see hundreds of new homes built with no infrastructure, particular no new GP surgeries, that is when they get really fed up.

I would also like to support new clause 63, which is about planting trees along highways. I think planting trees next to the highway makes a street beautiful and makes places where people want to live. This Government are focused only on building 1.5 million homes, which I do not think they will do. They are not focusing on designing, making the communities of the future and making communities liveable.

Aphra Brandreth (Chester South and Eddisbury) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a wonderful point about the new clause I have tabled. Does he agree with me that this is about improving our environment and reducing pollution, and we need to think about all of that when we consider this Bill?

Lewis Cocking: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and of course I agree. She makes an important point, and I fully support her new clause. I know she is a keen advocate for this provision in her constituency; it is about creating communities. As I have said, this Government are interested only in hitting a national target, which I and lot of experts in the industry do not think they will meet.

The Government need to think about how they are going to create the communities of the future and the places where people want to live. That means designing them to be really nice, getting developers around the table and agreeing design codes, and making sure developers really put their money where their mouth is. We should ensure we have tree-lined streets, because when we go out in our constituency, as I am sure you do in yours, Madam Deputy Speaker, a tree-lined street is absolutely beautiful to walk down. It is so much better for the people living there and everybody in the constituency if we make that a reality for lots of our residents. Rather than just focusing on building a set number of houses, we should focus on creating the communities of the future and the places where our constituents want to live.

Neil Duncan-Jordan (Poole) (Lab): I rise to speak in favour of amendment 69 and new clause 32, which were both tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Chris Hinchliff). I commend him for his work on the Bill.

I believe the Government have got it wrong with their changes to nature protection. I appreciate that Ministers will say that they come from a genuine desire to address the housing crisis, but the Bill removes the foundations of our nature laws, including the mitigation hierarchy that requires developers to avoid harm. Nearly every major conservation group opposes the Bill and the Government watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection, says that it degrades nature protections.

Amendment 69 offers practical improvements, ensuring that environmental delivery plans achieve their stated purpose of making developers pay to offset damage to nature. It ensures that plans result in an improvement to the specific feature being harmed, so that the Bill does not give a green light to degrading irreplaceable habitats.

James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab): The Wild Justice “Lost Nature” report, which was produced by a team including my excellent constituent Sarah Postlethwaite, reveals that housing developers are frequently failing on

their legally binding ecological commitments. Its survey of 42 new housing developments, including two in my constituency, shows that only half the ecological enhancements promised, including hedgehog highways, bird boxes, bat boxes and planted trees, were actually being delivered. Does my hon. Friend agree that, while trusting developers' promises, we must take up-front steps to empower and expand Natural England and other authorities to hold them to account?

Neil Duncan-Jordan: Yes, I wholeheartedly agree.

Amendment 69 also mandates that improvements be delivered before harm occurs. Without that, we risk species being pushed closer to extinction before their habitats are replaced. Worst of all, the Bill still will not deliver the affordable homes we desperately need.

Dan Tomlinson: The explanatory statement to amendment 69 states:

"This amendment would require Environmental Delivery Plans to set out a timetable for, and thereafter report on, conservation measures, and require improvement of the...status...before development takes place in areas where Natural England"—

thinks there could be harm. How long does my hon. Friend think that that would take in the case of nutrient neutrality and a developer who wanted to build a new social home?

Neil Duncan-Jordan: I do not have a specific answer to that point. I cannot give my hon. Friend an answer to that.

The Government's own impact assessment provided no data that environmental protections are a blocker. Nature in the Bill is being scapegoated to distract from a broken developer-led model.

Sean Woodcock: We have heard a lot about the failure of developers to build infrastructure, protect nature and provide enough social housing. Does that not just show that the status quo is broken, and why the Bill is so important and heading in the right direction?

Neil Duncan-Jordan: The current system is broken, absolutely, but I do not think that hard-pressed planning officers are the problem. I think developers are the problem, and that is the point that I am coming on to make.

Last year, less than 2% of new homes were social rents delivered through the planning system. Private developers prioritise maximum profit with high-end luxury builds, particularly in constituencies such as mine. At the current rate, we would need to build over 5 million homes to deliver just 90,000 social rent properties, yet there are over 1 million people on waiting lists. That is why I signed new clause 32 to introduce binding quotas for affordable and social rent homes. If we are serious, as I believe Labour is, about getting families out of temporary accommodation and off waiting lists, local authorities need the power and funding to lead a new generation of council house building.

We also cannot ignore the fact that the developer-led model creates conflict with nature, as under-resourced councils are forced to accept whatever sites developers propose, regardless of how suitable or unsuitable they are for sustainable development. There is no amount of killing badgers or red tape bonfires that will fix that. It is too simplistic to argue that this is a debate of builders

versus blockers. The overwhelming majority of planning applications are approved, which is why we had more than a million planning permissions approved in the past decade that have yet to be built. Developers continue to drip feed developments into the system, prioritising properties that maximise profit and are far from affordable for local people.

It is time, therefore, to move away from the failed market dogma and, I believe, to return to Labour values. The post-war Labour Government built millions of homes supported by the planning system our party created, and it is time we did it again.

Wendy Morton: I rise to speak to new clause 84, in my name, and to add my support for new clause 51 on solar and battery energy storage systems, and new clause 39 on solar.

New clause 84 seeks to prohibit the development of battery energy storage systems on higher-quality agricultural land. In a debate on this topic in this Chamber just last week, we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Sarah Bool) that there is 78 GW of battery capacity that is either operational, awaiting construction having received planning permission or awaiting consideration, which is equal to supplying 200 million homes—10 times the number of houses we actually have. This is ludicrous.

There are numerous questions over safety, fire risk, accessibility and proximity to homes and communities, yet these storage systems are replacing land that could be used for crops and grazing for animals with metal containers, eating into our national food security at a time that we should be increasing food security and strengthening our food chains. Farmland, as we all know in this place, is irreplaceable—when it is gone, it is gone. We are seeing far too many planning applications coming forward that would risk green-belt land being trashed, with the term "grey belt" used to create a grey area that planning inspectors will take advantage of. I hope the Government are listening to this point, and those made by others on solar, as well.

In the time I have, I want to support a number of other new clauses and amendments that I know matter to my constituents, such as new clause 79, on the duty to co-operate. It is not that we do not expect to have targets in constituencies such as mine; we just do not expect to do all the heavy lifting. We do not expect to have to pick up the can and let failing authorities such as Labour-led Birmingham off the hook. The council certainly cannot manage Birmingham's bins and it cannot manage its housing, either; three years on, none of the properties in the Commonwealth village in Perry Barr has been let.

It cannot be right that housing targets in areas like Birmingham and London are being placed on authorities such as Walsall, where our targets are being hiked up—not least when evidence points to more people wanting to live in towns and centres. Surely what we should be doing is regenerating these areas and building on our brownfield. If we do it sensibly, it will protect the green belt, protect our environment and protect the green and open spaces that we all love and enjoy.

I will also speak in support of new clause 45, on intentional unauthorised development, something that really irks some of my constituents. They write to me

[Wendy Morton]

and come to see me about developers or individuals who flagrantly breach or ignore planning regulation or permissions, creating misery for their neighbours. How can someone simply get away with doing that sort of thing without repercussions, when others abide by the rules and are left picking up the pieces?

I have already spoken of my support for new clause 43 on preventing the merging of villages. That is crucial to constituencies like mine, which is on the edge of Birmingham, and has communities that are at risk of being consumed into its urban sprawl. Finally, there is so much I could say on Natural England. I worry that the Government are giving more powers over planning to an unelected quango, while taking power away from local authorities and councillors.

9.15 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to speak to new clause 58 in my name. It would place a clear environmental and climate duty on Forestry England and its parent body, the Forestry Commission. That is a simple but crucial step that is long overdue. Forestry England manages over 198,000 hectares of land across England, and with that comes huge untapped potential. Estimates suggest that around 100,000 hectares of ancient woodland and open habitats such as lowland heath could be restored. Restoration at that scale could deliver a fifth of the Government's legally binding target to create or restore 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat, as set out in the Environment Act 2021. That is a massive opportunity that we cannot afford to waste.

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter: I wonder whether my hon. Friend agrees that new clause 56 in my name would also enhance biodiversity. Simple acts such as providing bird boxes and swift bricks can enhance the environment in the way that my hon. Friend suggests.

Alex Sobel: Absolutely. We have seen a huge loss in biodiversity in this country. As Lord Goldsmith, a Minister in the former Government, said in the other place, we are one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Making small changes in planning law will increase biodiversity.

The duties on Forestry England are simply too weak. Its only existing nature duty is the biodiversity duty, updated in the 2021 Act, but it is ineffective. It requires Forestry England only to consider biodiversity, not contribute to nature recovery. That is not good enough. It lacks clarity, enforceability and, crucially, any tie to our legally binding nature targets. As a result, economic interests too often take precedence. Forestry England continues in many cases to prioritise commercial forestry over restoring biodiverse habitats, including areas of ancient woodland. There are no legal climate duties on it, either. Its climate work, while good, is entirely at the whim of political feeling at any time.

This imbalance is rooted in history. The Forestry Commission was set up in 1919 to promote timber production, and that economic priority still dominates. It is reinforced by the growth duty in the Deregulation Act 2015, which requires the Forestry Commission and Forestry England to have regard to economic growth. However, as the nature and climate crisis has worsened, the law has failed to catch up. The result is missed

opportunities, poor outcomes, and actions that directly undermine Government policy, such as grant funding of invasive species and the approval of development on deep peat.

Let us look at the facts. The target for restoring damaged ancient woodland is 5,000 hectares a year, yet under the last Government, in 2023-24, just six hectares were restored. That is indefensible. New clause 58 is a straightforward, cost-effective fix. It would rebalance the scales, and give Forestry England a proper legal duty to contribute to nature recovery and climate goals in a way that is in line with the Government's targets. That means no more missed changes—just clear accountability, better outcomes and better value for public money. I urge the Minister to look at new clause 58 and consider giving Forestry England the clear mandate that it needs in order to deliver for people, nature and the climate.

Llinos Medi (Ynys Môn) (PC): I rise to support new clause 39. Building large-scale solar farms on productive agricultural land is short-sighted. The proposed Maen Hir project, classed as a nationally significant infrastructure project, will cover over 3,000 acres of agricultural land on Ynys Môn. This is not just any land; it is land that sustains rural livelihoods and underpins the economic and cultural identity of the island.

Let us not forget why Ynys Môn is known as Môn Mam Cymru—the mother of Wales. Our island has long been the breadbasket of the nation, playing a key role in food production. This land is not just soil; it is security. Replacing it with solar panels serves developers, not communities. The climate crisis will make suitable agricultural land scarcer, which makes protecting what we have now even more important. Once such land is lost to development, we will not get it back. That is not sustainability but short-term gain at long-term cost.

We see serious inconsistency in how planning policy is applied. In Wales, under the planning process, good-quality agricultural land is considered for smaller-scale developments, but when it comes to large-scale NSIPs, such as Maen Hir, those protections seem to vanish. The contradiction between Welsh and UK Government policy is unacceptable. There must be a level playing field, regardless of the scale of proposals.

We have already felt the impact of energy insecurity in recent years. Let us not repeat the same mistakes with food security. I ask the Government to rethink their approach; to protect our agricultural land, our economy and our communities; and to support new clause 39.

Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): I rise to speak in support of new clause 64 in my name. It seeks to encourage a greater focus on the delivery of affordable housing through rural exception sites. I tabled it to prompt further consideration of the role that this policy can play in addressing the urgent need for affordable homes in rural communities. As many who represent areas with significant rural populations will know, we have a serious housing problem. Waiting lists grow faster in rural areas than anywhere else, and young people are forced out of villages and towns by the lack of affordable housing. Parents face old age without the comfort of their children nearby. Pubs, post offices and shops start to struggle for lack of customers. Those businesses close, and a small village and the whole community feels the damage.

Rural exception sites, which are usually found on the outskirts of small settlements, offer a modest but vital solution. Developed for the provision of affordable housing to those with a connection to the area, they help sustain local economies, retain local people and skills, and keep families together. Because they adjoin villages, development takes place on a gently human scale; houses radiate out from a historical core, respecting the historical and rural situation. These are not soulless, disconnected housing estates. This is development on a scale that ensures that affordable housing is woven into the fabric of our communities, not added on. It preserves and recreates the social mix once typical of our towns, where, as Nye Bevan remembered,

“the doctor, the grocer, the butcher and farm labourer all lived in the same street”.—[*Official Report*, 16 March 1949; Vol. 462, c. 2126.]

That sort of community is now an exception, but let us reform rural exception sites and offer a route back to that ideal.

Despite the potential, the rural exception site regime is alarmingly underused. Out of 145 local authorities in the country, only 25 used rural exception sites to deliver affordable homes in 2021-22. I thank the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George), who is not in his place, although he was here for most of the afternoon, for his support for my new clause. Cornwall leads the country by example: 50% of what is delivered on rural exception sites across the whole of England is in Cornwall, and 20% to 30% of housing delivered in Cornwall is through rural exceptions. Why do we not equip other areas across the country, including my county of Suffolk, to do the same? Increasing awareness and engagement will double the output of affordable housing on such sites, so let us encourage officers and local authorities across the country to take a much closer look at the guidance. That will give us a new engagement strategy for delivery partners, who will work with the local community and landowners, which will be crucial.

By giving rural exception sites the prominence they deserve in planning, we increase the supply of affordable homes but maintain the unique character and spirit of our rural communities. I was heartened to read in the Government's response to the consultation on the revised national planning policy framework that further consideration is indeed being given to exceptions as a means of supporting rural affordable houses. That is welcome, and I am optimistic about the potential for rural exception sites to be brought forward in much greater numbers, delivering small-scale affordable housing that is crucial to ensuring that the English countryside has vibrant and inclusive communities for generations to come. Let us put the life back into the heart of rural England.

Aphra Brandreth: I love trees, which is why I rise to support new clause 63 tabled in my name. I am sure that all of us in this House recognise the value of trees—not just their ecological importance, but the character and beauty that they bring to our communities and high streets. I hope that I can demonstrate why amending the rules to allow for sensible guidance on planting trees can help to liberate local authorities from their default, over-cautious position, and kick-start a tree-planting revolution.

New clause 63 seeks to remove some of the ambiguity and misconceptions surrounding the regulation of tree planting along highways. The Highways Act 1980 includes

provision for local authorities to maintain free-flowing roads, but those provisions can and have been misinterpreted to block tree planting. In particular, the licensing rules established in section 142 of the Act should be relaxed to make it easier for local residents to plant trees. Too often, even well-meaning councils impose unrealistic demands. In Windsor and Maidenhead, for example, individuals planting trees must pay between £500 and £1,000 in administrative fees and secure £10 million in public liability insurance—hardly encouraging. Hampshire county council's strict interpretation of section 142(5) has led to a one-metre buffer around utilities, blocking many ideal planting sites, despite minimal risk to those services.

Let me briefly touch on the environmental case. A Woodland Trust report, “The benefits to people of trees outside woods”, found that roadside trees are highly effective at capturing pollutants—especially important, given that traffic is a major source of air pollution in the UK. A study by Lancaster University even showed that planting silver birch on a terraced street reduced harmful particulate matter inside nearby homes by more than 50%. Trees also play a critical role in supporting biodiversity; common roadside species such as lime and flowering cherry trees are not only beautiful, but vital for pollinators, helping to maintain healthy ecosystems.

Cheshire is a proud dairy and beef farming county. We have some of the most carbon-efficient cows in the world, and we should be proud of that record, but if we can further improve our environmental impact, that can only be a good thing. In rural areas, having tree-lined roads can help to reduce ammonium levels and impacts on habitats and the surrounding environment. Again, placement of trees matters; having more trees near semi-natural habitats that need protection has a greater impact than having more trees in established woodland. Of course safety must remain a priority, and not every road is suitable for tree planting, but where space and conditions allow, trees can improve road safety. Studies have shown that tree-lined streets feel narrower, naturally encouraging drivers to reduce their speed.

There are many more benefits that I could speak to, such as improved soil quality, but time is short, so I will finish by touching on the aesthetic benefit of trees near highways. They really do make a difference. They stand the test of time, they add character to the area, they take on cultural significance, and they improve our mental health, our perceptions and our appreciation of the areas in which we live. By amending this Bill through new clause 63, I hope we can empower local authorities to plant the right trees in the right areas where there is local support, and I am confident that we will notice the benefits of doing so.

Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab): I was privileged to be a member of the Bill Committee. I started the Committee as a supporter of this legislation, and I rise to speak now as an equally strong supporter of it.

Many of my constituents in Dartford are also extremely strong supporters of change. Their town is regularly paralysed by overspill traffic from the overloaded Dartford crossing. That has been an issue for decades. The need for a new crossing was first suggested as long ago as the 1980s, yet despite a route having been agreed in 2017, development consent was granted only this year. Hundreds of millions have been spent on the process so far.

[*Jim Dickson*]

I strongly support the measures to streamline the NSIP regime and give more certainty on large and much-needed projects such as the lower Thames crossing, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Chris Curtis). This Bill will make changes to dramatically improve the situation, and that fact must not be lost as we debate the amendments today.

9.30 pm

I want to speak briefly to three of the new clauses that I feel strongly about, covering net zero, sustainability and the social content of new development. A number of proposals have been tabled—including new clause 73 by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent West (Barry Gardiner) and others—on the issue of swift bricks. That is another issue that was discussed at some length in Committee, and Members across the House recognise that we must do more to support vital species such as swifts. I welcome the steps that have already been taken by the house building industry on this issue, with a voluntary standard signed up to by 28 home builders, accounting for 100,000 homes a year, committing to a bird nesting brick or box being installed for every new home built, as well as hedgehog highways as standard for every new development. I hope that Ministers will monitor the effectiveness of this voluntary measure and look at what further steps might be taken in future.

I also support the sentiment in new clause 2, tabled by the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos), that would require new homes to be built to a net zero carbon building standard and include provision for the generation of solar power. I hope, however, that he will welcome the announcement by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero on Friday that the future homes standard, when published later this year, will require all new homes, with a small number of exceptions, to include solar panels. Not everything we want to see happen needs to be included on the face of the Bill.

I want to finish by speaking in favour of new clause 82, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Tom Hayes). This would require local authorities to assess local play provision and to take reasonable steps to improve play sufficiency. As other Members have mentioned, hundreds of playgrounds have been lost over the past decade and a half. Speak to any young parent and they will tell you the value of play, especially outdoor play, where their children can meet and play safely with other young children. I hope that Ministers will see the strength of feeling on this issue and, whether they accept this new clause or not, do more to help create spaces to play for families across the country. Notwithstanding the amendments and new clauses that have been discussed tonight, I am proud to have helped move this vital piece of legislation nearer the statute book, and I look forward to the Bill helping to get Britain building again.

Ellie Chowns: I will get straight to the point: there are two big problems with this Bill. First, there is no social housing target, which means that it does not do anything to secure delivery of the fit-for-the-future social rent housing that we so desperately need, as colleagues across the House have said tonight. Secondly, it rolls back vital

nature protections, effectively giving developers carte blanche to bulldoze nature to build luxury homes that are accessible only to the richest.

Green MPs gave the Bill a chance on Second Reading—

Luke Murphy (Basingstoke) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ellie Chowns: I am sorry, I will not give way because there are so many colleagues who still want to speak and we are short of time.

Green MPs gave the Bill a chance on Second Reading, because a secure home is out of reach for too many people. Rents are spiralling, over 165,000 children are living in temporary accommodation and over 1 million people are stuck on housing waiting lists. It is scandalous that just 3% of the housing built in the last decade was for social rent, and there is now a wait of more than 100 years for a family-sized social home. I served on the Bill Committee for the past six-plus weeks and I worked hard to persuade the Government to fix the serious flaws in the Bill, but unfortunately those calls have so far been ignored.

I am profoundly concerned that, in the glaring absence of a social rent housing target, this Government are writing a charter for developers' greed. That is why Green party MPs have tabled new clause 78, to push for safe, warm homes in the communities we love at a truly affordable price. It would require housing plans to set targets for building zero-carbon social rent housing based on local needs, because without an explicit social housing commitment, big developers will be able to line their pockets even further while ordinary people are still locked out of affording a decent home.

I am hugely concerned, as are so many people and the nature organisations that we all trust. By the way, the Bill rolls back nature protections. That is why I have proposed amendments 24 to 63, which would delete part 3 of the Bill entirely, because the Government repeatedly blocked cross-party efforts in Committee to amend part 3 to reduce its harmful impact on nature.

Part 3 is harmful for three key reasons. First, it weakens and undermines the requirement for nature protection to be achieved to a high level of scientific certainty. Secondly, it creates a “pay to pollute” system, allowing developers to skip straight to offsetting, trashing the long-established principle of the mitigation hierarchy—that is, that development should first seek to avoid harm. Thirdly, it upends the requirement for compensation to be delivered up front and creates wiggle room for developers to avoid paying the true cost of the harm they do.

The Government know the nature crisis in our country is severe, yet they repeatedly voted in Committee to reject a raft of constructive amendments to improve part 3 and ensure a win-win for housing and nature. I remind the House that the Labour party's 2024 manifesto pointed out that

“the Conservatives have left Britain one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world,”

but part 3 will make that terrible situation worse. It is not just the nature organisations that tell us that; it is the independent expert advice of the Office for Environmental Protection, which says that the Bill constitutes a “regression” in environmental law, directly contradicting the assertion of the Secretary of State.

If Ministers insist on bulldozing ahead on part 3, I urge them at the very least to accept my new clause 26. With cross-party support and wide backing, it seeks to match the current degree of certainty for environmental protection. I also strongly support amendment 69, in the name of the hon. Member for North East Hertfordshire (Chris Hinchliff), which would ensure that improvements are delivered before the damage they are compensating for.

We can and must both protect nature and build warm, affordable, zero-carbon social rent homes. The Government said it is what they want. Sadly, it is not what the Bill delivers. Without urgent change—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. I call Alex Brewer.

Alex Brewer (North East Hampshire) (LD): The planning system certainly needs change, but local people know their area, which is why local planning authorities must retain their current powers, as outlined in amendment 1. As we have heard, each area is different. In my constituency we are fortunate to have the Loddon and Whitewater chalk stream rivers nurturing ecosystems and sustaining biodiversity.

The Labour manifesto promised

“more high-quality, well-designed, and sustainable homes... creating places that increase climate resilience and promote nature recovery. Chalk streams in this country are at risk. A third are over-abstracted, a third failed their phosphorus targets, and a third failed their fish and plant assessments. Only 11 have any form of protection. We cannot rely on the local nature recovery strategy or the national planning policy framework to protect those ecosystems. These rivers need bespoke national protection written into primary legislation in this House, as outlined in amendment 16. We cannot make reparation after the fact. Once chalk aquifers are destroyed, they cannot be replaced. When we say irreplaceable, we mean it.

The Government also say they want to make the UK a clean energy superpower. My colleagues and I are thrilled that the Liberal Democrats’ call for solar panels on new homes is finally being implemented. Solar power is a key way to harness the power of the natural environment as we develop infrastructure for our communities. Supporting new clause 7 and putting solar panels on all new car parks would be the natural next step in the right direction.

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): Electric vehicles are key to achieving energy independence, but charging inequalities are simply holding us back, undermining net zero and energy security. Does my hon. Friend agree that local authorities must be empowered to approve safe cross-pavement charging solutions without expensive and time-consuming street work licences or planning applications?

Alex Brewer: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend on those policies.

Solar panels do not just soak up the sun and create clean energy; they also provide shade, protect vehicles and, frankly, over a car park they look quite good while they are doing it. We should be prioritising solar panels on the 250,000 hectares of rooftops and car parks across the country, not on our precious green spaces. Car parks are often located in energy intensive areas—

near hospitals, shopping centres and office buildings—so it makes perfect sense to generate the power right next to where it is needed.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that car parks and rooftops might be a good place for solar, but this country’s prime agricultural land is not?

Alex Brewer: We must find the right balance between agriculture and renewable energy.

France has already taken the lead by mandating that all car parks with more than 80 spaces must be covered with solar panels. The Bill is the right place for us to implement a similar clause. Solar photovoltaics produce about 10 times more energy per square kilometre than biomass. Solar is efficient, clean and ready to go. I am highly concerned that the Bill is overcommitted to biomass, which is not a form of renewable energy. In Britain, we have the knowledge and expertise to develop new housing, energy and infrastructure with nature in mind. The Government are treating this issue as an either/or, but we could and should be much more ambitious and have both.

Helen Maguire: I rise to speak in support of my new clause 93 and amendments 122 to 126, which aim to tackle the growing electric vehicle charging divide—an issue that is not only about infrastructure, but about fairness, affordability and climate action.

Nearly four out of every 10 households in the UK do not have a driveway. For many of them, the transition to EVs remains a challenge because bureaucratic barriers mean that they face charging costs that are 10 times more expensive compared with those who can charge their car at home. Today, someone with a driveway can charge their EV overnight for as little as 7p per kilowatt-hour, but a driver without one may be forced to pay up to 80p at a public charger. That means over £1,000 more per year, and renters, residents of terraced homes and lower-income families bear the brunt.

My amendments would cut unnecessary red tape and enable local authorities to approve safe cross-pavement charging solutions without expensive and time-consuming street works licences or planning applications. They would give councils control while empowering residents to take part in the EV transition. That is a vital step in closing the gap between those who can charge affordably at home and those who cannot. It would help to reduce reliance on overstretched public chargers, support grid resilience and build confidence in the EV transition, while unlocking green jobs and cutting emissions.

This is also an issue of energy security. Sky-high energy and fuel bills are hurting families and businesses, fuelling the cost of living crisis. Russia’s assault on Ukraine has reinforced the need to significantly reduce the UK’s dependence on fossil fuels and to invest in renewables, both to cut energy bills and to deliver energy security. Electric vehicles can help millions of families to avoid a petrol premium, save on travel costs and strengthen our national security and independence.

If we are serious about hitting net zero, cleaning our air and reducing the cost of living, we must make EV adoption a genuinely accessible and affordable option for everyone, not just for those with a driveway. I urge Members to support my common-sense, future-facing amendments and new clause 93.

Sarah Bool (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I rise to speak to my amendments 145 to 147 and to highlight the importance of new clauses 39, 84 and—if I have time—83.

My amendments seek to correct a clear oversight in the legislation by extending the energy bill discounts to those who live near energy generation sites, rather than simply to those who live near energy transmission sites. Why is it that those who have pylons built near their homes are compensated, while those who have solar farms—such as the proposed Green Hill development near Grendon, Easton Maudit and Bozeat in my constituency—are not? That arbitrary distinction exposes the Government's proposals as not only inconsistent, but fundamentally unfair. Such disparities understandably rile residents who must live cheek by jowl with solar farms. By simply extending the energy bills discount, the Government would at least put an arm around those who bear the burden, and would encourage communities to embrace renewables. I encourage the Minister to take that forward, but I will not hold my breath.

New clauses 39 and 84 are essential. The number of proposed battery energy storage systems is—if Members will pardon the pun—exploding. They should not be built on higher-quality agricultural land. The Government say repeatedly that food security is national security, but any plans that take agricultural land out of producing food leads the Government and this country down a very dangerous path. We must encourage and incentivise farmers to do exactly that: farm. The Government are creating an either/or situation by allowing battery energy storage systems and solar on higher-quality agricultural land. I urge Members to support these new clauses.

9.45 pm

New clause 53 proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Blake Stephenson) would prevent local planning authorities from allowing developments on functional floodplains. I visited far too many homes in my constituency last year that were devastated by flooding. By developing on these known sites we are sleepwalking into a crisis. Homes will be devastated, with homeowners finding their homes uninsurable, and there will be risks to life. The Government are exacerbating the problem of flooding under this Bill.

Sir Gavin Williamson (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. My understanding is that it is hoped that new clause 82 has been selected to be called for a separate decision of the House. My concern is that the House will be denied the ability to have that separate decision.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I thank the right hon. Member for his point of order. He will know that the Member who put forward the amendment has the right to withdraw it and has indicated that they will do so. It is at the Chair's discretion whether a separate decision is called for, and in this case it is my understanding that the amendment is not going to be moved.

Sir Gavin Williamson: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. My understanding is that the Member should shout and make it clear on the Floor of

the House that he does not wish the amendment to be put to the vote, so that Members can voice their opinion.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the right hon. Member for his further point of order. If I do not call the Member to move his amendment, and it is not my intention to do so, there will be no separate decision.

Paul Holmes: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. *[Interruption.]* I am entitled to raise a point of order.

I appreciate your ruling on this matter, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I ask for clarification because it is my understanding that if we have been informed that an amendment is for separate decision, the Chair asks the Member whose amendment it is whether they want to withdraw it, with the leave of the House, and I have never seen that question not being put on the Floor of the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for that point of order. It is simply not the case that it has to be withdrawn on the Floor of the House; this has happened on numerous occasions.

I call the Minister.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): It is a pleasure to rise to respond to what has been a very comprehensive debate. *[Interruption.]* A significant number of amendments have been spoken to in the course of the debate—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson) should not be shouting at the Clerks in that way. I have made my point.

I call the Minister.

Matthew Pennycook: A significant number of amendments have been spoken to in the course of the debate and the House will appreciate that I do not have the time to address the vast majority of them. I will therefore focus on addressing as many of the key amendments and points of contention as I can. I have been extremely generous in giving way in opening the debate, but I hope that hon. Members will now appreciate that to get through as many points as possible I will not be taking further interventions.

The debate this evening has evidenced support from across the House for nature and for ensuring we get the nature restoration fund right. I spoke in detail about the Government's position in opening the debate. As I repeatedly made clear in the Bill Committee and will reiterate this evening, we are listening to the concerns raised by hon. Members and stakeholders. We are clear that this is the right model to take us forward.

We are of course open to ways to improve the legislation, however, and on that basis, and to emphasise the point I made earlier in the debate, we are giving serious consideration to ways in which we might instil further confidence that part 3 will deliver the outcomes we believe it will, such as providing greater confidence in the rigour of the overall improvement test, as raised by the OEP and the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos).

We are also giving due consideration to how we can provide for greater certainty in the timescale for delivering conservation measures, as raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Chris Hinchliff), as well as seeking to clarify the evidential basis and environmental rationale for strategic conservation measures, as raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins). The status quo is not working. The case for moving to a more strategic approach is compelling and I look forward to further consideration of part 3 in the other place.

Turning to the important issue of children's play areas and playing fields, I thank the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington for tabling new clause 16 and my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Tom Hayes) for tabling new clauses 82. I particularly commend my hon. Friend on all that he is doing to make the case for high-quality, accessible and inclusive areas for play. The Government agree that access to play space is vital, which is why strong protections are already in place.

The national planning policy framework is clear that local planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities, and opportunities for new provision, including places for children's play. In December, we strengthened the strong protections already in place in the NPPF by adding explicit reference to safeguarding "formal play spaces". That means that those facilities can be lost only where they are no longer needed, or where there is a justified and appropriate alternative

Given the existing policy expectations, safeguards and sources of support, we do not believe that it is necessary to add the sort of legislative requirements the amendments would entail. However, I recognise the importance of what the amendments seek to achieve, and the provision of play space is one of the areas we are considering as we prepare a new set of national planning policies for decision making, on which we will consult this year. I commit to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East to writing to my counterparts at the Department for Education and at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that we are acting across Government to increase spaces for play. I will work with him to broker the necessary ministerial meetings that he seeks. With those assurances, I hope that he and the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington will feel able to withdraw their amendments.

Turning to swift bricks, which were mentioned several times during the debate, we recognise that they are a vital means of arresting the long-term decline of the breeding swift population. While swift brick coverage is increasing, with nearly 30 house builders having made a voluntary commitment to install one for every new home built, the Government want to do more to drive up swift brick installation. However, there is a principled difference of opinion as to the best way to achieve that objective. Although I understand why many are attracted to the argument that the only way to make a significant difference to swift numbers and other red-listed species is to mandate the incorporation of swift bricks into all new-build properties, through building regulations or free-standing legislation, I take a different view.

In all sincerity, I do not believe that amending building regulations is the most appropriate way to secure the outcome that the House as a whole seeks. As building regulations are mandatory, going down that route would compel developers to install swift bricks in all new buildings, irrespective of what they are or where they are located.

Chris Curtis: On that point, will the Minister give way?

Matthew Pennycook: No, I will not.

Contrary to what hon. Members might assume, amending building regulations is not a quick fix. It can take years for changes to feed through into building design and we do not think that swifts can afford to wait that long. For those and other reasons, I remain of the view that changing national planning policy is the more effective route to securing swift bricks as a standard feature of the vast majority of new buildings.

As the House will be aware, the revised NPPF published in December expects developments to incorporate features that support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs. However, as I have made clear to many hon. Members over recent months, we have always intended to go further. We are specifically giving consideration to using a new suite of national policies for decision making to require swift bricks to be incorporated into new buildings, unless there are compelling reasons that preclude their use or that would make them ineffective. That would significantly strengthen the planning policy expectations already in place, so that, for example, we would expect to see at least one swift brick in all new brick-built houses.

I believe that is the best way we can achieve the objective of seeing swift bricks used as widely as possible, as the use and placement of swift bricks can be integrated into the planning process and become a standard expectation in the design of new developments. We will be consulting on a new set of national policies for decision making later this year. So that no one can be in any doubt about our intentions here, the Government have today published new planning practice guidance setting out how swift bricks are expected to be used in new developments, as an interim step ahead of the planned consultation.

We also heard from several hon. Members who want to see stronger protections put in place for chalk streams. The measures in the Bill will not weaken existing protections for those valuable areas for nature, but the Government continue to give careful consideration to this matter in the context of ongoing reform to national planning policy and I am more than happy to engage with hon. Members from across the House on it.

I turn to new clause 1, tabled by the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington, which would have the effect of preventing the Government from implementing a national scheme of delegation for planning committees. Put simply, it is a wrecking amendment, and the Government cannot accept it for the following reasons. Planning is principally a local activity, and the Government recognise the vital role that planning committees play. However, we must ensure that they operate as effectively as possible. At present, every council has its own scheme of delegation, and 96% of planning decisions in England are already made by planning officers. However, there is significant variation across the country, which creates risk and

[Matthew Pennycook]

uncertainty in the system. As such, we believe that there is a robust case for introducing a national scheme of delegation.

Since Committee stage, when we debated these issues at length, the Government have published a technical consultation setting out our detailed plans for reform in this area. I encourage hon. Members to read that consultation, in which we propose splitting planning applications into two tiers, providing certainty about what decisions will be delegated to expert officers and at the same time ensuring that councillors can continue to focus on the most significant proposals for housing and commercial developments to allow for effective local and democratic oversight of the most controversial applications where warranted. I believe that if Members engage with the detail of that conversation, they will recognise that what is being proposed is not an attempt to ride roughshod over local democracy, but a sensible and proportionate change designed to improve certainty and decision making in the planning system. However, on the fundamental point of whether we should introduce a national scheme of delegation, the Government's position is an unequivocal yes. For that reason, I cannot accept the new clause in question.

I turn briefly to the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) and the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington relating to the Bill's new reflective amendment procedure for national policy statements. I reassure the House that our changes are not about eroding parliamentary scrutiny, but about ensuring that scrutiny is proportionate to the changes being made, and we absolutely recognise the value that such scrutiny brings to getting important changes right.

As I have discussed with my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch, several safeguards are in place that will ensure parliamentary oversight is protected; I will happily restate them for the record. Where we intend to make a reflective amendment, a statement will be laid in Parliament announcing a review and we will write to the relevant Select Committee. Ministers will make themselves available to speak to that Committee as far as is practicable, and we will take into account the views of any Select Committee report published during the consultation period.

Let me be very clear in response: the Government recognise the importance of Ministers attending Committee to explain the proposed changes, and I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that the Deputy Prime Minister and I will write to colleagues to ensure that is fully and clearly understood. Importantly, the NPPS as amended must be laid in Parliament for 21 days, during which time this House may resolve that the amendment should not be proceeded with. Parliament retains the ultimate say over whether a change should be enacted. I hope that clarifies the process and reassures my hon. Friend and the House more widely.

Finally, I will address some of the amendments about provision of affordable and social housing, including new clauses 32 and 50, tabled by my hon. Friends the Members for North East Hertfordshire (Chris Hinchliff) and for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi). The Government are committed to the biggest generational uplift in social and affordable housing,

and in our first 10 months in office we have put our money where our mouth is. We have announced new £800 million in-year funding to top up the 2021-26 affordable homes programme, and we announced in the spring statement an immediate injection of £2 billion in new capital investment to act as a bridge to the future grant programme, which is to be announced this week in the spending review.

To date, we have not chosen to define a target for social and affordable housing, and there is good reason why that is the case, including the fact that the sector has faced significant financial constraints and needs regulatory certainty. That was made worse by many of the completely irresponsible and unacceptable decisions made by the Opposition when they were in government over the past 14 years. It would not be appropriate to set a target until after the sector is stabilised, knows what is required and, importantly, is clear on what investment will be available to support delivery, which will become apparent only after the spending review. A range of complex factors contribute to the numbers of affordable houses coming forward in this country and impact on the sector's ability to build more homes, but we will of course keep that matter under review.

I will very briefly mention the green belt and the protection of villages. As the House will be aware, we recently published guidance in relation to the green belt. None of the long-standing green-belt purposes are touched by those changes, including the purpose of precluding the merging of towns. The guidance does not remove those appropriate and relevant protections from land around villages, and any green-belt land—including land in, or near, villages—that conflicts with the relevant purposes would not be identified as grey belt.

To conclude, I once again thank all hon. Members who have participated in today's debate for their contributions. The Government will continue to reflect on the arguments that have been made. I urge the House to support the targeted amendments to this Bill that the Government have proposed, to ensure we can realise its full potential.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 69 accordingly read a Second time.

10 pm

Debate interrupted (Programme Order, this day).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

New clause 69 added to the Bill.

New Clause 39

PROHIBITION OF SOLAR DEVELOPMENT ON HIGHER-QUALITY AGRICULTURAL LAND

"No permission may be granted for the building or installation of provision for solar power generation where the development would involve—

- (a) the building on or development of agricultural land at grade 1, 2, or 3a, and
- (b) building or installation at ground-level."—(Paul Holmes.)

This new clause would prohibit the development of solar power generation on higher quality agricultural land.

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 113, Noes 335.

Division No. 215]

[10 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat
 Allister, Jim
 Anderson, Lee
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Bool, Sarah
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brandreth, Aphra
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Burghart, Alex
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartledge, James
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Cocking, Lewis
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Cross, Harriet
 Davies, Ann
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David
 Dewhurst, Charlie
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Glen, rh John
 Grant, Helen
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jopp, Lincoln
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Khan, Ayoub
 Kruger, Danny
 Lake, Ben
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mayhew, Jerome
 McMurdock, James
 McVey, rh Esther
 Medi, Llinos
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paul, Rebecca
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
James Wild and
Rebecca Smith

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abbott, Jack
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Alexander, rh Heidi

Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baines, David
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Bell, Torsten
 Berry, Siân
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Bishop, Matt
 Blake, Olivia
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Buckley, Julia
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Chowns, Ellie
 Clark, Feryal
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Denyer, Carla
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul (*Proxy vote cast by Lorraine Beavers*)
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh

Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, rh Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Kendall, rh Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, rh Shabana
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McGovern, Alison
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, James
 Murray, Katrina

Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Onn, Melanie
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, rh Bridget
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Scrogg, Michelle
 Seward, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan

Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Swann, Robin
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz

Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vince, Chris
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Martin McCluskey and
Christian Wakeford

Question accordingly negated.

Simon Hoare: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder if you could fill a gap in my ignorance—I am sure you can. Earlier today, Mr Speaker announced that the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Tom Hayes), whom I will call my hon. Friend because he is my county neighbour, would not move new clause 82, to which I am a signatory. Mr Speaker had said that the new clause would be subject to a separate decision, and anybody would interpret that to mean that there would be a vote on it. My understanding, from previous experience, is that when the principal signatory to an amendment decides not to move it, any hon. or right hon. Member who is a co-signatory to it is at liberty to move it, to test the will of the House. It may well be that the Standing Orders have changed, and that I am negligent of that knowledge. If that is the case, I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but what has changed?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I thank the hon. Member for his point of order. Had he been in the Chamber earlier, he would have heard several earlier points of order on this question. He would also have heard me say that a decision on the new clause would be at the discretion of the Chair, and Mr Speaker indicated earlier that there would be a separate decision. The hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Tom Hayes), who tabled new clause 82, indicated that he wished to withdraw it. A decision on it is at the discretion of the Chair. If the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) wishes to question that further, he is at liberty to do so.

Paul Holmes: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Interruption.*] Labour Members may chunter, but I have a right to raise a point of order on process in this House. Madam Deputy Speaker, may I ask for your guidance? I am a relatively new Member, but it is my—[*Interruption.*] I want to raise a point of order, and it is not up to them to say I cannot.

New clause 82 has been signed by over 60 Members of this House. Through the usual channels, I was told, as shadow Minister, as were others, that the Speaker's Office had selected the new clause for a separate decision. Over 60 Members have signed the new clause, and my understanding of precedent in this House is that any Member who has signed it can move it. It is a new and dangerous precedent if Members can indicate before the debate that they wish to withdraw a new clause, and other Members who have signed it are not given the choice to move it. May I seek your clarification, Madam Deputy Speaker? It seems highly unusual that over 60 Members have signed the new clause but none of them can move it, especially when we were given an indication that it would be subject to a separate decision on the Floor of the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for his further point of order on this subject. I have provided the clarity for which he asks. The decision is at the discretion of the Chair.

New Clause 43

PROTECTION OF VILLAGES

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, issue guidance for local planning authorities, or update any relevant existing guidance, relating to the protection of villages.

(2) Any guidance issued under this section must provide villages with equivalent protection, so far as is appropriate, as is provided for towns in relation to—

- (a) preventing villages from merging into one another,
- (b) preventing villages merging into towns, and
- (c) preserving the setting and special character of historic villages.”—(*Paul Holmes.*)

This new clause would provide existing villages with protection equivalent to that currently provided to towns under the NPPF.

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 167, Noes 334.

Division No. 216]

[10.20 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat	Chadwick, David
Allister, Jim	Chambers, Dr Danny
Amos, Gideon	Cleverly, rh Sir James
Anderson, Lee	Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Andrew, rh Stuart	Cocking, Lewis
Aquarone, Steff	Collins, Victoria
Argar, rh Edward	Cooper, Daisy
Atkins, rh Victoria	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	Costa, Alberto
Barclay, rh Steve	Coutinho, rh Claire (<i>Proxy</i>
Bedford, Mr Peter	<i>vote cast by Joy Morrissey)</i>
Bennett, Alison	Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Bhatti, Saqib	Cross, Harriet
Bool, Sarah	Dance, Adam
Bowie, Andrew	Darling, Steve
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Davies, Mims
Brandreth, Aphra	Davis, rh David
Braverman, rh Suella	Dean, Bobby
Brewer, Alex	Dewhurst, Charlie
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Dillon, Mr Lee
Burghart, Alex	Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
Cane, Charlotte	Duffield, Rosie
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Cartlidge, James	Evans, Dr Luke

Farage, Nigel	Mohamed, Iqbal
Farron, Tim	Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Foord, Richard	Moore, Robbie
Forster, Mr Will	Moran, Layla (<i>Proxy vote cast</i>
Fortune, Peter	<i>by Zöe Franklin)</i>
Fox, Sir Ashley	Morello, Edward
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Morgan, Helen
Franklin, Zöe	Morrissey, Joy
Freeman, George	Morton, rh Wendy
French, Mr Louie	Mullan, Dr Kieran
Fuller, Richard	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Gale, rh Sir Roger	Norman, rh Jesse
Garnier, Mark	Obese-Jecty, Ben
George, Andrew	O'Brien, Neil
Gibson, Sarah (<i>Proxy vote</i>	Olney, Sarah
<i>cast by Anna Sabine)</i>	Patel, rh Priti
Gilmour, Rachel	Paul, Rebecca
Glen, rh John	Perteghella, Manuela
Glover, Olly	Philp, rh Chris
Goldman, Marie	Pinkerton, Dr Al
Gordon, Tom	Pochin, Sarah
Grant, Helen	Raja, Shivani (<i>Proxy vote cast</i>
Green, Sarah	<i>by Mr Mohindra)</i>
Griffith, Andrew	Rankin, Jack
Griffiths, Alison	Robertson, Joe
Harris, Rebecca	Sabine, Anna
Hayes, rh Sir John	Shannon, Jim
Heylings, Pippa	Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Hinds, rh Damian	Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Hoare, Simon	Simmonds, David
Holden, rh Mr Richard	Slade, Vikki
Hollinrake, Kevin	Smart, Lisa
Holmes, Paul	Smith, Greg
Huddleston, Nigel	Snowden, Mr Andrew
Hudson, Dr Neil	Sollom, Ian
Hussain, Mr Adnan	Spencer, Dr Ben
Jarvis, Liz	Spencer, Patrick (<i>Proxy vote</i>
Jenkin, Sir Bernard	<i>cast by Joy Morrissey)</i>
Johnson, Dr Caroline	Stafford, Gregory
Jopp, Lincoln	Stephenson, Blake
Kearns, Alicia (<i>Proxy vote cast</i>	Stone, Jamie
<i>by Joy Morrissey)</i>	Stuart, rh Graham
Khan, Ayoub	Swann, Robin
Kohler, Mr Paul	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Kruger, Danny	Taylor, Luke
Lam, Katie	Thomas, Bradley
Lamont, John	Tice, Richard
Lewis, rh Sir Julian	Timothy, Nick
Lopez, Julia	Tugendhat, rh Tom
MacCleary, James	Vickers, Martin
MacDonald, Mr Angus	Voaden, Caroline
Maguire, Ben	Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Maguire, Helen	Wilkinson, Max
Mak, Alan	Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Malthouse, rh Kit	Wilson, Munira
Martin, Mike	Wood, Mike
Mathew, Brian	Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Mayhew, Jerome	Wrigley, Martin
Maynard, Charlie	Young, Claire
McMurdock, James	
McVey, rh Esther	
Miller, Calum	
Milne, John	

Tellers for the Ayes:
James Wild and
Rebecca Smith

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (<i>Proxy</i>	Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
<i>vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-</i>	Alexander, rh Heidi
<i>Addy)</i>	Al-Hassan, Sadik
Abbott, Jack	Ali, Rushanara
Akehurst, Luke	Ali, Tahir
Aldridge, Dan	Anderson, Callum

Anderson, Fleur	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Johnson, rh Dame Diana	Nash, Pamela
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Dickson, Jim	Johnson, Kim	Niblett, Samantha
Arthur, Dr Scott	Dixon, Anna	Jones, rh Darren	Nichols, Charlotte
Asato, Jess	Dixon, Samantha	Jones, Gerald	Norris, Alex
Asser, James	Dodds, rh Anneliese	Jones, Lillian	Norris, Dan (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)
Athwal, Jas	Dollimore, Helena	Jones, Louise	Onn, Melanie
Atkinson, Catherine	Dowd, Peter	Jones, Ruth	Opher, Dr Simon
Atkinson, Lewis	Downie, Graeme	Jones, Sarah	Osborne, Kate (<i>Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson</i>)
Bailey, Olivia	Duncan-Jordan, Neil	Josan, Gurinder Singh	Osborne, Tristan
Baines, David	Eagle, Dame Angela	Joseph, Sojan	Owatemi, Taiwo
Baker, Alex	Eastwood, Colum	Juss, Warinder	Owen, Sarah
Baker, Richard	Edwards, Lauren	Kane, Chris	Paffey, Darren
Ballinger, Alex	Efford, Clive	Kane, Mike	Pakes, Andrew
Bance, Antonia	Egan, Damien	Kaur, Satvir (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Patrick, Matthew
Barker, Paula	Ellis, Maya	Kendall, rh Liz	Payne, Michael
Barron, Lee	Elmore, Chris	Khan, Afzal	Peacock, Stephanie
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Entwistle, Kirith	Khan, Naushabah	Pennycook, Matthew
Baxter, Johanna	Eshalomi, Florence	Kinnock, Stephen	Perkins, Mr Toby
Beavers, Lorraine	Evans, Chris	Kirkham, Jayne	Phillips, Jess
Bell, Torsten	Fahnbulleh, Miatta	Kitchen, Gen	Phillipson, rh Bridget
Berry, Siân	Falconer, Mr Hamish	Kyrke-Smith, Laura	Pinto-Duschinsky, David
Betts, Mr Clive	Farnsworth, Linsey	Lamb, Peter	Pitcher, Lee
Billington, Ms Polly	Ferguson, Mark	Lavery, Ian	Platt, Jo
Bishop, Matt	Ferguson, Patricia	Law, Noah	Pollard, Luke
Blake, Olivia	Fleet, Natalie	Leadbeater, Kim	Powell, Joe
Blake, Rachel	Foody, Emma	Leishman, Brian	Powell, rh Lucy
Bloore, Chris	Fookes, Catherine	Lewin, Andrew	Poynton, Gregor
Blundell, Mrs Elsie	Foster, Mr Paul (<i>Proxy vote cast by Lorraine Beavers</i>)	Lewis, Clive	Prinsley, Peter
Bonavia, Kevin	Foxcroft, Vicky	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Quigley, Mr Richard
Botterill, Jade	Foy, Mary Kelly	MacAlister, Josh	Qureshi, Yasmin
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena	Francis, Daniel	Macdonald, Alice	Race, Steve
Brash, Mr Jonathan	Frith, Mr James	MacNae, Andy	Ranger, Andrew
Brickell, Phil	Furniss, Gill	Madders, Justin	Rayner, rh Angela
Bryant, Chris	Gardner, Dr Allison	Mahmood, rh Shabana	Reader, Mike
Buckley, Julia	Gemmell, Alan	Martin, Amanda	Reid, Joani
Burgon, Richard	German, Gill	Maskell, Rachael	Reynolds, rh Jonathan
Burke, Maureen	Gilbert, Tracy	Mather, Keir	Rhodes, Martin
Burton-Sampson, David	Gill, Preet Kaur	Mayer, Alex	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Butler, Dawn	Gittins, Becky	McAllister, Douglas	Richards, Jake
Byrne, Ian	Goldsborough, Ben	McCarthy, Kerry	Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
Cadbury, Ruth	Gosling, Jodie	McDonagh, Dame Siobhain	Rigby, Lucy
Caliskan, Nesil	Gould, Georgia	McDonald, Andy	Rimmer, Ms Marie
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Grady, John	McDonald, Chris	Robertson, Dave
Campbell, Juliet	Greenwood, Lilian	McDonnell, rh John	Roca, Tim
Campbell-Savours, Markus	Griffith, Dame Nia	McDougall, Blair	Rodda, Matt
Carden, Dan	Gwynne, Andrew (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	McEvoy, Lola	Rushworth, Sam
Carling, Sam	Haigh, rh Louise	McGovern, Alison	Russell, Sarah
Carns, Al	Hall, Sarah	McKee, Gordon	Rutland, Tom
Champion, Sarah	Hamilton, Fabian	McKenna, Kevin	Ryan, Oliver
Charalambous, Bambos	Hatton, Lloyd	McKinnell, Catherine	Scrogham, Michelle
Charters, Mr Luke	Hayes, Helen	McMahon, Jim	Sewards, Mark
Chowns, Ellie	Hayes, Tom	McMorris, Anna	Shah, Naz
Clark, Feryal	Hazelgrove, Claire	McNally, Frank	Shanker, Baggy
Collier, Jacob	Healey, rh John	Midgley, Anneliese	Shanks, Michael
Collinge, Lizzi	Hendrick, Sir Mark (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Minns, Ms Julie	Siddiq, Tulip
Collins, Tom	Hillier, Dame Meg	Mishra, Navendu	Slaughter, Andy
Coombes, Sarah	Hinchliff, Chris	Mohamed, Abtisam	Slinger, John
Cooper, Andrew	Hinder, Jonathan	Moon, Perran	Smith, Cat
Costigan, Deirdre	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Morgan, Stephen	Smith, David
Coyle, Neil	Hopkins, Rachel	Morris, Joe	Smith, Jeff
Craft, Jen	Hughes, Claire	Mullane, Margaret	Smith, Nick
Creagh, Mary	Hume, Alison	Murphy, Luke	Smith, Sarah
Creasy, Ms Stella	Hurley, Patrick	Murray, Chris	Smith, Sarah
Curtis, Chris	Hussain, Imran	Murray, rh Ian (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Smth, Karin
Dakin, Sir Nicholas	Ingham, Leigh	Murray, James	Snell, Gareth
Darlington, Emily	Irons, Natasha	Murray, Katrina	Sobel, Alex
Davies, Jonathan	Jameson, Sally	Myer, Luke	Stainbank, Euan
Davies, Paul	Jarvis, Dan	Naish, James	Stevens, rh Jo
Davies, Shaun	Jogee, Adam	Naismith, Connor	Stevenson, Kenneth
Dean, Josh		Narayan, Kanishka	Stewart, Elaine
Dearden, Kate			Stone, Will
Denyer, Carla			

Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony

Vince, Chris
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Martin McCluskey and
Christian Wakeford

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 31

PROCEDURE FOR CERTAIN ORDERS AND SCHEMES

Amendment made: 93, page 47, line 37, leave out subsections (3) and (4) and insert—

“(3) In section 326 (revocation and variation of schemes and orders)—

(a) in subsection (2)—

(i) after “An order” insert “or scheme”;

(ii) after “section” insert “10.”;

(iii) after “14B,” insert “16.”;

(iv) after “27,” insert “106(3).”;

(v) after “orders” insert “or schemes”;

(vi) after “subsequent order” insert “or scheme”;

(b) after subsection (2) insert—

“(2A) Subsection (2) does not apply to an order or scheme under section 10, 16 or 106(3) made or confirmed by the Welsh Ministers (but see section 325(1A)).”;

(c) in subsection (6), before “14,” insert “10.”.—
(Matthew Pennycook.)

This amendment excludes instruments made by the Welsh Ministers from a consequential amendment in this clause.

Clause 41

DEEMED CONSENT UNDER MARINE LICENCE

Amendments made: 94, page 54, line 22, leave out from beginning to end of line 19 on page 55 and insert—

“(1) An order of the Secretary of State under section 1 or 3 may include provision deeming a marine licence to have been granted by the Secretary of State for activities specified in the order (being activities for which the Secretary of State is the appropriate licensing authority).

(2) Activity specified under subsection (1) must be carried out wholly in one or more of these areas—

(a) England;

(b) waters adjacent to England up to the seaward limits of the territorial sea;

(c) an exclusive economic zone, except any part of an exclusive economic zone in relation to which the Scottish Ministers have functions;

(d) a Renewable Energy Zone, except any part of a Renewable Energy Zone in relation to which the Scottish Ministers have functions;

(e) an area designated under section 1(7) of the Continental Shelf Act 1964, except any part of that area which is within a part of an exclusive economic zone or Renewable Energy Zone in relation to which the Scottish Ministers have functions.

(3) An order of the Welsh Ministers under section 1 or 3 may include provision deeming a marine licence to have been granted by the Welsh Ministers for activities specified in the order (being activities for which the Welsh Ministers are the appropriate licensing authority).

(4) An order including provision under subsection (1) or (3) may also include provision—

(a) deeming the licence to have been granted subject to such conditions as may be specified in the order;

(b) deeming any such conditions to have been attached to the marine licence by the Secretary of State or (as the case may be) the Welsh Ministers under Part 4 of the MCAA 2009.

(4A) If an order includes provision of the sort mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b) of subsection (4), sections 68 (notice of applications) and 69(3) and (5) (representations) of the MCAA 2009 do not apply in relation to the deemed marine licence.”

This amendment reworks the provision for deemed marine licences in Transport and Works Act orders so that the Secretary of State and the Welsh Ministers may only authorise activity for which they are responsible under the marine licensing legislation.

Amendment 95, page 55, line 22, leave out “Marine and Coastal Access Act” and insert “MCAA”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 97.

Amendment 96, page 55, line 24, leave out “Marine and Coastal Access Act” and insert “MCAA”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 97.

Amendment 97, page 55, line 26, at end insert—

“‘the MCAA 2009’ means the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009;

‘marine licence’ means a marine licence under Part 4 of the MCAA 2009.”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 94.

*Amendment 98, page 55, line 29, leave out “Marine and Coastal Access Act” and insert “MCAA”.—
 (Matthew Pennycook.)*

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 97.

Clause 51

SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Amendment proposed: 15, page 72, line 29, at end insert—

“(2A) A spatial development strategy must have regard to the need to provide 150,000 new social homes nationally a year.”—*(Gideon Amos.)*

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 73, Noes 323.

Division No. 217]

[10.34 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat
 Allister, Jim
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Lee
 Aquarone, Steff
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân

Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cane, Charlotte
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chadwick, David
 Chambers, Dr Danny

Chowns, Ellie
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Dean, Bobby
 Denyer, Carla
 Dillon, Mr Lee
 Duffield, Rosie
 Farage, Nigel
 Farron, Tim
 Foord, Richard
 Franklin, Zöe
 George, Andrew
 Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine*)
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Goldman, Marie
 Gordon, Tom
 Green, Sarah
 Harding, Monica
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Jarvis, Liz
 Khan, Ayoub
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 MacCleary, James
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Ben
 Maguire, Helen
 Martin, Mike
 Mathew, Brian

McMurdock, James
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Munt, Tessa
 O'Brien, Neil
 Olney, Sarah
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Sabine, Anna
 Shannon, Jim
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Sollom, Ian
 Stone, Jamie
 Swann, Robin
 Taylor, Luke
 Tice, Richard
 Voaden, Caroline
 Wilkinson, Max
 Wilson, Munira
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Will Forster and
Charlie Maynard

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abbott, Jack
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baines, David
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Bell, Torsten
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Bishop, Matt
 Blake, Olivia

Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Buckley, Julia
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Butler, Dawn
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Clark, Feryal
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Curtis, Chris

Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul (*Proxy vote cast by Lorraine Beavers*)
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally

Jarvis, Dan
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, rh Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Kendall, rh Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, rh Shabana
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McGovern, Alison
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Narayan, Kanishka

Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Onn, Melanie
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, rh Bridget
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Scroggham, Michelle
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat

Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vince, Chris
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Martin McCluskey and
Christian Wakeford

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 56

OTHER REQUIREMENTS FOR AN EDP

Amendment made: 99, page 92, line 36, at end insert “and (2A)”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 100.

Amendment proposed: 69, page 93, line 8, at end insert—

- “(10) An EDP must include a schedule setting out the timetable for the implementation of each conservation measure and for the reporting of results.
- (11) A schedule included under subsection (10) must ensure that, where the development to which the EDP applies is in Natural England’s opinion likely to cause significant environmental damage, the corresponding conservation measures result in an improvement in the conservation status of the identified features prior to the damage being caused.
- (12) In preparing a schedule under subsection (10) Natural England must have regard to the principle that enhancements should be delivered in advance of harm.”—(*Chris Hinchliff.*)

This amendment would require Environmental Delivery Plans to set out a timetable for, and thereafter report on, conservation measures, and require improvement of the conservation status of specified features before development takes place in areas where Natural England considers development could cause significant environmental damage.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 180, Noes 307.

Division No. 218]

[10.46 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Adam, Shockat
 Amos, Gideon
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana*)
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blake, Olivia
 Bool, Sarah
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brandreth, Aphra
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Cane, Charlotte
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Cartlidge, James
 Chadwick, David
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Chowns, Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Cocking, Lewis
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Cross, Harriet
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davies, Mims
 Dean, Bobby
 Denyer, Carla
 Dewhurst, Charlie
 Dillon, Mr Lee
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farron, Tim
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Franklin, Zöe
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine*)
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Glen, rh John
 Glover, Olly
 Goldman, Marie
 Gordon, Tom
 Grant, Helen
 Green, Sarah
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel

Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Kim
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Khan, Ayoub
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Kruger, Danny
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Lavery, Ian
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 MacCleary, James
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Ben
 Maguire, Helen
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McVey, rh Esther
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zoe Franklin*)
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Munt, Tessa
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Olney, Sarah
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)
 Patel, rh Priti

Paul, Rebecca
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rankin, Jack
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Joe
 Sabine, Anna
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Rebecca
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stone, Jamie
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sultana, Sarah
 Swann, Robin
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Thomas, Bradley
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wild, James
 Wilkinson, Max
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jeremy Corbyn and
Neil Duncan-Jordan

NOES

Abbott, Jack
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Anderson, Lee
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine

Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baines, David
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Bell, Torsten
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Bishop, Matt
 Blake, Rachel

Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Buckley, Julia
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Butler, Dawn
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Clark, Feryal
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farage, Nigel
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul (*Proxy vote cast by Lorraine Beavers*)
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James

Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, rh Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Kendall, rh Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewin, Andrew
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, rh Shabana
 Martin, Amanda
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas

McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Chris
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McGovern, Alison
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 McMurdoch, James
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Moon, Perran
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naismith, Connor
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Onn, Melanie
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, rh Bridget
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Pochin, Sarah
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Richards, Jake
 Rigby, Lucy
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam

Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Scrogham, Michelle
 Searwards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tice, Richard
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Tuftnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vince, Chris
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Christian Wakeford and
 Martin McCluskey

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 57

PREPARATION OF EDP BY NATURAL ENGLAND

Amendments made: 100, page 93, line 19, at end insert—

“(2A) In preparing an EDP that specifies as the development area an area that includes waters adjacent to England (see section 53(2)(b)), Natural England must also have regard to—

- (a) any marine plan,
- (b) the marine policy statement, and
- (c) the UK Marine Strategy,

so far as Natural England considers them to be relevant.”.

This amendment requires Natural England to have regard to the marine policy statement, marine plans and the UK Marine Strategy when it prepares an EDP that covers development in the territorial sea.

Amendment 101, page 93, line 20, leave out “subsection (2)” and insert “subsections (2) and (2A)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 100.

Amendment 102, page 93, line 29, at end insert—

“‘marine plan’ has the meaning given in section 51(3) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009;

‘marine policy statement’ has the same meaning as in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (see section 44 of that Act);

‘the UK Marine Strategy’ means the strategy developed under the Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 (S.I. 2010/1627).”.

—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 100.

Clause 58

CONSULTATION ON DRAFT EDP

Amendments made: 103, page 94, line 2, at end insert—

“(ca) any local highway authority for an area that is wholly or partly within the development area,

(cb) any strategic highways company for an area that is wholly or partly within the development area,

(cc) Network Rail Limited, if the development area includes all or part of its network;”.

This amendment adds local highway authorities, strategic highways companies and Network Rail Limited to the list of persons who must be consulted when Natural England has prepared a draft environmental delivery plan.

Amendment 104, page 94, line 25, at end insert—

“‘local highway authority’ has the meaning given by section 329(1) of the Highways Act 1980;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 103.

Amendment 105, page 94, line 30, at end insert—

“‘network’ has the meaning given by section 83(1) of the Railways Act 1993;

‘strategic highways company’ has the meaning given by section 329(1) of the Highways Act 1980.”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 103.

Clause 64

CHALLENGING AN EDP

Amendment made: 106, page 98, line 26, leave out “before the end of” and insert “during”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

This amendment clarifies that a challenge to an EDP (or anything done or not done in the course of preparing an EDP) cannot be brought before the day on which the EDP is published.

Clause 65

COMMITMENT TO PAY THE NATURE RESTORATION LEVY

Amendments made: 107, page 100, line 3, leave out “or the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981”

and insert

“, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 or the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 109.

Amendment 108, page 100, line 25, at end insert—

“(ba) in a case where the feature is a protected feature of a marine conservation zone, the developer does not have the option of satisfying the public authority determining an application relating to the development of the matters mentioned in section 126(6) or (7) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 instead of paying the levy;”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 109.

Clause 91

INTERPRETATION

Amendments made: 115, page 118, line 40, at end insert—

“(d) a condition that may be attached to a marine licence under section 71(1)(b) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, or

(e) a condition that may be attached to a harbour revision order under section 14 of the Harbours Act 1964 or a harbour empowerment order under section 16 of that Act;”.

This amendment, which is partly consequential on Amendment 116, adds conditions attached to marine licences and conditions attached to harbour orders to the definition of “condition of development”.

Amendment 116, page 119, line 6, at end insert

“, and

(c) licensable marine activities, within the meaning of Part 4 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (see section 66 of that Act);”.

This amendment amends the definition of development so as to include marine activities that must be consented under Part 4 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (for example offshore construction works).

Amendment 117, page 119, line 20, at end insert—

“‘marine conservation zone’ means an area designated as such under section 116 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 118.

Amendment 118, page 119, line 27, at end insert

“or

(d) a marine conservation zone.”.

This amendment, which is largely consequential on Amendment 116, adds marine conservation zones to the definition of protected sites, so that an EDP can make provision for the protection of MCZs when it covers development in territorial waters.

Amendment 119, page 119, line 30, leave out “geological or physiographical feature” and insert

“feature of geological, geomorphological or physiographical interest”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

This amendment, which is consequential on Amendment 118, reflects the grounds for designating an area as a marine conservation zone in section 117(1) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, which include conserving not only marine flora, fauna and habitats but also “features of geological or geomorphological interest”.

Schedule 4

ENVIRONMENTAL DELIVERY PLANS: EFFECT ON ENVIRONMENTAL OBLIGATIONS

Amendments made: 109, page 162, line 17, at end insert—

“*Protected sites: marine conservation zones*

2A (1) Sub-paragraph (2) applies where—

(a) an environmental feature identified in an EDP in accordance with section 54(1)(a) is a protected feature of a marine conservation zone, and

(b) a developer has committed to pay, in respect of a development, such amount of the nature restoration levy set out in a charging schedule to the EDP as applies in relation to an environmental impact of the development on that protected feature.

(2) The environmental impact of the development on the protected feature is to be disregarded for the purposes of section 126 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (duties of public authorities in relation to certain decisions).”

This amendment, which is consequential on Amendment 116, means that if a developer for a development affecting a marine conservation zone pays the levy, the effect of the development on protected features in that zone is disregarded for the purposes of the duties of public authorities set out in section 126 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

Amendment 110, page 162, line 29, leave out

“by Natural England to the developer”

and insert

“to the developer by the relevant licensing body (see regulation 58(4A) of those Regulations)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 113.

Amendment 111, page 162, line 41, leave out

“by Natural England to the developer”

and insert

“to the developer by the appropriate authority (see section 16(8A) and (9) of that Act).”—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

This amendment is largely consequential on Amendment 116. It reflects the fact that species licences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 relating to marine animals are granted by the Marine Management Organisation.

Schedule 6

AMENDMENTS RELATING TO PART 3

Amendments made: 112, page 177, line 13, after “55” insert “(1)”.

This amendment corrects a minor drafting error so as to match the cross-reference in the new paragraph (4A) to that in regulation 58(2) (so both are to “regulation 55(1)”).

Amendment 113, page 177, line 15, leave out “Natural England” and insert “—

(a) so far as the licence relates to the restricted English inshore region, the Marine Management Organisation; and

(b) otherwise, Natural England.”.

The effect of this amendment is that where developers for developments in the territorial sea are treated (by paragraph 3 of Schedule 4 to the Bill) as having been granted a species licence under regulation 55 of the Habitats Regulations, the licensing authority is the Marine Management Organisation rather than Natural England.

Amendment 114, page 177, line 15, at end insert—

“(da) in paragraph (6), for “paragraph (2)” substitute “this regulation”;”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 113.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS

That the draft Payment Services and Payment Accounts (Contract Termination) (Amendment) Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 28 April, be approved.—(*Gerald Jones.*)

Question agreed to.

Breast Cancer Screening: Bassetlaw

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Gerald Jones.)

10.59 pm

Jo White (Bassetlaw) (Lab): The first known descriptions of breast cancer date back to beyond 3,000 BC. Hippocrates described the progressive stages of breast cancer in 400 BC, when he outlined his theory for its cause. Although breast cancer mortality rates have been decreasing since the 1970s, approximately 11,400 women and 85 men die of breast cancer every year. That is 32 deaths from breast cancer every single day of the week.

We all know someone who has been impacted by breast cancer—a mother, a sister, a granny, a daughter, a colleague or a friend. For me that was my nan, the matriarch of the family, a character, fit and healthy, who went out daily to clean other people's houses. We lost her when I was 19 years old. She was too embarrassed to show her breast to her doctor, and explained away her lump as an injury caused by falling off a window ledge when cleaning windows. By the time she finally went to the doctor, it was too late, and she died months later. We lost her too soon. Perhaps it was also fear that kept her away; two of her sisters were also taken by breast cancer.

That is such a familiar story. So many women being treated for breast cancer tell of family members—aunts, sisters, mothers, grandmothers—who have been through the same experiences. My nan was of Jewish descent. It is now known that Jewish people of Ashkenazi heritage have a one in 40 chance of carrying the BRCA gene mutation, which means a much higher chance of developing breast cancer—a one in two chance before the age of 70. For the sake of my family, I am currently having genetic screening to check that, if it was the familial cause, it has not been passed down. I urge every woman of Jewish heritage to do the same. Screening is provided free by the NHS and can be done in the home.

Emily Darlington (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): Medical testing of the BRCA1 gene is effective, but polygenic risk factors mean that if someone has a combination of genes, they might be more at risk of breast cancer. Does my hon. Friend think we should be rolling out polygenic risk testing so that, with a better understanding of their genes, women know how often they should have their breasts checked?

Jo White: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point, and I hope that the Minister has taken heed of it.

Dawn Butler (Brent East) (Lab): I was diagnosed and went through the journey of early-stage breast cancer during the covid pandemic. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that the system understands that breast cancer can present in younger women, not just in older women?

Jo White: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. I have sympathy for her experiences and hope that she is now fully recovered. Yes, we must be conscious that women of all ages could have breast cancer, and awareness must be raised so that women continue to check their breasts for it.

[Jo White]

What I do know is this: breast cancer screening and early detection save lives. The earlier that breast cancer is detected, the simpler and more effective the treatment is likely to be. Between the ages of 50 and 70, on a three-year cycle, women will get a letter in the post inviting them in for screening. A chance conversation last autumn with a local GP alerted me to his concern that the number of women attending Bassetlaw hospital for screening appointments had dropped dramatically. I asked the chief executive of our local hospital trust to investigate that, and he quickly came back with some worrying figures showing that attendance had dropped in recent times to below 50% of women invited for screening. This was either due to an appointment cancellation or a no-show on the day. NHS England data shows that prior to the coronavirus pandemic 78% of women in Bassetlaw and Doncaster were going for screening. The decline is dramatic and is not unique to Bassetlaw.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for bringing this debate forward. I spoke to her before the debate and her concerns are those of us all, and that is why we are here—to try to make lives better. Across England, Wales and Northern Ireland breast screening coverage remained relatively steady over time until 2019, at an average of 76%, but following covid in 2019, breast screening coverage had decreased to 65% by 2022. The covid impact on breast screening is entirely worrying, as is the fact that most trusts are not back to pre-covid screen test rates. Does the hon. Lady agree that we need a co-ordinated approach throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to enhance screening rates? We look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

Jo White: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution and agree that it is worrying that only half of the trusts in England are meeting the national target of 70% of eligible women going for their screening, but next year we hit a milestone in that it is estimated that almost 1 million women will be invited for screening. I welcome the fact that NHS England is actively encouraging more women to book and attend their screening. Will the Minister provide more detail on that?

To be honest, in Bassetlaw I cannot wait for a national operation to kick in. Last month I launched the “Bassetlaw love your boobs, get them checked” campaign, supporting local women and encouraging women to go for their breast screening. I pay tribute to the wonderful Bassetlaw women who have been active in the campaign—women such as Liz Rew and Maria Charlesworth, who found lumps in their breasts and went for their screening. Barbara Baldwin and Claire Previn joined my campaign as they have had friends taken too soon by breast cancer; I do not want anyone else to have to go through that. Lynn Dixon from Bassetlaw had breast cancer in her family and was first diagnosed at the age of 36 after finding a lump, and she has just recently found another lump and was screened. This week she is facing further treatment for breast cancer. My thoughts and love are with Lynn right now. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] Jenny Bailey is a former NHS nurse and midwife in Bassetlaw who had her breast cancer identified following routine screening. The women from Bassetlaw are amazing,

using their life experiences to join the fighting spirit, encouraging their friends, family and neighbours to get screened.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): I thank the hon. Lady very much for introducing this debate, because it is so important. I could not agree more that screening is incredibly important, but we also need to make sure that modern radiotherapy treatment is available for those whose breast cancer has been detected. NHS England has degraded the availability of radiotherapy treatment in many regions over the last 10 years. I understand that breast cancer patients from Bassetlaw have to travel over an hour, as they do in my area, to receive the radiotherapy that they need. What might the hon. Lady say about the Government's new cancer plan? I hope it goes a long way to resolving the problem of getting access to radiotherapy, which is so effective.

Jo White: I welcome the hon. Member's contribution. Women in Bassetlaw have to travel all the way to Sheffield once they have been diagnosed to have treatment and radiotherapy. That is a long journey and it would be better if the cancer could be treated in Bassetlaw. I wait to hear how that can be achieved in future years, because it is so important for people to be treated close to home.

James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for introducing this debate. She has mentioned several women whom I know personally, having worked with them, and she is absolutely right that they are incredible. I particularly send my sympathy to Lynn and her family. We know that barriers to improving breast cancer screening rates include not only awareness but accessibility; it is about people living in rural areas being able to get to where treatment and screening can take place. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government need to think not only about treatment but about the way in which people access that treatment when they are in rural areas like mine and hers?

Jo White: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution and I agree with him. In Bassetlaw, we have a single unit, but there are mobile units in rural areas that might encourage a better take-up rate.

The misconception that only women can get breast cancer is far too common. Almost 400 men get breast cancer every year, including my constituent Danny Emmerson from Worksop, who found some lumps in his armpits while he was sitting watching TV. He went to his GP to get checked and was quickly diagnosed with breast cancer. I thank Danny for joining my campaign to raise awareness that men get breast cancer too.

My ask today is that everyone in the Chamber, man or woman, checks themselves, and encourages their wives, partners, daughters, granddaughters, sisters and all the women in their lives to attend their breast cancer screening appointments. This debate is not the end of my campaign. On 29 June, I will be running the Race for Life in my constituency and visiting the Bassetlaw Princess Diana mammography unit to help tell the story of how easy it is for people to get their breasts screened.

I welcome the fact that my hon. Friends the Members for Doncaster Central (Sally Jameson) and for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme (Lee Pitcher) are in their places. The data for Doncaster and Bassetlaw hospitals

covers all of our constituencies. While I understand that we can presume that there are lower attendance levels by those who live in our more deprived wards, will the Minister provide advice on what more the Department can do to ensure that we can get hospital-specific data for breast cancer screening uptake?

Sally Jameson (Doncaster Central) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is critical that we get data at that level, so that our Doncaster and Bassetlaw teaching hospitals NHS foundation trust can target the areas, and perhaps even the age groups, in which women's take-up is lowest?

Jo White: I agree with my hon. Friend. We have data, but we remain unsure where the lowest uptake is. I would like to go to the wards in my area where uptake is low and knock on doors to encourage women to go to their screenings, so it would be helpful to have precise data from the two hospitals in the Doncaster and Bassetlaw hospitals trust.

Several organisations across Bassetlaw support people with cancer, and I wish to highlight the work of Aurora in Worksop, which offers support to people during and after cancer treatment. From exercise spaces to beauty treatments, emotional support or even just a cup of tea with a friendly face and a listening ear, organisations like Aurora in our constituencies are the unsung heroes for people going through the challenge that is cancer treatment.

Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend and neighbour on securing this important debate, and on the campaign that she is leading on women and men being screened for breast cancer early. Uptake is very low nationally, which is a problem in Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme. Incredible work is done by organisations like Visit Bawtry. In October last year, over 70 organisations turned the town pink during Breast Cancer Awareness Month, raising £15,000 for breast cancer charities and, most importantly, amplifying the message that it is important to get early detection to save lives. Does my hon. Friend agree that efforts by grassroots organisations are vital, and that the Government must support them, as well as supporting improved screening access and public health messaging?

Jo White: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments, and I agree with him. Bawtry is just across the border from my constituency, and it has a very strong community. When I go to through these towns, I see how many people come out on to the street to support one another, so I am sure that the campaign he mentions is very strong. I have come across many charities and organisations working on this issue in my constituency; they often involve people who have had breast cancer, and who want to educate other women and encourage them to be screened. They are very important to the work that we are doing.

Since the beginning of breast screening checks in 1988, there has been a cut-off age of 70. My campaign includes women who are above the age threshold for being invited in for screening. My nan was over 70 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Why do women over 70 have to rely on memory and a phone call to get their screening appointment? All women can get breast cancer; it does not discriminate by age or background.

I thank Bassetlaw women Sue Shaw and Barbara Baldwin, who are both over 70 and are now missing out. They argue that the cost of treatment for breast cancer far outweighs the costs of screening. Early prevention not only saves lives, but saves the NHS money. They are calling for the threshold to be eradicated—that is their ask and mine of the Minister. As we have heard, early diagnosis of breast cancer can save lives, and I am doing everything that I can locally to encourage women to attend their screenings when they are invited. My Bassetlaw message is: love your boobs, and get them checked.

11.15 pm

The Minister for Secondary Care (Karin Smyth): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Jo White) for bringing forward this debate on a really important topic that is close to my heart and, I know, the hearts of so many other hon. Members. It is really important to ensure that as many women as possible take up the offer of screening. They should not feel embarrassed to seek help if they feel something untoward when checking their breasts.

My hon. Friend has spoken really eloquently, and has been supported by other colleagues. As she has done on other occasions, she has highlighted her family's experience of losing a loved one due to the fear of seeking medical advice, and she is right to raise the issue of the downturn in women choosing to be screened in her constituency and, sadly, across the country.

Survival rates for breast cancer can be good. If breast cancer is found early, at stage one, the five-year survival rate can be as high as 98.2%, but the five-year survival rate plummets to 26.6% when breast cancer is not found until stage four. The earlier breast cancer is caught, the earlier it can be treated, and the more likely it is that the patient will recover.

Everyone is encouraged to check their breasts for lumps. There have been some excellent public health campaigns over the years from various charities explaining what to look for, be it a lump, a discharge or a dimpling of the skin on the breast. If a change is found, it is essential that no time is wasted before contacting a GP. That is why screening is an essential tool in our arsenal when trying to prevent this disease.

A mammogram can identify breast cancer before it is large enough to be felt. The NHS national breast cancer screening programme invites all women aged 50 to 71 to attend a screening appointment once every three years. Mammograms can be uncomfortable, as those of us who have had them know, and many women have anxiety about having to get undressed in front of strangers, but that short discomfort could save a life. It is important that we encourage all women not to put off their scans.

The NHS breast screening programme was badly affected by the pandemic, as we have heard this evening. Screening for breast cancer was paused, and when it restarted, the number of women taking up the offer did not recover to pre-pandemic levels. Even after the backlog of missed appointments had been cleared, the take-up of invitations was low, and data indicates that lots of women are still not coming forward to start their screening journey. The NHS is doing more to help to drive up engagement, and we can all do more to help, as my hon. Friend is doing.

[Karin Smyth]

The most recent NHS data shows that breast cancer screening uptake in the area including my hon. Friend's constituency is reported at 74.1%, with an achievable standard of 80%. That is higher than the national average of 70%, but it is short of that achievable high standard. Also, the percentage of women screened within 36 months of their previous screen is reported at 97.5%, versus the acceptable standard of 90% and the achievable standard of 99%.

While more can clearly be done to increase uptake, I hope that those figures for the entire patch that includes my hon. Friend's constituency provide some reassurance that women are coming forward to be screened. However, I absolutely take the point made by her and her colleagues that the data needs to be understood at a more granular, local level—particularly data on the women coming forward in areas of high deprivation. I will ensure that my hon. Friend has access to that information following this debate.

I am pleased that the Doncaster and Bassetlaw teaching hospitals breast screening service has made significant improvements over the past year to improve attendance at appointments. I really commend my hon. Friend's "Love your boobs" campaign, and the work that she has highlighted with local women like as Liz, Maria, Barbara, Claire and Lynn, and with men such as Danny, which makes the point that is important that men also check. The service has recently expanded availability by offering more appointments outside traditional hours. It has extended its clinic hours, and has regular Saturday appointments. The invitation method has also been changed from open appointments to timed and dated appointments, which has been shown to help increase engagement, and the service has met with the Cancer Alliance and commissioners to review ways of increasing uptake. I understand that Doncaster and Bassetlaw teaching hospitals' breast screening service is planning to invite my hon. Friend to visit a clinic in her constituency. I hope that visit will furnish her with further information about local efforts to increase uptake, and I know she will make sure that visit happens.

In February this year, the NHS launched a national breast screening awareness campaign to encourage more women to take up the offer of screening, and debates such as the one we are having tonight help raise awareness of its importance. We are not complacent: as well as increasing the uptake of routine screening, we need to make sure that the women who are most at risk are screened more frequently. The breast screening after radiotherapy dataset, or BARD, programme is working to identify and invite women who received radiotherapy involving breast tissue when aged between 10 and 35. As we have heard this evening, genetic tracing programmes are also looking at identifying carriers of genes, including BRCA, that predispose individuals to a higher risk of

breast cancer. Those women are entitled to more frequent screening, and we need to ensure that they are identified and informed.

The UK national screening committee is considering other changes to the breast screening programme. It is looking at whether women with denser breasts need to be screened differently, and an ongoing trial called BRAID—breast radiography to aid identification of cancers in dense breasts—is looking at breast density. The UK NSC is discussing the first findings of that trial, which I am sure hon. Members will maintain a close interest in. It will continue to review BRAID and other findings as they become available to ensure that early decisions can be made to keep the screening programme updated and dynamic.

We are also investigating the age thresholds for screening. Currently, only higher-risk women are invited for screening below the age of 50. The programme stops at the 71st birthday, although women aged over 70 can choose to opt back into regular screens. A trial called AgeX is reviewing whether an additional screen three years before and three years after the existing age thresholds would increase the effectiveness of this programme and ultimately save more lives, and the EDITH research study is looking at whether artificial intelligence can be used to support the reading of mammograms. If it can, that could relieve pressure on the workforce and allow more screens to take place, as there would be increased capacity to translate the results. The Government have already invested £11 million in that trial, and we keenly await the results.

More widely, the Government are committed to tackling breast cancer and ensuring that women get diagnosed and treated faster and more efficiently. That is why we will publish a national cancer plan later this year. That plan will have patients at its heart and will cover the entirety of the pathway, from referral and diagnosis to treatment and ongoing care, as well as prevention, screening, research and innovation. It will seek to improve every aspect of cancer care to improve the experience of, and outcomes for, people with cancer. Our goal is to reduce the number of lives lost to cancer over the next 10 years.

I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw and other hon. Members for being in the Chamber this evening, giving this House an important opportunity to shine a light on the lifesaving importance of breast screening. My hon. Friend is doing a great service in publicising her work with the NHS, and I wish her good luck with Race for Life. We all have the same goal, and together, we can improve outcomes and increase the number of women surviving breast cancer.

Question put and agreed to.

11.23 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 9 June 2025

[PETER DOWD *in the Chair*]

Non-stun Slaughter of Animals

4.30 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 700557 relating to the non-stun slaughter of animals.

As Chair of the Petitions Committee, I always find it encouraging to witness public participation in politics, and this is a good example. It is evident that this petition, which has attracted more than 100,000 signatures, has engaged a very large number of people from all across the country. For that reason, I must very sincerely thank its creator, Mr Martin Osborne, who is in the Public Gallery today with a group of his friends and other supporters.

Mr Osborne created this e-petition because he believes that in a modern society more consideration needs to be given to animal welfare and how livestock is treated and culled. He and his fellow signatories believe that non-stun slaughter is barbaric and should be banned, as some EU nations have done. I had the happy privilege of speaking to him last week, and he made one thing very clear to me: he is an animal lover, and he believes that he lives in a country that shares his desire to reduce suffering at the time of slaughter in so far as it is possible to do so. Put simply, I would suggest that his motivation comes from a place of care.

But what Mr Osborne did not do is create this petition with the desire for it to be co-opted as a mechanism for prejudice and discrimination against religious communities in this country that prepare their food differently from him. I trust Members will bear that in mind while debating the topic. I also had the pleasure of meeting representatives of the Halal Monitoring Committee and Shechita UK, both of which expressed respectful interest in the debate. Again, I trust that everyone speaking today will return that respect.

I turn to the topic at hand. The current rules on slaughter in England are set by the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015, under which all animals must be stunned, rendering them insensible to pain before they are slaughtered. However, as we know, an exemption to those rules allows slaughter without pre-stunning for religious communities.

In recent years, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has expressed concern about the large increase in the number of animals that have been slaughtered without pre-stunning. In 2024, 30.1 million animals were killed in that way—a significant increase from the 25.4 million in 2022. Of those 30.1 million animals slaughtered without stunning, 27 million were for halal and 3 million were for kosher.

Evidence presented by the RSPCA makes the case for removing the religious exemption on the basis that animals that are not stunned prior to being slaughter suffer

“very significant pain and distress in the period before insensibility supervenes”.

That is because the neck, cut, sends a stream of sensory information to the brain in the conscious animal, causing intense temporary pain and distress. Only after prolonged blood loss does the animal become unconscious and thus insensitive to the incision. That process can take up to 20 seconds in sheep, 2 minutes in cattle and 2.5 minutes in poultry. As a result, those concerned about animal welfare are calling on the Government to end slaughter without pre-stunning and to ensure that any free trade agreement that the UK signs with other countries excludes the export of non-stunned meat.

If slaughter without pre-stunning is to remain, the RSPCA requests that

“provisions are used in cases where the religious exemption applies only”,

and that we amend the current rules

“to make sure it better protects animal welfare”.

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): I am very glad that my hon. Friend has mentioned the issues surrounding this practice so sensitively. I want to begin by saying that my comments are based on animal welfare issues, as reflected by my constituents. Does he agree that this practice is not only outdated but barbaric, and that it inflicts needless suffering on animals? It also does the consumer absolutely no favours, given that heightened distress and panic in the animal at the time of slaughter leads to meat of inferior quality.

Jamie Stone: My hon. Friend makes her point with some passion; I will touch on that point in a second.

Such provisions include post-cut stunning for ruminants, minimum-stun parameters for poultry and mandatory slaughter labelling. Conversely, it is crucial that we properly and thoughtfully consider the other side of the debate: namely, the religious communities that require this method of slaughter for halal and kosher practices. Proponents of those practices argue that banning non-stun slaughter would violate their freedoms. The teachings of the Jewish and Muslim religions state that an animal must be fully alive before it is slaughtered. Accordingly, the stunning of an animal before slaughter may be interpreted as not being compliant with such religious teachings.

However, in many religions—including my own, Christianity—there are variations in the interpretation of religious laws. Leaders of more liberal branches may be more open to interpreting religious law in the light of modern customs and welfare standards. However, it has to be said that more orthodox factions may still consider changes to traditional methods as a serious offence.

David Pinto-Duschinsky (Hendon) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the way he is setting out his case, given the sensitivity of this issue. Would he accept—I cannot, unfortunately, speak for the halal rules, but I can speak for the kashrut ones—that there is no school of kosher slaughtering that permits stunning?

Jamie Stone: I am prepared to be informed on that point. In my discussions with both the Jewish and Muslim communities, I actually learned a very great deal myself. I found particularly fascinating the fact that the method used is scripture-based, and I think that is important to remember.

[*Jamie Stone*]

After all that has been said so far, if we thought that the slaughtering of animals according to religious practice went unregulated in this country, we would be very wrong, because there are certain requirements. First, the killing must take place in a slaughterhouse—an abattoir, if people want to call it that—approved by the Food Standards Agency. Secondly, it must be done by someone who has a certificate of competence, known as the COC. Thirdly, and importantly, the slaughter must be done in a way that follows Jewish or Islamic religious practice when intended for consumption by Jewish or Muslim people. Now, this is the gory bit: the animal's throat must be cut by a rapid, uninterrupted movement, with both carotid arteries and jugular veins severed by a knife of sufficient size and sharpness. There is to be no sawing. These measures are required to minimise animal suffering. I am sorry if that is shocking, but I think we need to be quite clear about the practice as it is.

These existing regulations prompt deliberations on both sides of the argument. In the case of animal-welfare advocates, one could suggest that our current laws are already examples of the way religious practices have adapted in accordance with modern ethical standards, and that it is therefore entirely just for these practices to further adhere to society's standards as those continue to strengthen. Conversely, to be balanced about this, proponents of traditional religious practice could argue that the current regulations typify compromises that have already been made between religion and law in a society like ours, which—I think this is crucial to the way we go about doing things in this country—actively supports and protects religious freedom or belief. That is a crucial factor.

As an aside, it is important to note that the petition follows the European Court of Human Rights ruling that a ban on the ritual slaughter of animals without prior stunning does not violate the European convention on human rights. This is because the Court accepts that “the protection of animal welfare can be linked to...‘public morality’, which constitutes a legitimate aim”

for which the state might justifiably restrict freedom of religion. In this case, the Court accepted that it was consistent with these standards to legislate that animals should be stunned before being ritually slaughtered. As I am sure many of us know, several European countries have already introduced a ban, including Denmark, Slovenia, Sweden, Finland and Norway. However, other fellow neighbours, including France and Germany, still allow for non-stun slaughter on religious grounds.

All of this is to say that this debate requires nuance—careful nuance—and sensibility to all the views in the room, regardless of the beliefs that one holds.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he is saying, given the sensitivities around this subject. Hon. Members will understand that fundamentally this country is of Christian heritage. Most of my constituents do not like the idea that an animal should be slaughtered in this way. Does he agree that some things should be done fairly quickly, even if there is not a complete ban straightaway? For instance, the introduction of a mandatory multi-labelling system that included the method of slaughter would allow the public to make better-informed decisions about the

food they consume and give them freedom of choice. Surely people who do not want to eat meat that has been slaughtered in that way should have the choice. At the moment, there is no choice. Fundamentally, the British people want to be able to decide whether to consume meat from an animal that has been slaughtered in that way.

Jamie Stone: From my discussions with the Islamic and Jewish communities, I think that the concept of labelling—if I interpret what the hon. Gentleman said correctly—could be quite acceptable to them, if that would give people choice.

I come from the highlands of Scotland, where, to be honest, the 1715 and 1745 rebellions were based on the religious division between Catholics and Protestants, and where there have been huge arguments even within the Church of Scotland in relation to the Free Church. I am therefore very clear that tolerance among religions is crucial to a civilised society.

I have probably said enough. I can see many hon. Members who, I am sure, will make the most interesting contributions, and I look forward to the Minister's. However, I want to end where I began, by thanking Mr Martin Osborne for the sincere way in which he put forward the petition. I also thank those I have spoken with, who have had the patience to explain the halal and the Jewish kosher points of view. I am grateful to have learned a lot over the past few days.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): Order. I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to be called in the debate. I call Yasmin Qureshi.

4.42 pm

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South and Walkden) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd.

I rise to oppose the petition and the divided narratives that surround it. Let us be clear: non-stun religious slaughter accounts for just 2.9% of all animals killed in the United Kingdom, and 88% of halal meat is already pre-stunned. The remainder is slaughtered in accordance with strict religious guidelines by trained professionals in a regulated setting, with respect for the animal, yet that small percentage is repeatedly singled out in public debate. We have heard religious slaughter described as “barbaric”. MPs such as myself have received emails referring to “Muslim meat” and “dirty men with beards”. That is not the language of animal welfare; it is prejudice—plain and simple.

Although the petition talks about “non-stun slaughter” in general, public focus has almost entirely been on halal. Kosher slaughter uses the same method, but is rarely mentioned. That reveals what many of us have known for some time: this debate is less about animals and more about Muslims.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to the fact that eating meat does mean that an animal has to be killed—that is the gross reality of what we do and what we are talking about. Unfortunately, as has already been mentioned, the context has been taken

out of this debate. The Food Standards Agency states that 98% of cattle are stunned before slaughter and just 2% are not. Many constituents in Luton North have contacted me to say that any ban will contravene religious freedoms for both Muslim and Jewish communities. Does my hon. Friend agree that both groups care deeply about animal welfare, but are now concerned about their right to eat meat prepared in accordance with their religious beliefs?

Yasmin Qureshi: I totally agree, and I will come to those points a little later in my speech.

As I said, for many people the debate has been revealed to be less about animals and more about Muslims. If it is truly about animal welfare, will we be talking about the 44,000-plus welfare breaches occurring in the stun industry; the millions of animals affected by failed stunning, painful procedures and transport death; or the use of CO₂ gassing in 88% of pig slaughter, which is known to cause severe distress and pain? Instead, attention is focused on a religious practice followed by a minority, which has been protected by our laws for many decades. The right to practise one's faith should not be up for debate, and it should not be undermined by misinformation driven by culture wars.

The practice seems to be: pick a minority practice, label it backward or dangerous, and claim the moral high ground under the banner of animal welfare. But this is not about welfare; it is about control, scapegoating and singling out faith communities for scrutiny that others are not subjected to. Let us be clear: although the petition refers to non-stun slaughter, the debate outside this room has focused almost entirely on halal meat. That is what is dominating the headlines. Again, as I said, kosher slaughter is done in a similar way, so it is great that at least one community is not being picked on over this issue.

What all of this highlights is a double standard. As I mentioned, the real welfare crisis is the over 44,000 animal welfare breaches that happen in a single year; the failed stunning, which affects up to 31% of poultry and leaves animals conscious; the CO₂ gassing of pigs, which causes panic and breathlessness, and is still used on 88% of pigs; the transport deaths, which see over 118,000 chickens die before even reaching the slaughterhouse; and castration, another painful practice, which causes prolonged suffering.

Do hon. Members think that the electric bolts sent into an animal's head—which quite often fail—are somehow painless? They cause immense suffering, yet nobody talks about them. Why do we not talk about them? Because it is easier to attack visible religious practice.

Afzal Khan (Manchester Rusholme) (Lab): Even the British Veterinary Association has suggested a permit system for non-stun allowances—for halal and kosher demands—not a blanket ban. Does my hon. Friend recognise that debates such as this can feed division rather than unity? With religious hate crimes against British Muslims rising by 13% last year alone, and many feeling increasingly marginalised by political discourse, does she agree that we should confront the underlying racism and Islamophobia that too often drives these debates?

Yasmin Qureshi: I agree with my hon. Friend and thank him for making that observation.

Jewish and Islamic traditions around slaughter are grounded in clear rules designed to minimise suffering. These are not casual practices. The animal must be healthy. It must not witness another animal being slaughtered; the slaughter must be done individually, with animals away from one another. The process must be swift and carried out by someone who is trained and accountable. It is not a mechanical process; it is solemn and Islamic. As I am sure those who can talk more about kosher practice would agree, this is about recognising that we are taking the life of a living being, so it must be done with respect. In fact, in Islamic slaughter—I think it is the same in the shechita method—the animal is held, or embraced, so that any stress is reduced.

In Islam, all animals must, in effect, be vegetarian. Basically, Muslims eat only lambs, cows, sheep and chicken, because they are considered to be grass-eating vegetarian animals that do not eat other animals. So this is about eating healthy meat, but it is also about protecting animals. The way they are slaughtered is important, and it is wrong to say that it is somehow barbaric. However, as I said, when I have looked at social media, GB News and newspapers, the whole debate has been, “Oh, barbaric! Let's get rid of halal meat, halal meat, halal meat.” That is almost the mantra that everybody has. Yet, 88% of halal meat is pre-stunned.

I am grateful the Government have taken a sensible approach to this issue. I believe that halal meat and kosher meat should be available in this country, and I am very happy for it to be labelled; it is very important that there should be clear labelling—I do not think anybody has any problem with that—so that people know what they are getting.

Although this has not been mentioned, scientific studies have shown that the Jewish and the Islamic method of slaughter is actually less painful to the animal because it involves a minimum amount of time, whereas gassing animals or putting a bullet through their heads—a lot of times, that actually fails, so it has to be done twice over—is much more painful.

4.51 pm

Iqbal Mohamed (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd.

I am also an animal lover, and it is really important to put that on the record. I think everybody in this room would be happy to be described as an animal lover. However, we are omnivores, and some of us eat meat. As a Muslim, I will only eat meat that has undergone slaughter using the traditional Islamic halal method.

The rhetoric around non-stunned slaughter, and the way this debate is being framed in Parliament today, are deeply concerning not just to me, but to other Members, to organisations and to many of my constituents. I care about animal welfare, which is the supposed topic of the debate, but I am equally disturbed by the undertone—a title dressed as a welfare concern, but sounding like a dog whistle for xenophobia, targeting religious practices, particularly those of Jewish and Muslim communities.

The methods of slaughter we are discussing are long-standing practices already regulated by clear legislation. Previous Governments have ensured that safeguards are in place to protect animal welfare during religious slaughter. So why are we having this conversation again, if not to stigmatise kosher and halal traditions?

[*Iqbal Mohamed*]

The claim in the petition that non-stun slaughter does not reflect our culture or modern values is not just inaccurate; it is worryingly exclusionary and divisive. It shows a lack of understanding of why these practices exist and how they are monitored.

Let us make this conversation what it should be: about learning and inclusion. As the hon. Member for Bolton South and Walkden (Yasmin Qureshi) said, many people may not realise that both halal and kosher slaughter practices are centred around minimising suffering. They require the animal to be alive and healthy at the time of slaughter. Animals must not be shown the implement with which they will be slaughtered. They should not be in the presence of other animals that are being slaughtered. If that is not humane, I do not know what is.

A sharp knife is used to make a swift incision, cutting key arteries and the windpipe, but not the spinal cord, causing rapid unconsciousness and minimal pain. Evidence shows that when done properly—the key word here is “properly”; I am a proponent of halal and kosher slaughter done in the proper way—kosher and halal methods can be as humane as stun slaughter, if not more so. In fact, if we flip the narrative, mistakes in stunning can cause suffering and expose animals to bad welfare in pre-slaughter handling, or cause pain and fear.

We have heard how halal and kosher slaughter are performed. In the UK, the main methods used to stun an animal before slaughter include penetrating captive bolts, which are used on cattle, sheep and some pigs. A gun fires a metal bolt through the skull into the brain, causing unconsciousness after excruciating pain. In electrical stunning, which is used on sheep, calves and pigs, an electric current is passed through the brain, temporarily rendering the animal unconscious, but not always. Chickens are often stunned before slaughter using an electrical water bath, which involves shackling the birds upside down and passing them through a bath of electrified water. Does that sound humane to anyone in this room? It does not sound humane to me. We have already heard about gas stunning and killing, which is primarily used for pigs and some poultry. Animals are exposed to mixtures of gases, such as carbon dioxide, that cause unconsciousness and eventually death. Each of those stunning methods can lead to the death of the animal, and the eating of a dead animal by Jewish and Muslim believers is not permissible.

This is not a simple “stun good, not-stun bad” issue. It is far more complex and should be centred around good and well-monitored practice. Assuming that there is only one ethical way to slaughter an animal is not science; it is imposition, and it does not reflect the values of a pluralistic society. To claim that halal and kosher practices are outside of “our” culture is a dangerous path—one that risks vilifying communities under the guise of animal welfare.

If we are talking about welfare, let us talk about factory farming. Are the same concerns being raised about that industry, which still allows animals to live in cages, to be mass culled and to suffer through profit-driven systems from birth to death? Despite the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and subsequent legislation, certain intensive farming practices are still legal and widely used. One is enriched cages for hens. Although barren battery cages

were banned in 2012, around 28% of the UK’s laying hens are still kept in enriched cages, which severely restrict natural behaviours. Another is farrowing crates for sows, which prevent mother pigs from turning around or interacting properly with their piglets.

Mr Adnan Hussain (Blackburn) (Ind): The hon. Member is putting forward his case passionately. Does he agree that this debate is not about animal welfare? We once saw Nazi Germany put into law policies similar to those we are discussing. The justification then, too, was animal welfare, but in context it was a thin pretext for antisemitism. That ban was part of a broader programme to marginalise and dehumanise Jewish people by stripping away their rights and religious freedoms. Does the hon. Member agree that such a ban threatens to have a similar effect on Britain’s Muslim and Jewish communities?

Iqbal Mohamed: We in this place must drive our society to move away from divisive rhetoric, hurtful behaviours, racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia. Any attempts to bring them to the fore should be challenged, and communities should be protected.

Another practice that is allowed is the use of individual calf pens. Young calves can be kept in isolation for weeks, which can cause stress and developmental issues. All the practices I have mentioned are legal under current UK law, but are increasingly seen as inhumane by animal welfare advocates. Many of my constituents in Dewsbury and Batley have written to me in support of the RSPCA’s campaign to end cages that restrict an animal’s movement for life. Why are we not debating that?

These are not questions of belief; these are clear, systemic welfare violations, undisputed and urgent. Yet, here we are instead scrutinising faith-based practices rooted in ethics and compassion. This debate must not become a platform to demonise or criminalise. If we truly care about welfare, we must look at the bigger picture: intensive farming, mass culling, corporate cruelty, the prevalence of illegal fox hunting, and the importing and selling of fur products, which is still permitted. That is where the real, meaningful change lies.

5 pm

David Taylor (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab): I start by acknowledging that this is an extremely sensitive debate. We have heard some really thoughtful contributions, for which I am grateful to Members, and I really hope that the debate continues in that tone.

Constituents on all sides of this debate have emailed me; I have heard from the local mosque, but also from a number of people who are concerned primarily by animal welfare. I am grateful that the tone of those emails has been appropriate, and not of the sort that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South and Walkden (Yasmin Qureshi) rightly mentioned. I want in particular to acknowledge the point that she made that the vast majority of meat in this country is non-halal and non-kosher and that, too often, the welfare standards of that meat are poor.

As a lifelong RSPCA supporter, I am strongly of the opinion that our Government should take further measures—I believe that they are—to ensure that the majority of meat consumed in this country is produced to the highest possible standards of animal welfare. One issue that has not been raised is the increasing number

of people getting meat from out of home—from a takeaway, rather than a supermarket. Outside of the debate on halal and kosher meat, I know that the Government are looking at that issue. We often do not know the welfare standards of the meat that we buy from a takeaway, which is a problem when more and more of us—I include myself in that—are eating takeaway food. When we buy from a supermarket, we can look for the Red Tractor or free range mark. I think that is an area that needs to be looked at. I also recognise what others have said about how, unfortunately, a lot of people who raise this issue do so not because of animal welfare concerns, but from a place of Islamophobia or antisemitism. That is completely unacceptable.

As a supporter of the RSCPA who has donated to it and volunteered with it all my life, I want to highlight one of its recommendations to Members. It suggests the adoption of a permit system for non-stunned meat, to allow the tracking of the number of animals slaughtered without prior stunning. I want the Government to consider whether that might be of merit, just to ensure that the volume and proportion of such meat is appropriate. That is the only contribution that I wish to make to the debate, and I hope that the Minister will consider it.

5.3 pm

Rupert Lowe (Great Yarmouth) (Ind): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I accept that this is a very sensitive debate. We all get along fine in Parliament, so I hope that Members will accept what I say as my genuine view.

One of the greatest joys of being a farmer is raising livestock. We see them born, we feed them, we watch them grow and we care for them. When their time comes, we want the end to be swift, calm, dignified and painless. Right now, today, in abattoirs across the country, we are allowing vile practices that would turn the stomach of any decent person, all in the name of religious exemption. There is no bolt to the brain, no stunning, no anaesthetic, but a blade—a deep, crushing cut across the throat. The animal does not die instantly; it thrashes, gasps and panics—it feels everything. It experiences a minute of pure agony while the blood pours from its body. There is no sedation or stunning, just raw terror and suffocation. As a farmer, I would rightly be prosecuted for treating our animals like that, but in the abattoir, it is legal under religious exemption. It is two-tier slaughter.

Instead of an instant, painless death, these poor beings are put through the most unimaginable pain, all in the name of religion. This is not farming; it is torture. The British people have no idea that this is happening, because supermarkets do not label it, restaurants do not mention it and schools do not highlight it, and politicians in these buildings are too terrified to mention it, out of fear of upsetting the religious minorities. I am afraid I do not care—it is about animal welfare.

Millions of Brits are eating halal meat against their will and without their knowledge due to our deceitful labelling system. The two-tier regulatory arbitrage between our abattoirs and halal slaughterhouses means that economic factors foster a more widespread adoption of the cheaper option, which means that halal meat is seeping into the food chain and the consumer is unwittingly eating it.

Ayoub Khan (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): The hon. Member mentions halal meat. Does he adopt the same position for kosher meat?

Rupert Lowe: I do, and I will cover that at the end of my speech.

We are all eating halal meat without knowing it. I find that morally repugnant. We should ban non-stun slaughter, we should ban halal slaughter and we should ban kosher slaughter.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): Will the hon. Member clarify what he proposes? Eighty-eight per cent. of halal meat is pre-stunned. Is he just after pre-stunned meat? Is that the crux of his argument?

Rupert Lowe: The issue of stunning is complex, as the hon. Member probably knows. The halal stun is a lower voltage than the non-halal stun. As the hon. Member for Dewsbury and Batley (Iqbal Mohamed) rightly said, chickens are put into an electric bath before they are killed. It is the level of the stun that counts.

Freedom of belief does not mean freedom to cause cruel and brutal pain. When I care for animals, I have the most stringent set of rules to abide by. I am regulated on how I house them, feed them and transport them. There are inspections, paperwork and codes of practice, all to make sure they are treated with dignity.

Iqbal Mohamed: Will the hon. Member give way?

Rupert Lowe: I am going to finish.

A halal abattoir can brutally butcher an animal alive, and all is fine. Where is the fairness in that? Where is the humanity in that?

This is not a fringe issue. In 2024, an estimated 214.6 million animals were slaughtered for halal meat: 27 million entirely non-stunned and the remainder with some form of weak and ineffectual attempt to ease the animal's pain, often just causing an epileptic fit. It is state-endorsed butchery. We talk so much in this place about being a nation of animal lovers. It is time to prove it. Let us ban non-stun slaughter, along with any fig leaf of reduced-stun slaughter, which simply accentuates the suffering.

5.8 pm

David Pinto-Duschinsky (Hendon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I thank hon. Members for engaging in the debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) on the way he has led it. I also thank Mr Osborne for instigating the petition. The debate allows us to directly address some of the myths that pervade the conversation and speak honestly about the implications that it has for our Jewish and Muslim communities.

Let us start with the myths. Everyone here today believes in improving animal welfare. We have heard that time and again. I want to acknowledge the really strong and right feelings of all those who signed the petition. We are right to be proud of our reputation as a nation of animal lovers. Proponents of moves to ban what they call non-stun slaughter argue that stunning is more humane. Their advocacy conjures up pictures of animals gently and humanely put to sleep, shielded from suffering. I am afraid to say that reality does not always conform to that comforting image. As we have heard, modern industrial

[David Pinto-Duschinsky]

methods of stunning often involve significant distress and suffering. Animals are suffocated and slowly asphyxiated by carbon dioxide gas, electrocuted by having metal tongs placed around their heads, or maybe even placed upside down and dipped in baths of electrified water. As we have heard, captive bolts are also used.

These processes are used not to minimise pain, but to maximise economic efficiency. They still entail significant suffering, and it is not clear at all that they involve less suffering than traditional forms of ritual slaughter used in the Muslim and Jewish communities. For instance, evidence suggests that animals undergoing kosher or halal slaughter often rapidly lose consciousness. A recent peer-reviewed report in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* suggests that, in the case of kosher slaughter, consciousness is lost within 10 seconds.

Both Jewish and Muslim traditions emphasise the compassionate and humane treatment of animals. A focus on using factory methods of meat production will not reduce the suffering of individual animals, and it will not reduce the suffering of the animals we consume overall. Kosher slaughter accounts for 0.5%—just one in 200—of all animals slaughtered in the UK, and so-called non-stun halal slaughter accounts for merely 2.6%, so 97% of animals are unaffected. If we are serious about improving animal welfare, we should focus on how the 97% are treated throughout their lives, and not how the 3% meet their end. Banning or severely curtailing traditional slaughter will not help animal welfare, but it will hugely impact Jewish and Muslim communities.

That brings us to the implications for those communities, and here I need to declare an interest of sorts. Just as colleagues have declared that they keep halal, I should say that I am Jewish and I only eat kosher meat. I am proud to represent large Jewish and Muslim populations in my Hendon community. I say to the proponents of a ban that keeping the rules of kashrut or halal is not some minor technical issue for observant Jews and Muslims; it is at the core of their—our—religious practice.

To be an observant Jew is to keep kosher and to be an observant Muslim is to honour halal and avoid that which is haram. Banning or restricting halal or kosher meat would strike at the core of religious freedom for Jews and Muslims. It is an affront to the principles of religious liberty upon which this country is so proudly built. It would essentially deny Jews and Muslims the right to practise their religion in our country in the way that they see fit.

I say respectfully that, as we have heard today, proponents of a ban have no answer to that argument. They cannot tell us what they expect Jews and Muslims who wish to be observant to do. They need to be honest about what a ban really means for their Jewish and Muslim friends, colleagues and neighbours.

Some proponents have suggested not banning kosher and halal slaughter, but labelling all kosher and halal meat as non-stun. I say to them that, at a time when antisemitism has reached record levels and Islamophobia has risen dramatically, labelling meat prepared for the Jewish and Muslim communities as inherently cruel not only is inaccurate, but will feed the fires of prejudice.

Of course, for some people in today's debate, that is unfortunately the whole point, and this is where we need to come to some honesty. The vast majority of people engaged in the debate do so in good faith, but a very small number are not interested in animal rights, compassion in farming or food standards; they are interested only in division. In France and other countries, the far right has used this issue to stir up hatred against minorities. We must not allow it to be used as a weapon to sow the seeds of division between our communities here. We must not allow those who seek to undermine the quintessentially British value of tolerance to do so. The British answer is to maximise animal rights while protecting religious freedom. Banning this form of slaughter is fundamentally un-British.

Animal welfare is critical—I endorse all moves to enhance it—but so is religious freedom. Banning kosher and halal slaughter will not improve welfare. There are other measures that will achieve that far more effectively, and they should be taken. However, imposing a ban would curtail the fundamental religious freedoms of my Jewish and Muslim constituents in Hendon, and I fear that it may feed a rising tide of prejudice. I urge everyone who cares for our communities, and for animal rights, to join me in rejecting the calls for this divisive ban.

5.15 pm

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): It is a real honour to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd. Let me take this opportunity to thank Mr Osborne for bringing this petition to the House, allowing us to debate it in the respectful manner that it has been. I also thank the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) for the compassionate manner in which he set out the petition. I hope to follow suit.

As has been articulated, we are a nation of animal lovers. In the words of Immanuel Kant:

“We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.”

But to truly protect animals, we must look at their entire lives, not just their final moments. Many animals endure terrible suffering in the food system from the farm to the fork: chickens in battery cages, pigs exposed to CO₂ and cattle transported for hours in cramped conditions. Yet debates such as this often focus narrowly on the method of death, and occasionally even more narrowly on religious slaughter.

Let us look at the facts. Scientific studies, including those from the European Food Safety Authority and Massey University in New Zealand, suggest that methods such as kosher and non-stun halal slaughter may cause more pain than pre-stunning. But even scientists concede that pain can only be inferred, not definitively measured, through behaviour and EEG data. Meanwhile, pre-stunning methods are far from perfect—everyone would agree with that. As has been mentioned, in the commonly used penetrative captive bolt method, a 7 cm to 11 cm bolt is fired into the animal's brain. Yet the EFSA found that 4% of cattle are not rendered unconscious after the first attempt of that bolt of electricity. The non-penetrative method, where the bolt strikes but does not penetrate the skull, has a failure rate of up to 30% of animals, causing skull fractures and distress. Electrical stunning, often used in poultry, involves passing a high voltage current through the brain, but if done incorrectly, the animal remains fully conscious.

Let us be honest: no method is entirely pain-free. The idea that one is humane and the other is completely barbaric does not hold up to scrutiny. While we are on the subject of fairness, we must talk about human rights, as has been mentioned by hon. Members. Article 9 of the Human Rights Act 1998 protects freedom of thought, freedom of belief and freedom of religion, including the right to eat in accordance with those beliefs. UK laws reflect that. Religious slaughter is legal as long as it is regulated by licensed slaughterhouses and under the oversight of the Food Standards Agency.

Furthermore, as has been mentioned, 88% of halal meat in the UK is already pre-stunned. In fact, just 2.5% of the 1 billion animals that are slaughtered annually are processed using non-stun halal methods. I may not be able to speak about the Jewish communities, but I am of the firm conviction that many Muslim communities support clear, accurate labelling. Those who do not wish to eat religiously slaughtered meat have the freedom to choose. This is not about hiding anything but about respect and choice for all.

Why does this issue keep returning to the political spotlight? Frankly, we must ask if it is being used as a dog whistle—I exclude the people who may have brought this petition today—by stirring suspicion and division under the guise of concerns for animals. When MPs table 12 questions about halal, only one about kosher and absolutely none about CO₂ gassing of pigs or factory farming, that does send a message—either consciously or not—that this may be about faith, not welfare.

If we are genuinely committed to animal welfare, let us raise standards across the board for how animals are raised, transported and treated, and not just how they die. Let us tackle intensive factory farming and support improved enforcement, CCTV in slaughterhouses and transparency in all meat production, including for the food we import such as foie gras, which is the diseased liver of force-fed ducks and geese—how inhumane is that? Let us build a system rooted in science, compassion and dignity for all animals and for the people of this country.

5.20 pm

Josh Newbury (Cannock Chase) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd. I welcome the opportunity to debate this subject, so I, too, thank the petition author, Mr Osborne, and the signatories for enabling us to do that.

I declare that I am personally against non-stun slaughter. I am not religious, and I would never knowingly buy products from animals that had not been stunned before slaughter. Some 301 of my constituents signed this petition to ban the non-stun slaughter of animals. That is the second highest number of signatories from any constituency across the UK, so it is clear that people in Cannock Chase feel very strongly about this topic. I appreciate that many of my constituents will have signed the petition to voice their concerns about animal welfare—a topic that I am always keen to discuss. I hope that across the House, we can balance that valid question with respect for those for whom non-stun slaughter is part of religious observance.

I affirm that animal welfare is, and must remain, a core concern in the UK. We are rightly proud of our high standards, and it is incumbent on all of us to ensure that our animals are treated with dignity and

suffer as little as possible in life and death. Just last week, I was in this room for a debate on animal welfare in farming, discussing low-welfare farming practices, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Dewsbury and Batley (Iqbal Mohamed), who is no longer in his place. I am glad to be in another debate with the Minister so soon.

Although the religious aspect of slaughter methods might make headlines, I have brought my passion for animal welfare to this House long before today, and I will continue to do so long after this debate is over. As representatives of the British people, parliamentarians must recognise that both the Jewish and Muslim faiths have deeply rooted religious practices around slaughter—kosher and halal—which are grounded in principles of respect, discipline and faithfulness to scripture.

In preparation for the debate, I spoke at length with a friend of mine who is a practising Muslim. He told me that in the Koran, cruelty towards animals is considered to be a sin. There are also several rules around Islamic slaughter, as other hon. Members have said. Animals must be well treated before being killed and they must not see other animals being killed. The knife must not be sharpened in the animal's presence, and the blade must be free of blemishes so that it will not tear the wound.

The demonstration of life protocol is an industry-led initiative that provides assurance to Muslim communities that stunning is compatible with halal slaughter requirements while protecting the welfare of the animals involved. Because of that, already a significant proportion of halal meat comes from animals that were stunned before slaughter, as has been said. Last year, that was 88% of halal meat. There is widespread agreement in the Muslim community in Britain that stunning is compatible with halal slaughter principles as set out in the Koran. As has been pointed out, stunning is deemed incompatible with Jewish requirements, so exemptions for non-stun slaughter are particularly used for the production of kosher meat.

This debate is an opportunity for us to reflect on whether, as raised by the Chair of the Petitions Committee, the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), the law should evolve once again. The British Veterinary Association shared a briefing note with Members about changing labelling requirements so that meat from animals that have not been stunned prior to death is clearly labelled, so that consumers can make informed choices. As the Minister knows, I am keenly interested in improving labelling for consumers, particularly welfare labelling, which would give a far broader perspective on welfare than simply “stun” or “non-stun”. I appreciate that we could end up crowding food packets with way too much information, but as part of the Department's ongoing review of food labelling, I ask the Minister to consider the BVA's proposals; perhaps he could comment on that.

The BVA also shared ideas on introducing a non-stun permit system to ensure that the number of animals slaughtered without prior stunning does not exceed demand. I imagine that others across the House will focus on those suggestions, so in the interests of timekeeping I will not dive any further into them, but I want to place them on the record as I feel that they are important for us to consider.

[Josh Newbury]

Through the National Farmers Union food and farming fellowship scheme, I recently had the opportunity to visit a beef farm owned by ABP Food Group in my home county of Staffordshire. We met abattoir managers who talked to us about how the industry is continuing to innovate and push for higher welfare standards during slaughter. For example, they are introducing new forms of lighting, which mimic the way that light falls in barns, to ensure that animals are as relaxed as possible. Although there are lingering examples of outdated and bad practices, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South and Walkden (Yasmin Qureshi) rightly highlighted, I hope that innovations in modern abattoirs will ensure that they are consigned to history.

We also discussed non-stun slaughter at Bromstead farm. Contrary to what people might think, there are ways to minimise the suffering of animals being slaughtered without prior stunning. Many of the stunning methods that have been described in this debate are instantaneous, so I do not believe that it is correct to say that they always cause excruciating pain to animals.

Scientific evidence continues to develop, and discussions in faith communities about how animal welfare can be improved are growing. Examples of improvements include shortening transport times or increasing transparency in abattoirs. That brings me to the importance of the role of small and local abattoirs. They must be part of this conversation. Small abattoirs offer something that larger industrial systems often cannot: shorter journey times for animals, more human handling and the possibility for community oversight.

The long-term plight of abattoirs is not spoken about in this House frequently. In the 1970s, around 2,500 abattoirs were operating in the UK, but today that number has fallen to just 200. That collapse in capacity has left many farmers with no choice but to send their animals long distances for slaughter, which increases the animals' stress and undermines efforts to maintain short, local supply chains from farm to fork. I know that is a concern for some religious communities.

The Food Standards Agency has been consulting on increasing fees and removing a discount scheme on the inspections. Concern has grown in the industry about the future of the current discount, which represents up to 90% of charges for some abattoirs, according to the Association of Independent Meat Suppliers, which states that 45% of small and medium-sized abattoirs could close without this discount. Our commitment to farming and our record £5 billion investment into the agricultural sector needs to support small local abattoirs. They are essential not just for animal welfare but for rural economies, food security and diversity in our food system.

If we are serious about welfare and about balancing our values and standards with religious traditions, we should support a system that allows more ethical, more local and more transparent slaughter. That includes investing in small abattoirs, supporting training for specialist staff, and encouraging respectful dialogue between religious and non-religious groups, vets, farmers and regulators. Our task is to hold all those principles together with seriousness and sensitivity.

5.27 pm

Ayoub Khan (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I start by thanking the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) for presenting this topic for debate following the online petition. I extend my gratitude to all Members, who have made efforts to treat this issue with the sensitivity that it demands.

However, unfortunately, while there are people looking to promote animal welfare issues, such as Mr Osborne, who I am confident is sincere in his efforts, there are also those looking to make use of this debate to stoke hatred along cultural divides. Although the petition makes no reference to halal or kosher slaughter, it has been welcomed in right-wing echo chambers as an opportunity to marginalise and discriminate against the Muslim and Jewish communities. This selective false outrage is not about ethics; it is a concerted effort to provoke and to marginalise, and to turn the wider population against religious communities by painting their practices as cruel, foreign and incompatible with modern life.

Given there are well-meaning concerns at hand, let us move beyond motive and look at practicalities. We must tread carefully when it comes to imposing a blanket ban on non-stunned meat, as we are looking at a sector that brings £2 billion of trade to the UK economy every year. The demand for non-stunned halal and kosher meat will not cease, because it is a matter of profound, unwavering religious conviction for many. Eliminating the practice outright would not just infringe religious freedom, but British farmers—the very people many of the campaigners claim to support—whose enterprises supply the demand for non-stun slaughter would be the first to suffer. In the blink of an eye, they would lose vital domestic and export markets to overseas competitors as Muslims and Jews are forced to turn to imports. It may be that the price of meat would fall for consumers because the costs of raw energy are so high in this country.

What is more, many of the abattoirs that would ship such products to Britain's shores do not observe animal welfare regulations as stringently as we do in the United Kingdom. Although some may think they are standing up for transparency or animal welfare, they are really outsourcing the practice abroad, where British regulation and welfare standards no longer apply, all the while harming local farmers and losing millions of pounds in tax revenue. It is not just short-sighted but self-defeating, and it harms entire religious communities.

Let me be absolutely clear. If we want a serious and respectful conversation about animal welfare, let us have one. If we want to debate how best to balance religious freedom and national values, let us do that too. But those discussions must be fair, rooted in evidence and, above all, consistent.

Naz Shah: Following on from my intervention on the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Rupert Lowe), I have looked at the issue of stunning. I have heard from a slaughterhouse that, particularly for lambs—chickens are slightly different—the same method is used, with the same level of electricity, for stunned meat and halal. Even with chickens, the difference is actually very slight. The same legislative practice applies to the majority of chickens that are stunned. Does the hon. Member for Birmingham Perry Barr (Ayoub Khan) share my concern

that we are focusing on a minute number here? Ultimately, it is very disheartening that people say they are absolutely mortified to see people are eating halal meat; they would be even more mortified if they knew the real issues.

Ayoub Khan: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. Scientifically, one of the biggest challenges in modern times is to determine the level of pain. That will always be an enormous challenge; it just cannot be done. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that one method may be slightly less painful than the other, but it will never be factual. When we debate the different methods, we need real understanding, not dog whistles. Hon. Members have talked about the very small percentage of non-stunned meat, but we should be focusing on the wider cruelty, which simply goes unheard.

Britain has a long and storied history of tolerance for religious slaughter practices. Successive Governments have upheld that principle, and I encourage Members to honour it. Every individual has an inalienable right to freely practise their religion without fear of persecution or discrimination, or of the state setting conditions for them. Our society is made richer, more vibrant and more humane when we treat each other with dignity—even when we disagree. That dignity begins when we recognise when an argument is not about what it pretends to be about.

Let me be clear: abuse of the rules that perpetrates cruelty and excessive pain is reprehensible, and abattoirs that do not comply with welfare requirements should be disciplined, but the obligation to reduce animal suffering has its limits. Let us protect our faith communities, stand against veiled bigotry, and stand unapologetically with all affected communities.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman says that this is a long-standing practice for faith communities in the UK. I looked back, and there is UK legislation on this issue from the 1920s and 1930s that supports what he said. It looks like this Government have no intention of changing that. However, I have many constituents who would prefer not to eat animals that have not been stunned, because they are concerned about the pain that those animals may suffer. Would the hon. Gentleman support changes to legislation so that labels are placed on the food so that people know whether an animal has been stunned before slaughter and can make their own choices?

Ayoub Khan: I thank the hon. Member for her intervention. I was about to conclude my speech, but I wholeheartedly agree. I believe that labelling is paramount, and that people should have the choice to decide what meat to consume based on the methods used in the animal's final moments.

5.35 pm

Gurinder Singh Josan (Smethwick) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I want to speak about some of the aspects already referred to, but I just wanted to say that I am slightly conflicted on this, as I speak as a vegetarian. I am a vegetarian because of my religious beliefs: as a practising, Amritdhari, initiated Sikh, I do not eat any meat, egg, fish or any product that derives from them. It is a bit conflicting, as the prevention of cruelty to any being is a key belief that I hold. My own personal belief is that God is

omnipresent and within every being, and, therefore, to hurt any being is to hurt God, and that simply will not do. The other conflict that I have in my mind is that I struggle with the concept of the compassion involved in breeding and rearing animals, but for the sole purpose of killing and eating them. Nevertheless, the vast majority of my constituents do eat meat, and I fully support their right to do so. We also have a thriving agricultural farming industry in this country. We export meat to other countries and we have had trade deals recently that will further improve those opportunities, and others have set out why they are so important.

Essentially, where I think the issue sits concerns our great British values. British people have strong beliefs about the humane treatment of animals. We see that in our postbags and when we go around our constituencies; we see it all the time. British people also have strong beliefs about freedom of choice and respect for other religions. We are an incredibly diverse country and although we have our challenges, I, as a practising Sikh, strongly believe we have probably the best model of integration in the world, and that that is something we should be proud of.

I just wanted to touch on the Sikh aspect of this, partly because some of my constituents have asked me to raise it. I have said where I sit on this, but the Sikhs have the Sikh Rehat Maryada, the code of conduct put together by the central Sikh authorities based at the Golden Temple. That states that eating ritually slaughtered meat is not allowed—that is something that we believe—and that meat, when it is eaten, should be from an animal slaughtered by a single strike that instantly beheads the animal. That is thought to be quick, humane, and the most compassionate way. That process is called jhatka, and I recently met representatives of the Jhatka Council, who would like to explore with the Government how that method of slaughter, perhaps using guillotines, could be accommodated in abattoirs in the UK. If people were struggling with the concept of religions getting involved in meat, there is another thing to struggle with.

Laws are seldom perfect and without fault. Clearly, this area is one where our thinking, science and understanding has evolved over time, and will continue to do so. We may get better at identifying pain thresholds and the methods to use for stunning, but I suspect that we will never know for sure exactly where they sit.

At our very best, we are a country that not only tolerates but respects differences, including religious differences. Statistics show that well over 80% of the meat that is butchered in the UK is stunned prior to slaughter, so we are talking about a minority of the animals slaughtered. It seems to me wholly un-British, and entirely out of keeping with our role in this place, to be talking about things that would adversely affect the religious practices of any of our citizens, particularly when the supposed problem is relatively small. Although it is important to debate such issues, the current situation, in which the vast majority of animals are pre-stunned and we can accommodate the religious requirements of fellow citizens, is an excellent, British solution.

5.40 pm

Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I congratulate the petitioners on bringing this important subject to Parliament.

[Dr Danny Chambers]

I start by making something absolutely clear: the Liberal Democrats, and I personally, fully respect the right to freedom of religious belief and expression, and this debate must not be used as a smokescreen for antisemitism or Islamophobia. Too often, discussions about religious slaughter are hijacked by those with an agenda that has nothing to do with animal welfare. That is unacceptable. This debate must be grounded in science, evidence and animal welfare, not in prejudice, and our focus should be on improving welfare standards through respectful dialogue and evidence-based policy, not fuelling division or targeting communities.

To declare my very obvious conflict of interest, I am a veterinary surgeon. As a veterinary student, I had to spend a lot of time in abattoirs learning about the process and about public health. As a vet, I have had to issue emergency slaughter certificates for farms. I was on the policy committee of the British Veterinary Association, and we looked at farm assured schemes and welfare standards at different stages of animals' lives on farms. As a veterinary profession, we have always been clear in talking purely about stunned and not stunned, and not bringing in kosher, halal or other types of religious slaughter, because doing so would muddy the waters and play into the hands of people who are trying to hijack the animal welfare agenda with antisemitism and Islamophobia.

The science is clear: the evidence shows that stunning animals before slaughter is the most humane method available. Stunning renders animals unconscious and insensible to pain prior to slaughter, and slaughter without stunning causes avoidable pain and distress. That is why, from a veterinary and animal welfare perspective, we want to see a reduction in the amount of non-stunned slaughter and a great uptake of stunning techniques that are compatible with religious practices. It is encouraging that almost 90% of halal meat in the UK is already pre-stunned. That is a clear example that animal welfare and religious observance can go hand in hand.

Dr Caroline Johnson: When doing research for this debate, I found that the RSPCA states that 65% of all halal meat is pre-stunned; the rest of it, presumably, is not. Can the hon. Gentleman explain the difference, and why some meat would be classified as halal when it has been stunned and some would not?

Dr Chambers: If the RSPCA has different figures, I would ask it to explain where its figures come from. Not all non-stunned meat is halal. Some of it is shechita slaughter, and the hind quarters are not considered kosher, so they would go into the normal food chain. That could be why there are some discrepancies, but I am not familiar with how the RSPCA generated its figures, so I would take it up with the RSPCA.

I acknowledge that, as many hon. Members have rightly pointed out, there are failures in stun slaughter as well. That is sometimes due to bad practices and inadequate training in abattoirs, and is one reason why I was pleased to be part of the successful campaign to put CCTV in all abattoirs. We should ensure that legal standards are upheld, that anyone breaking those standards is held to account, and that adequate training is given.

I share the concerns about slaughter in which pigs are stunned with CO₂. I eat pork, but I am aware that such slaughter is a welfare concern in the veterinary world. We are looking at how we can improve that experience for pigs.

Iqbal Mohamed: On CCTV and enforcement of existing humane slaughter processes, does the hon. Member agree that the Government must ensure that there are adequate resources for inspectors' visits and audits of abattoirs so that the right level of treatment of animals is maintained?

Dr Chambers: I totally agree. The resourcing of trading standards and the veterinary profession is a hugely important issue. We know that we are short of vets working in public health and farm animal medicine.

As many hon. Members have pointed out, the British Veterinary Association has made several sensible recommendations, including that the UK Government should introduce

"a non-stun permit system to ensure that the number of animals slaughtered without prior stunning does not exceed the relevant demand of the UK's religious communities"

and that they should

"stop the export of meat from animals that have not been stunned before slaughter."

The British Veterinary Association and the National Farmers Union also support greater uptake of the demonstration of life protocol for sheep and goats. Although that protocol is not perfect, it can help improve welfare outcomes, even in non-stun contexts. I urge all abattoirs to adopt it.

The Liberal Democrats believe that consumers deserve full transparency. That is why we back clear and honest labelling that includes information on whether the animal was stunned before slaughter, the conditions in which it was reared and the environmental impact of the product. Our goal is simple: to give people the information that they need to make informed choices—not to stigmatise any group, but to raise welfare standards across the board. Religious consumers who wanted halal meat, for example, would be able to see whether it came from stunned or non-stunned animals. That matters deeply to many of the individuals in those communities with whom I have spoken.

There have been many calls for a way to know whether meat is stunned or non-stunned, and for freedom of choice. I point out that British consumers already have the freedom of choice to ensure that they eat only meat that has been stunned. All farm assurance schemes, including Red Tractor, Soil Association, and RSPCA Assured, have minimum welfare standards throughout the animal's life, and require stunning before slaughter. Someone like me, who wants to ensure that they eat only animals that have been stunned, can do that with current farm assurance label systems.

The hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury) made a very important point about the need for more local abattoirs, to reduce transport time and stress, and to ensure that more meat is produced and sold within local communities. I commend him for that point.

Let us move forward with a science-based, respectful approach that works in partnership with, not against, religious communities; that improves welfare without

fuelling division; and that ensures the UK remains a world leader in compassion and evidence-based policy, while allowing for expression of religious freedom.

5.49 pm

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): It is good to see you in your place, Mr Dowd, and it is a privilege to speak in this debate on a petition that has attracted over 109,000 signatures from members of the public across the country.

At the start of my comments, let me acknowledge the importance of this issue, which touches on two fundamental principles: commitment to animal welfare on the one hand, and respect for religious freedoms on the other. Those values should not be placed in opposition one to the other, but reconciled through careful evidence-based policy. The petition argues that non-stun slaughter is incompatible with modern animal welfare standards and urges the Government to ban the practice, as has already happened in some other European nations. It is worth remarking that the European Court of Human Rights has already ruled that such a ban does not violate the European convention on human rights. An hon. Member—I cannot remember which one—made reference to article 9 on freedom of religion, and the court has already found that that can be balanced against legitimate animal welfare concerns.

So there are conflicting positions. We have animal welfare, a cause close to the hearts of many Britons and many of our constituents—we can see that by the large number of signatures to this petition; I sometimes think my constituents prefer their animals to their neighbours. Many would prefer all animals to be stunned before slaughter. The RSPCA, the British Veterinary Association and Compassion in World Farming all argue that slaughter without prior stunning causes unnecessary pain and distress. Their research shows—there has been some conflict between the numbers being bandied around, but the general sense of the numbers has been consistent throughout the debate—that consciousness is lost for sheep within five to seven seconds and for adult cattle within 22 to 40 seconds, although some larger numbers were referenced in other people's contributions. During that period we have to accept that animals will endure pain and suffering. For that reason, non-stunned killing has been banned for many years in this country, with the religious practice exception going back at least until 1933.

As the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) said in her intervention, we need to recognise that when we eat meat an animal always dies. But I accept the argument from the hon. Member for Winchester (Dr Chambers), with his expertise as a veterinary surgeon. He said—I have no reason to doubt him—that the science is clear. Contrary to some of the arguments put forward by hon. Members during the course of this debate, welfare is improved by stunning. So where do we go from here?

I very much liked the contribution of the hon. Member for Hendon (David Pinto-Duschinsky), who, if I wrote this down correctly, said that there is a British answer: to maximise animal rights while defending religious freedoms. Equally venerable has been our determination as a society to defend religious freedoms. It goes back, as I mentioned a moment ago, as far as the Slaughter of Animals Act 1933, which contains an exemption for

stunning for religious slaughter for Jews and Muslims. That has been repeated more recently in the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015. Religious slaughter in the UK is permitted under exemptions laid out in those regulations.

That does not mean that we cannot make significant improvements to the current position. One issue raised was that of oversupply: the killing of more animals without stunning than are required for religious observance in this country. That might be because they are being exported. That begs the question: why do we need a religious exemption to fund or support an export market rather than religious observance in this country? Another issue could simply be over-production. There is a wild variety of estimates as to how much oversupply there is in this country; the figures that I have seen vary between 32% over-production and 278% over-production. That could mean that as many as 99 million animals are being slaughtered annually without stunning, despite not being required for religious observance—at least, not in the UK.

Such a huge variation suggests that better data, at the very least, is required. What steps is the Minister intending to take to obtain reliable data on the end use of non-stunned meat? The second significant area where improvements can be made is in the area of labelling. Many consumers are unaware of whether the meat they purchase comes from stunned or non-stunned animals, and that is not the same as saying the meat is halal or kosher. We have heard repeatedly that 88% of all halal-killed animals are pre-stunned. Nevertheless, there are currently no legal requirements to label meat by method of slaughter. That creates a genuine lack of consumer choice—especially for those who, for ethical or welfare reasons, prefer to avoid non-stun meat, or conversely, those who wish to consume meat that has been religiously slaughtered.

Dr Johnson: The Conservative Government had a consultation on food labelling, which was completed last May. The current Government said they would respond, but they have now had more than a year to do so. Does my hon. Friend agree that they need to get on with it and ensure they respond as quickly as possible?

Jerome Mayhew: My hon. Friend has clearly been looking over my shoulder, because I was about to say that the last Government did undertake a consultation; it is very noticeable that there has been no official response from the Government. My next question to the Minister, who I know is keen to provide us with full answers, is this: when will we receive an official response to that previous consultation? What is the current Government's position on method of production labelling?

It must be right that increasing transparency through clearer labelling could empower consumers to make informed choices. Improved engagement with religious certification bodies could help to promote the wider use of pre-stunned methods, particularly for halal meat: some stunning methods—where the animal is capable of revival, for example—have been deemed compatible with religious standards. I hope that this afternoon's debate leads to renewed engagement between the Government, communities, scientists, welfare organisations and religious groups, so that we find an accommodation, rather than a conflict, that both respects faiths and honours our shared responsibility for the welfare of animals.

5.57 pm

The Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs (Daniel Zeichner): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Dowd. Can I join others in thanking both the Petitions Committee and the more than 100,000 people who signed the petition, for giving us the opportunity to discuss this very important subject? I also commend the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) for opening the debate on this sensitive topic so very thoughtfully, which is very characteristic of his approach.

It is clear from the petition and from today's discussion that both Parliament and the wider country care dearly for our farm animals and their welfare. I was in this very Chamber at this very Dispatch Box last Tuesday, discussing farm animal welfare standards. I will be returning this time next week to debate another e-petition on cages and crates. I have no doubt that farm animal welfare is an issue the public care deeply about.

I was struck by many of the contributions from hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton South and Walkden (Yasmin Qureshi), for Hendon (David Pinto-Duschinsky) and others, who made a series of wider points about animal welfare. I hope we can continue that discussion as we make progress through this Parliament on improving animal welfare in general.

The topic of non-stun slaughter is clearly important, but, as we have heard from passionate contributions, it is also a sensitive one that understandably evokes deep convictions on both sides of the debate. I was struck by the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Smethwick (Gurinder Singh Josan), which I thought was both thoughtful and well-grounded.

Let me be clear from the outset: it is the Government's preference that all animals should be stunned before slaughter. However, the Government respect the right of Jews and Muslims to eat meat prepared in accordance with their beliefs. We therefore intend to continue to allow the religious slaughter of animals for consumption by Muslims and Jews. We believe that is an important religious freedom, as we have heard; many have spoken passionately about that point.

There is a long history of upholding this freedom, set down in legislation since the Slaughter of Animals Act 1933, which contained an exemption from stunning for religious slaughter by Jews and Muslims. Since then, animal welfare legislation concerning all slaughter methods has continued to develop, with new requirements introduced through EU legislation in 2013 that have now been assimilated into UK law. When animals are slaughtered either by the Jewish method or the Muslim method without prior stunning, there are additional animal welfare rules that apply to ensure that animals are spared avoidable pain, suffering or distress during the slaughter process.

One important requirement stemming from European legislation is for all ruminants that are to be slaughtered in accordance with religious rites to be individually and mechanically restrained. This has resulted in improvements to sheep handling, because sheep are no longer lifted on to tables to be slaughtered. New monitoring procedures have also been introduced to check for unconsciousness and death among all species.

Our slaughter legislation also provides greater protections than those contained in the EU regulation, which sets a baseline for standards in Europe. For instance, we prohibit the inversion of cattle for religious slaughter, which the EU regulation does not prohibit and some EU member states still allow. This ban followed a 1985 report of the Farm Animal Welfare Council, which recommended that cattle inversion should be banned.

Our legislation also specifically requires that any animal slaughtered without prior stunning must not be further processed before a minimum length of time after their cut has passed—90 seconds in the case of meat chickens. This adds an extra safeguard to ensure that animals are not dressed while still conscious.

Cattle present particular animal welfare issues due to the time that it takes for them to become unconscious, so additional national rules also specify that adult cattle have to be restrained in a restraining pen that has been approved by an official veterinarian from the Food Standards Agency. Also, following the neck cut, cattle must not be moved until they are unconscious and at least 30 seconds have elapsed.

The Government pay careful attention to trends in slaughter methods. With the Welsh Government, we jointly commission the FSA to undertake a biennial survey of slaughter methods. This survey is carried out over the course of a week and deliberately avoids any major religious festivals. The most recent iteration was carried out in February 2024 and was published last November. It showed that the majority of animals are stunned before slaughter: 97% of poultry, and 86% of animals that produce red meat. The number of poultry and cattle that are not stunned before slaughter actually decreased between 2011 and 2024.

However, I recognise that the rate of non-stun sheep slaughter has effectively doubled over the same period and is currently at 29% of all sheep killed in England and Wales; to some extent, this answers the questions put by the hon. Member for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew). The data shows that this change is being driven by increases in non-stun halal. However, it is unclear whether those increases are being driven by exports or by the changing requirements of Britain's Muslim communities. The survey also shows that a considerable proportion of halal meat comes from animals that are stunned before slaughter. For example, in 2024 88% of halal meat chickens in England and Wales were stunned prior to slaughter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury) made a very thoughtful speech, in which he talked about the demonstration of life protocol. This is an industry-led initiative. It provides assurance for Muslim consumers that stunning sheep and goats is compatible with halal slaughter requirements while protecting the welfare of the animals involved, and it also supports opportunities for trade. The FSA recently removed its associated fees to promote uptake of this protocol, which the Government support.

I turn to labelling, which a number of Members raised. Concern has been voiced about meat from animals slaughtered without stunning being sold to consumers who do not wish their meat to come from animals that are killed in that way. Clearly, such sales are regrettable. Currently, there are no regulations that require the labelling of non-stunned slaughtered meat. Legally, however, where any information of this nature is provided, it must be accurate and must not be misleading to the consumer.

I think the point was made by a number of Members that it is also worth remembering that the major supermarkets currently have sourcing policies requiring that all their own-brand fresh meat comes from animals that have been stunned before slaughter. Alongside that, they operate limited concessions for halal or kosher food that will clearly be labelled as such. In addition, some farm assurance schemes, such as Red Tractor and RSPCA Assured, also require stunned slaughter, so consumers can look out for such labels. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (David Taylor) made an important point about the out-of-home sector, which is clearly more challenging.

Recently, considerable work has been done to consider the merits of method-of-production labelling. A public consultation on proposals to improve and extend current method-of-production labelling was undertaken last year by the previous Government. The consultation sought views on options for the production standards behind the label, including the period of life that should be covered by the standards. My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase also spoke about the BVA proposals, and the potential for a plethora of information on labels.

In the debate on Tuesday last week, the interest in animal welfare labelling was very clear. We recognise that this is an important matter, and are looking closely at all the responses to that consultation before we decide on the next steps, but there will be a response to the consultation shortly. “Shortly” is quite interesting parliamentary language, but Members will not have to wait very long.

The effective monitoring and enforcement of our animal welfare regulations is key to ensuring that our high standards are maintained. Official veterinarians from the Food Standards Agency carry out that important work at approved slaughterhouses, and religious slaughter can take place only in an approved slaughterhouse. Enforcement action is taken when there are any breaches of animal welfare legislation, and that may involve suspension or revocation of a slaughterman’s licence, the imposition of an enforcement notice requiring that the non-compliance be remedied, or a formal investigation with a view to prosecution.

CCTV is an important tool to assist with monitoring and enforcement for all methods of slaughter, including non-stun slaughter. It provides assurance that it is done

in accordance with the regulations to protect animal welfare. All slaughterhouses in Great Britain are required to have CCTV recording in all areas in which live animals are present, and they must make the recordings available to the official veterinarian.

In conclusion, the debate today has been wide-ranging, underlining the complexities involved. I understand the welfare concerns of animal welfare and veterinary groups, as well as of many Members who have spoken today and urged the Government to reform the rules around non-stun slaughter. I can assure the House that I have listened carefully to all the points made. As hon. Members would expect, I will engage with religious communities and other stakeholders on these issues.

I reiterate that the Government will continue to respect the rights of Jews and Muslims to continue to eat meat prepared in accordance with their beliefs, but I am also proud that we have some of the highest standards of animal welfare in the world. This Government were elected on a mandate to introduce the most ambitious plans in a generation to improve animal welfare, and that is exactly what we will do. The Prime Minister announced last week that we will publish an animal welfare strategy later this year, and I look forward to being able to outline more detail in due course.

6.7 pm

Jamie Stone: I thank everyone who has spoken. People all over Britain who care about animals will be going online and watching this debate. The Muslim and Jewish communities will have been watching—we know that these debates have huge viewing figures. We have conducted this debate in a civilised fashion, and I think that will give people such as the petitioner and others the reassurance that when a petition comes here for debate, it will not just be put in a bag behind the Speaker’s Chair or put on a dusty shelf; it will be properly looked at. I hope I am not over-egging it when I say that that is quite good for British democracy.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 700557 relating to the non-stun slaughter of animals.

6.9 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 9 June 2025

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Contingencies Fund Advance: Independent Football Regulator

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): I would like to notify the House that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has obtained approval for an advance from the contingencies fund of £3,470,000. The independent football regulator is being set up in parallel to the passage of the Football Governance Bill to help ensure that the regulatory regime is delivered as quickly as possible once the IFR is established in law. We have identified the need for targeted spend on delivery activity prior to Royal Assent of the Bill.

Parliamentary approval for additional £1,920,000 capital and £1,550,000 resource for this new service has been sought in a main estimate for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £3,470,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the contingencies fund.

[HCWS688]

Grassroots Sport Facilities

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): Grassroots sport has the power to bring people together, creating a healthier nation and increasing opportunities for communities across the UK.

As part of the Government's plan for change, we are committed to supporting the growth of grassroots sport across the UK. We need to ensure that facilities are high quality, inclusive and provide opportunities for everyone to exercise in a safe environment. By investing in grassroots facilities, we will provide communities with social hubs and allow more people to get on to the pitch wherever they live.

We have today published updated lists of 1,650 projects funded by the multi-sport grassroots facilities programme across 2024-25. The programme delivers funding for communities across the UK through our delivery partners: the Football Foundation—a charity set up by the Government, the Football Association and the Premier League—in England, the Cymru Football Foundation in Wales, and the FAs in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Projects aim to support activity in deprived areas, with a substantial proportion needing to provide for sports other than football, and to increase provision for under-represented groups such as women and girls. A full list of the projects can be found here www.gov.uk/government/collections/multi-sport-grassroots-facilities-programme-projects-2021-to-2025 and I will deposit a copy of this list in the Libraries of both Houses.

With an additional £98 million of funding to be invested in 2025-26, and as we look forward to UEFA Euro 2028, which will be jointly hosted by the UK and Ireland, and develop our bid to host the FIFA Women's world cup in 2035, we will continue to put grassroots clubs and facilities at the front and centre of our ambition to get more people on to the pitch. Delivery partners are in the process of making decisions regarding 2025-26 funded projects, and lists will be further updated in due course.

[HCWS689]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Protecting Our Oceans

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Steve Reed): The Government are committed to protecting the ocean. Marine protected areas are pivotal to our ambitions to preserve and improve our seas. They are central to our international commitment to protect 30% of global seas by 2030. We have built a comprehensive network of 181 MPAs covering 40% of English waters. Now we are focusing on making sure they are properly protected.

MPAs are protected from the point of designation by the planning and marine licensing regimes that cover activities such as dredging for aggregates and construction of offshore wind farms. Some fishing methods, especially bottom trawling, can have a significant impact on our MPAs, and the Government are legally obliged to address this. Fishing is of course an important source of food, and is critical to our coastal communities. We want to support fishing, encourage it to become more sustainable, and ensure it does not damage protected species and habitats.

We use an evidence-led process to identify the specific measures needed to safeguard our MPAs. We have made good progress. Currently, 60% of English MPAs are protected by byelaws that limit the use of damaging fishing gear, but we need to do more.

The Marine Management Organisation is undertaking a programme to roll-out byelaws to protect all our offshore MPAs where needed. The first two stages of this programme have been completed, with byelaws covering 17 offshore MPAs. Today it is starting a consultation on the third stage, the largest by far.

The proposed byelaws are to protect coarse, sandy and muddy seabed habitats and the species that live on and in them. These include: ocean quahog—which can live up to 100 years old; fan mussel—one of Britain's largest and most threatened molluscs; and sea pens—part of the soft coral family, which can look like large feathers sticking up out of muddy seabeds. This is a substantial package of proposed measures. It covers a further 42 MPAs and includes proposals to stop bottom trawling over approximately 30,000 sq km, approximately 13% of English waters.

We appreciate that these potential measures would impact fishing fleets, both domestic and European. We encourage them to respond to the consultation, and everyone else who cares about supporting our coastal

communities and protecting our seas should also have their say. We recently announced a £360 million fishing and coastal growth fund, in part to help modernise Britain's fishing fleet.

[HCWS690]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

NHS Urgent and Emergency Care Plan 2025-2026

The Minister for Secondary Care (Karin Smyth): Today I am updating the House on the publication of our NHS urgent and emergency care plan for 2025-26. This plan sets out the key actions and milestones across 2025 and 2026 that will support the NHS across England to improve the timeliness and delivery of care to patients requiring urgent and emergency care.

The most recent winter clearly showed that, despite the hard work and compassion shown by NHS staff up and down the country, patients did not receive the standard of care we all expect.

Every day, more than 140,000 people access urgent and emergency care services across England. Since 2010-11, demand has almost doubled, with ambulance service usage rising by 61%.

A&E waiting time standards have not been met for over a decade, while the 18-minute target for category 2 ambulance calls has never been hit outside the pandemic. We know that something has to change.

This Government have committed to a 10-year health plan, which will lead the NHS to meet the challenge set out in the plan for change, here www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-change to build an NHS that is fit for the future.

But we know that we cannot stand still. That is why we asked the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England to work together to develop an urgent and emergency care plan for 2025-26.

This delivery plan focuses on improvement activity in line with the current round of NHS operational planning guidance. It is vital that we have clear, shared objectives, which is why we have instructed the NHS to focus as a whole system on those improvements that will have the biggest impact. We will make sure that this winter is significantly better than recent winters by setting ambitious but achievable targets and increasing transparency about progress.

In hospitals, the plan will ensure at least 78% of patients who attend an A&E department are seen within four hours—more than 800,000 people receiving more timely care than last year. To support care settings, the plan confirms that we will allocate almost £450 million of capital investment, including for same day emergency care and mental health crisis assessment centres, ensuring that patients who would otherwise be unnecessarily admitted to hospital can be assessed, diagnosed and treated on the same day and then discharged without an overnight stay.

We know that at least one in five people who attend A&E do not need urgent or emergency care, while an even larger number could be better cared for in the community. We will renew our focus on improving vaccine uptake, making it easier than ever to access

vaccination appointments closer to home. We will also improve vaccination rates among health staff to prevent them from getting flu—reducing the number of sick days and ensuring that staff are well and able to care for patients across the busy winter period.

We will continue to invest in data and digital tools to speed up and improve patient care, ensuring that paramedics across the country can access patient records on the move, enabling them to provide better care and avoid unnecessary admissions.

These measures mark a fundamental shift in our approach to urgent and emergency care—moving from fragmented efforts to genuine collaboration across the whole system—and mean better co-ordination between NHS trusts and primary care to identify patients who are most vulnerable during winter.

[HCWS686]

JUSTICE

Taking Control of Goods Procedure: Reforms

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Sarah Sackman): The Government are today announcing a balanced package of measures about the independent regulation of the enforcement sector and changes to the taking control of goods procedure. These measures aim to protect those facing enforcement action, enabling them to get debt support while ensuring that there is a fair system of enforcement so that public bodies and businesses can recover moneys owed to them.

Rights only exist if they can be enforced. That requires us to have an effective enforcement system—one that makes securing awards made by the courts straightforward and timely, while treating parties who owe money with dignity. A fair and stable enforcement system is one that can deliver better outcomes for all.

The private enforcement sector recovers a significant amount of debt each year, with a sizeable portion owed to local authorities and central Government, which is used to fund public services. There is, however, concern about the impact that some enforcement agencies are having on some vulnerable people in debt and those struggling to pay money owed. Many parties, including the Justice Committee and the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, have called for statutory independent regulation of the enforcement sector. The Civil Justice Council published a report in April 2025 which echoed that recommendation.

Although most enforcement agencies have already signed up to the Enforcement Conduct Board's voluntary accreditation scheme and are funding its oversight activity, the Government believe that it is necessary to take action so that all enforcement agents, High Court enforcement officers and agencies are regulated to the same standards, overseen by the same independent body. The Government will today open a consultation about how to do so.

As set out in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's regulation action plan, when regulation is designed well it can be an essential tool to promote growth and investment and protect the public. We will introduce

independent statutory regulation of the sector, in line with the objectives in the action plan and our work across Government to cut the administrative costs of regulation by 25% by the end of the Parliament. The consultation seeks views, among other things, on how to ensure that a regulator's statutory objectives are targeted and proportionate, and to consider how it will be held to account for its performance.

The consultation will run for a six-week period. The Government welcome responses from everybody with an interest in this area. The responses will inform legislation to be brought forward as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Alongside this, the Government have also published their response to a consultation that was held in 2023 about amending the Taking Control of Goods Regulations 2013 and intend to implement some interim reforms. These aim to increase the proportion of cases that settle at the earliest and cheapest stages of the enforcement process by, for example, extending the amount of notice that people must be given before an enforcement visit, giving them more time to access debt advice and/or set up a payment agreement.

We have also provided an update regarding the outcome of a 2023 review about the fees that the enforcement sector can recover from those facing enforcement, and plan to implement the following changes:

Uplifting the fixed fees that enforcement agents and High Court enforcement officers can recover from judgment debtors by 5%. This will be the first uplift to the fees since 2014. We consider it is necessary to do so to ensure that enforcement firms are adequately remunerated for the work they do in order to ensure the sustainability of the sector.

Uplifting by 24% the thresholds above which enforcement agents and High Court enforcement officers can recover a percentage fee. The taking control of goods regulations specify that debts over the prescribed thresholds, that reach the enforcement stage, will attract an additional percentage fee of 7.5% of the value of the debt that is above the threshold. Uplifting the value of the thresholds will, therefore, reduce the proportion of cases that will incur this additional percentage fee.

The Government intend to lay a statutory instrument in Parliament to implement the fee uplifts and interim reforms as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The Government recognise concerns around the impact that certain collection and enforcement processes—in particular, council tax—have on vulnerable people. That is why we have also committed to consulting on modernising the administration of the council tax system, including the processes for collecting and enforcing council tax. The consultation will be published later this year by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

[HCWS687]

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Online Safety: Super Complaints Mechanism

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Feryal Clark): I am repeating the following written ministerial statement made today in the other place by my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Future Digital Economy and Online Safety, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch.

Today, I am laying before Parliament the draft Online Safety Super-Complaints (Eligibility and Procedural Matters) Regulations 2025. This important statutory instrument establishes the eligibility criteria and procedural framework for the super-complaints mechanism under the Online Safety Act 2023 and marks an important step forward in fully implementing the Act.

The super-complaints mechanism is a crucial aspect of the Act's overall complaints handling, reporting and redress mechanisms. A well-functioning super-complaints regime will ensure a transparent and agile approach to online safety. It will perform a vital role in ensuring that eligible entities, such as civil society groups with expertise in online safety matters, can make complaints to Ofcom, the independent regulator for online safety. The regime will allow for complaints about features of regulated services or the conduct of providers, where they are, appear to be or present a material risk of causing significant harm to users or members of the public, significantly adversely affect their freedom of expression, or have other significant adverse impacts on users or members of the public.

This will ensure that Ofcom is aware of the issues users are facing, including issues that it might otherwise not have been made aware of. This process will also help Ofcom to focus priorities, target resources and recognise and eliminate systemic failings. It will also ensure that the voices of users, including vulnerable groups and children, are heard and can be acted upon, if necessary. Ofcom will be obliged to respond to super-complaints submitted by eligible entities within a specified timeframe. This instrument follows an eight-week consultation which ran from 16 November 2023 to 11 January 2024.

Eligibility criteria

The instrument I am laying before Parliament today sets out the criteria which an entity must meet in order to be considered eligible to submit a complaint:

The entity must be a body—such as a civil society group—which represents the interests of users of services regulated by the Act, or members of the public, or a particular group of users or members of the public.

The entity must be independent from the services regulated under the Act, although this does not prevent the entity receiving funding from these services or having representatives from these services involved in their governance, provided suitable mechanisms are in place to maintain independence.

The entity must demonstrate expertise in online safety matters, such as by routinely contributing as an expert to public discussions about online safety matters and media on the subject.

The entity can be relied upon to consider any guidance published by Ofcom.

The super-complaints regime is designed to be voluntary and to impose no significant burden on businesses, charities, or voluntary bodies. These regulations ensure that only eligible bodies, representing the interests of users or members of the public, can submit super-complaints about systemic online safety issues, thereby safeguarding the integrity and focus of the complaints process.

Admissibility

In addition to setting out eligibility criteria, this instrument also outlines the procedural steps required to submit an admissible complaint for consideration by Ofcom, as well as the requirements for how Ofcom must respond to such complaints.

Procedural requirements

Ofcom will determine the eligibility of an entity within 30 days, or 15 days if the entity was deemed eligible within the past five years and its circumstances have not changed.

Eligible entities will be required to ensure that evidence supporting the complaint is current, objective, and relevant. Where a complaint is submitted by an eligible entity, Ofcom is required to consider the complaint, including assessing the admissibility of the complaint itself, within a specified timeframe.

The whole super-complaints process must be typically completed within 120 days, or 105 days where an entity has retained eligibility status. Ofcom can stop the clock during the 90-day period in certain circumstances, or during the eligibility assessment period, such as if additional information is required and the complaint cannot be progressed without it. Entities may only submit one complaint every six months, though they can withdraw a complaint under consideration and submit a new one within six months if necessary. This will maximise the effectiveness of the regime and ensure that Ofcom is able to properly consider any complaints received. Ofcom will also have the power to reject complaints in specific circumstances, for example if the matter is already being considered by another court or regulator, or if a complaint merely repeats the substance of another complaint which has recently been considered.

Changes from consultation

A previous consultation ran from 16 November 2023 until 11 January 2024, and a separate policy response has been published. The responses we received were broadly in support of the proposals; however, we have made some notable changes based on feedback received

to simplify the process and expand eligibility criteria—I am grateful to stakeholders for taking the time to share their thoughts and expertise, which have enabled us to make positive changes to the eligibility criteria and procedural matters. A full summary of changes is set out in the policy response, and includes:

- Removing the statutory pre-notification period.

- Reducing the initial assessment period for determining eligibility from 30 days to 15 days for organisations previously deemed eligible.

- Placing restrictions on Ofcom's ability to pause the timelines for determining eligibility or considering the complaint.

- Expanding the eligibility criteria to include newer organisations that are experts in online safety matters, not just "experienced" ones that have a track record of publishing high-quality research and analysis, or collaborating with other organisations.

- Altering the restriction on submitting multiple complaints within a six-month period, allowing entities to ask Ofcom to consider a new complaint—complaint B—instead of their initial complaint, complaint A.

Ofcom's guidance

The regulations will commence on 31 December 2025. Ofcom will produce guidance, which it will consult on later in the year, to support organisations on the process of submitting a super-complaint.

Review and Monitoring

The impact of these regulations will be monitored as part of the broader review of the Act's regulatory framework. The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology will carry out a review between two and five years after the full implementation of part 3 of the Act, ensuring that the regulations remain effective and relevant.

[HCWS685]

Written Correction

Monday 9 June 2025

Other Correction

BRADLEY THOMAS

Business of the House

The following extract is from business questions on 5 June 2025.

Bradley Thomas:...A recent real-world study in Worcestershire demonstrated that signal is actually 1,000 times worse than operators claim it to be. Does the Leader

of the House agree that this is unacceptable and that my constituents deserve better? Will she support my efforts to secure a debate on the Floor of the House and a meeting with the Minister to discuss improvements?

[*Official Report*, 5 June 2025; Vol. 768, c. 470.]

Written correction submitted by the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Bradley Thomas):

Bradley Thomas:...A recent real-world study in Worcestershire demonstrated that signal is **up to** 1,000 times worse than operators claim it to be. Does the Leader of the House agree that this is unacceptable and that my constituents deserve better? Will she support my efforts to secure a debate on the Floor of the House and a meeting with the Minister to discuss improvements?

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 9 June 2025

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	579	HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT—continued	
Construction Sector Specialist Apprentices	589	New Unitary Authorities	579
Council Housing Repairs: Funding	583	Regeneration Funding: Scotland	588
Leasehold Reform.....	580	Social Housing Supply.....	589
Local Authority Funding.....	592	Support for High Streets.....	583
New Homes: Minimum EPC Rating	586	Topical Questions	595

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Monday 9 June 2025

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	29WS	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	31WS
Contingencies Fund Advance: Independent		NHS Urgent and Emergency Care Plan	
Football Regulator.....	29WS	2025-2026.....	31WS
Grassroots Sport Facilities.....	29WS	JUSTICE	32WS
		Taking Control of Goods Procedure: Reforms	32WS
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	30WS	SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY ..	33WS
Protecting Our Oceans.....	30WS	Online Safety: Super Complaints Mechanism	33WS

WRITTEN CORRECTIONS

Monday 9 June 2025

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
OTHER CORRECTION	7WC	OTHER CORRECTION—continued	
Bradley Thomas.....	7WC	Business of the House	7WC

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**not later than
Monday 16 June 2025**

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CONTENTS

Monday 9 June 2025

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 579] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Chinese Embassy Development [Col. 603]
Answer to urgent question—(Matthew Pennycook)

Winter Fuel Payment [Col. 614]
Statement—(Torsten Bell)

Planning and Infrastructure Bill [Col. 642]
Programme motion (No. 2)—(Matthew Pennycook)—agreed to
As amended, considered

Breast Cancer Screening: Bassetlaw [Col. 780]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall
Non-stun Slaughter of Animals [Col. 253WH]
e-petition debate

Written Statements [Col. 29WS]

Written Correction [Col. 7WC]
Other correction
